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FEBRUARY 1931

# THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

ILLUSTRATED

SM

**TARZAN**
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by Edgar Rice Burroughs

**DEVIL'S SALVAGE**
by Henry C. Rowland

Arthur Akers  Seven Anderton
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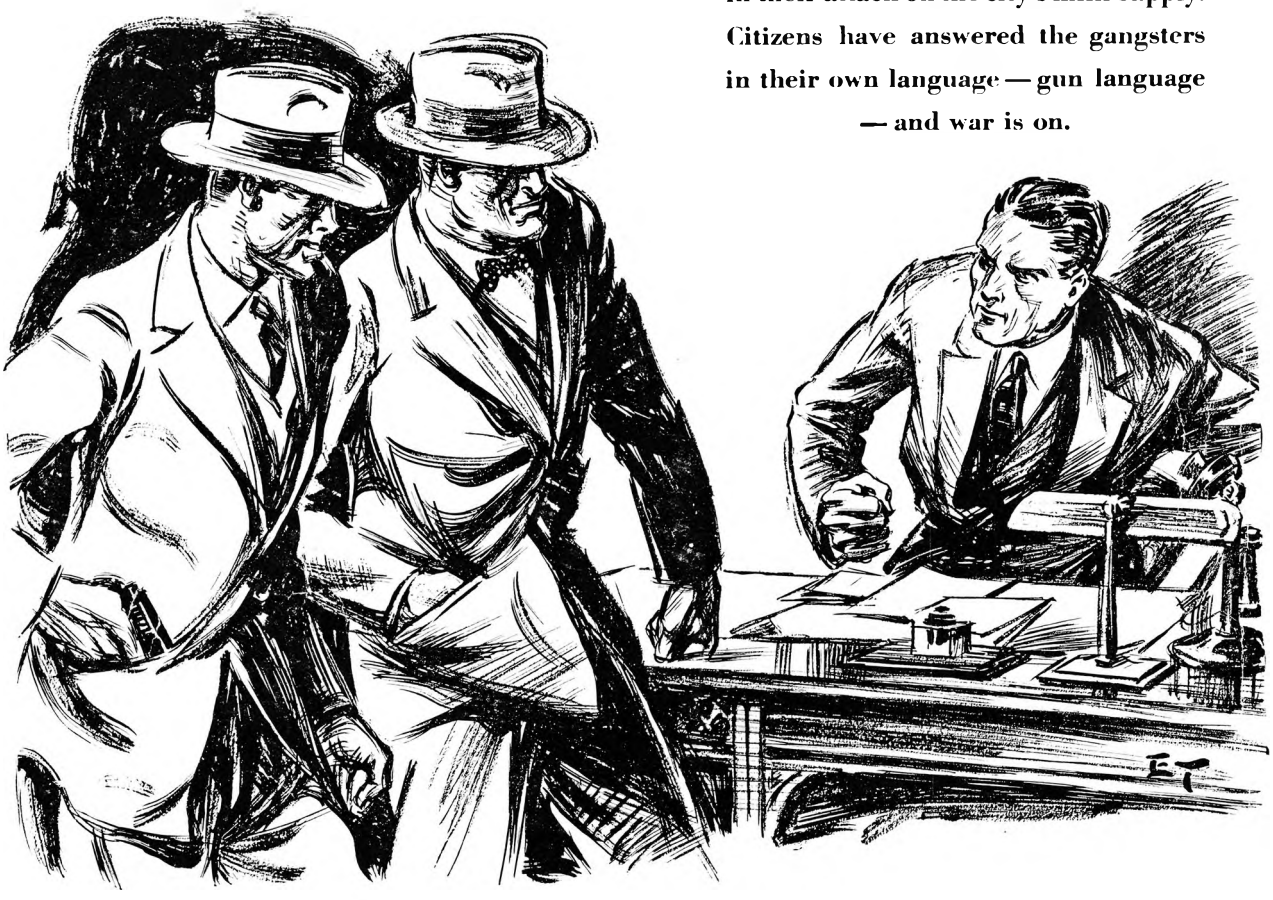
# City In Arms Against Gangs!

***Every man in the city has been aroused by the last audacity of the ruthless gangs who dominate the law.***

**Foresti's gang struck the most cruel, inhuman blow in the history of crime, in their attack on the city's milk-supply. Citizens have answered the gangsters in their own language — gun language — and war is on.**

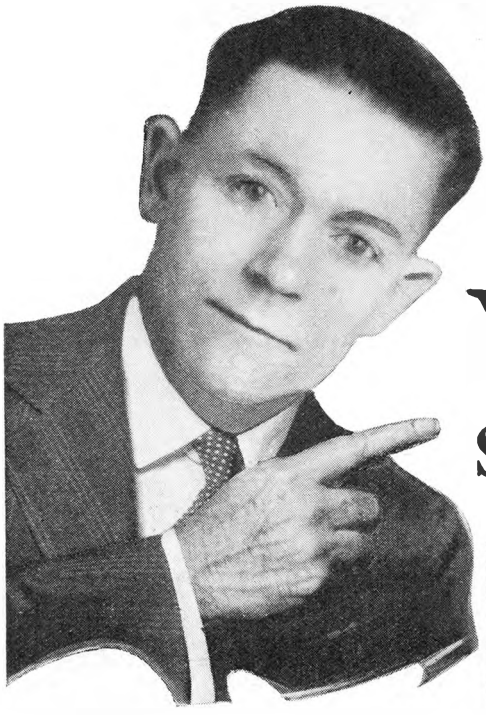


*"You come through or we're going to blow up your joint."*

**But the gangsters hit the wrong man. Richard Liston, the plant manager, defied them. And he went further than other courageous men who defied them: he challenged the city to enlist in his cause—either be preyed on by gangsters or exterminate. The city determined that the gangsters had gone too far and they chose to exterminate. The battle with the murderous, powerfully organized gangs is a grimly gripping story. It is the story that you may be living tomorrow. It appears under the title of "The Day of Doom," in the —**

## March Blue Book Magazine

The McCall Company, Publisher, 230 Park Avenue, New York



# 1930 Was a Good Year For Us!...

## Say These Successful *Trained* Men

**"Business was good and 1930 was a good year for me," says Chas. H. Reinhardt of Detroit. Business would have been poor if he had plodded along in the ranks of untrained men. Read his story—one of many—in the columns below!**

1930 threw a bad scare into millions of people of every class. Maybe you were scared too—maybe you were one of the millions of salary and wage earners who trembled before the fear of unemployment. You weren't the only one. There were thousands of employers, too, who trembled. Sometimes they held on to their inside, routine workers as long as they could—and finally let some go, in order to keep on providing jobs for the others. Sometimes, in sheer panic, they cut their forces at once.

W. G. Holzwarth

But there were some men who weren't scared. Far from it. They were making the biggest money of their lives. They weren't in the stock market, either—they were trained, capable men—salesmen who knew how to get full-sized business in depression as well as in good times. They weren't "born salesmen"—they were a good deal better than any self-styled "born salesman" in the business. They were *trained*—taught, quickly and easily, by a group of master sales experts, how to use the unfailing secrets of selling success. As a result, they "cashed in" their knowledge to the fullest advantage. Employers were frantic. They were watching their rivals, whose sales departments were weak, crash down into bankruptcy. They feared the same fate. In order to build up successful sales forces, they paid bigger money than ever, to good men who could really get business.

W. G. Holzwarth, of Los Angeles, California, had plodded along at a $30-a-week salary for ten years. He knew he ought to do something to get out of the rut—but he never did it. His company did it for him by laying him off. It was then that he enrolled for N. S. T. A. training. Three months later, with less than half the required training we give, he started selling—and proceeded to double his old income! Holzwarth will be riding the crest when business becomes really good again.

J. Dowell

In the same way Jarold Dowell made 1930 his best year. He looked ahead and decided to get his training before bad times hit his job. Completely trained, he quit the old position and took one which our Free Employment Department located for him. Today he says he has several times earned more money in two hours than he used to make in a week! 1930 was good to D. C. Stegmaier of Kansas City, Kansas. He got out of the competitive mechanical end of his firm, entered the sales force, and, before he completed his training, he turned in sales for one month that went over $5000. Firms can afford to pay good incomes to producers like Stegmaier—and they're anxious to do so.

Chas. H. Reinhardt of Detroit, Michigan, has something to say to people who thought 1930 was a bad year: "During the past few months in conversations with quite a few supposed salesmen, I have been struck by the frequent repetition that business is bad. I know that this year of 1930 has been a mighty fine one for me and just recently I got to thinking about what it was that enabled me to roll up such a good sales record and earn so much money this year. I realized that my good fortune was entirely due to the fact that I had been backed by N. S. T. A. training and service." Reinhardt, the *trained man*, went merrily on making bigger money than ever when "supposed salesmen," as he calls them, were finding the going hard, and while men in petty positions trembled for fear of lost jobs! Masterson, likewise of Detroit, emphasized this—1930 was his first year in selling. He was in competition with men who had been learning through the heart-breaking method of experience only—and he has more than held up his end.

E. Masterson

It was training alone that did it—Masterson started his working career as a tool and die maker! And remember this—it wasn't just men who crashed into selling in 1930 that made it their best year. More than one old-time graduate of N. S. T. A. proved how training wins, year in and year out — like Sterling of Detroit, whose earnings have steadily crept up since he enrolled for training, until now he makes 250% more than he did in his routine job—and 1930 is his best year, too!

R. L. Sterling

We could fill this page telling you how men who trained themselves through N. S. T. A. service made the late depression pay them a profit. The chief point is not what they did, however. It is, what are you going to do? These fellows made 1930 their banner year. If you are now employed, in a routine job, or if you are a holding on, untrained, to a salesman's position what is 1931 going to bring you?

When the depression is gone for good, you are going to see business pay more attention to skillful, efficient selling than ever before. The chance of a lifetime is going to open up then, for the trained man who can produce results—he is the one who will ride to the top on the new business wave. Right now is the time to give a little thought to what you are going to do, to make a real success in the new boom.

Send now and get your copy of "The Key To Master Salesmanship," the new free book that shows you, not only how these six men made 1930 a good year for them, but how thousands of men, in the last twenty-three years, have revolutionized their lives and their chances for financial and business success. Decide now that 1931 is going to be *your* banner year.

**NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION**
**Dept. B-33, 21 W. Elm St.**
**Chicago, Ill.**

*Where Shall We Send Your Copy...* **FREE!**


NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASS'N.
Dept. B-33, 21 W. Elm St., Chicago, Ill.

Without obligation to me, please send me my free copy of "The Key To Master Salesmanship," with full information concerning your training and your Free Employment Service.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....

# The BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY, 1931 Vol. 52, No. 4


## *Three Outstanding Serials*



## *Short Stories of Distinction*



## *A Vivid Novelette*



## *Five Prize Stories of Real Experience*



## GEORGE F. WORTS

IF it is true that the mood of an author is felt in his stories, this explains why George Worts' stories hold so much that is unusual. You feel his own vigorous love of activity that he expresses in riding and hunting, flying and sailing, living off the beaten paths. You feel his keen interest in the new, which he expresses in experimenting with mechanical devices. You will feel especially his stimulating imagination in the striking tale appearing in our forthcoming March issue—

## "SIX SECONDS DEAD"


THE McCALL COMPANY, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine

WILLIAM B. WARNER, President and Treasurer JOHN C. STERLING, Vice-President FRANCIS HUTTER, Secretary

DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

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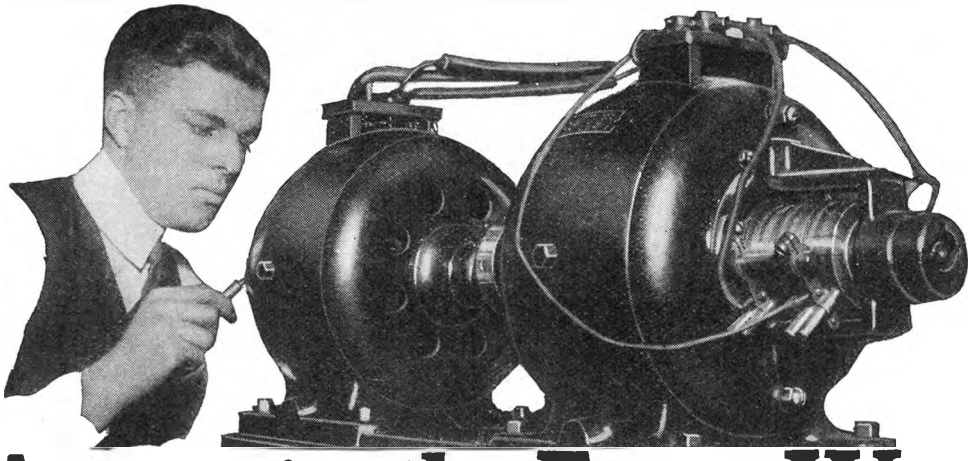


# Amazingly Easy Way to get into ELECTRICITY

**Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Now . . . and forever . . . say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me show you how to qualify for jobs leading to salaries of $50, $60 and up, a week, in Electricity —NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach, RIGHT HERE IN THE GREAT COYNE SHOPS. You become a practical expert in 90 days! Getting into Electricity is far easier than you imagine!**

## *Learn Without Lessons* in 90 DAYS

### By Actual Work—in the Great Shops of Coyne

Lack of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! I don't care if you're 16 years old or 48—it makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have.

**Prepare for Jobs Like These**

Here are a few of hundreds of positions open to Coyne-trained men. Our free employment bureau gives you lifetime employment service.

Armature Expert, to $100 a Wk.
Substation Operator $60 a Week and up
Auto Electrician $110 a Week
Inventor . . . . . Unlimited
Maintenance Engineer up to $150 a Week
Service Station Owner up to $200 a Week
Radio Expert up to $100 a Week

### EARN WHILE YOU LEARN

If you should need part-time work while at school to help pay expenses, I'll assist you to it. Then, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained on a gigantic outlay of electrical apparatus . . . costing hundreds of thousands of dollars . . . real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations . . . everything from door-bells to farm power and lighting . . . full-sized . . . in full operation every day!

### No Books-No Printed Lessons

No books, no baffling charts . . . all real actual work . . . right here in the great Coyne school . . . building real batteries . . . winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc., etc. That's a glimpse of how we make you a master practical electrician in 90 days, teaching you far more than the average ordinary electrician ever knows and fitting you to step into jobs leading to big pay immediately after graduation. Here, in this world-famous *Parent school*—and nowhere else in the world—can you get this training!

### Jobs-Pay-Future

Dont' worry about a job, Coyne training settles the job question for life. Demand for Coyne men often exceeds the supply. Our employment bureau gives you a lifetime service. Two weeks after graduation, Clyde F. Hart got a position as electrician for the Great Western Railroad at over $100 a week. That's not unusual. We can point to Coyne men making up to $600 a month. $60 a week is only the beginning of your opportunity. You can go into radio, battery, or automotive electrical business for yourself and make up to $15,000 a year.

### GET THE FACTS

Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 30 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large electrical concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs . . . facts . . . jobs . . . salaries . . . opportunities. Tells you how many earn expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.


### Now in Our New Home

This is our new, fireproof, modern home wherein is installed thousands of dollars' worth of the newest and most modern Electrical Equipment of all kinds. Every comfort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and contented during your training.

### *Get This* FREE *Book*

**Mr. H. C. LEWIS, President**
**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, Dept. 21-09**
**500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.**

Dear Mr. Lewis:
Without obligation send me your big free catalog and all details of your Free Employment Service, Radio, Aviation Electricity, and Automotive Courses, and how I can "earn while learning."

*Name* .....

*Address* .....

*City* ..... *State* .....

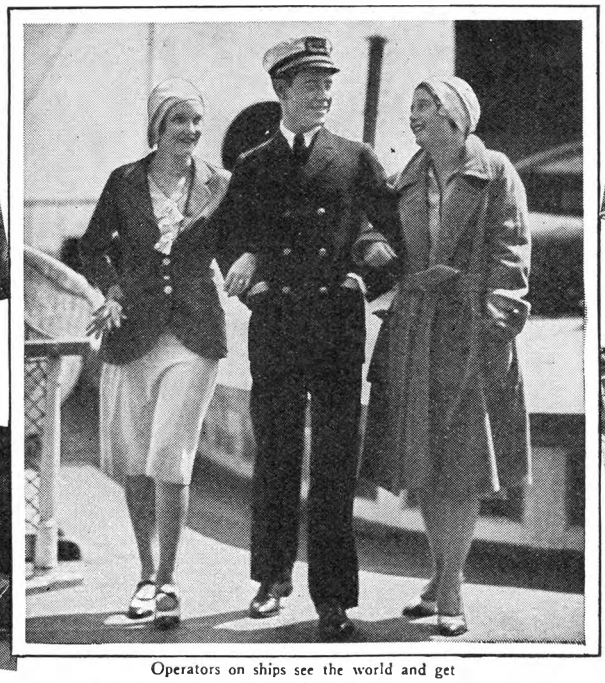
# COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL

**H. C. LEWIS, Pres.** ***Established 1899***

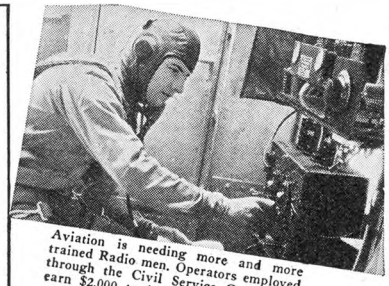
**500 S. Paulina Street • Dept. 21-09 • Chicago, Illinois**

Broadcasting stations need trained men continually for jobs paying $1,800 to $5,000 a year.

Television—the coming field of many great opportunities—is covered by my course.



Operators on ships see the world and get good pay plus expenses.



Aviation is needing more and more trained Radio men. Operators employed through the Civil Service Commission earn $2,000 to $2,800 a year.

Talking Movies—an invention made possible only by Radio—offers many fine jobs to well trained Radio men.

# You'll Get *Thrills*-Adventure

# BIG PAY in RADIO

## I will Train You at Home to Fill a Fascinating Job in Radio

### *Radio's Amazing Growth is Opening Hundreds of Big Jobs Every Year*

You like action, romance, thrills! You'll get them in Radio—plenty of them! Big pay, too. That is why I urge you to mail the coupon below for my free book of startling facts on the variety of fascinating, money-making opportunities in this great, uncrowded field. It also explains how you can quickly learn Radio through my amazingly simple 50-50 method of home-study training, even though you may not now know the difference between a "Screen Grid and a Gridiron". Thousands of men who knew absolutely nothing about Radio before taking my course are today making real money in this growing industry.

### Thrilling Jobs That Pay $50 to $100 a Week

Why go along with $25, $30 or $45 a week in dull, no-future work when there are plenty of good jobs in Radio that pay $50, $75 and up to $250 a week? For instance, by taking my training, you can see the world in grand style as a Radio operator on shipboard. There are many splendid openings in this line with good pay plus your expenses. You'll also find thrills and real pay in Aviation Radio work. Broadcasting is another field that offers big pay and fascinating opportunities to men who know Radio. And think of the great, thrilling future for men with *Radio training* in Television and Talking Movies. My free book tells all about these and many other branches of Radio that bring you in contact with interesting people, pay big money and make life pleasant for you. Without doubt, Radio training is the key that opens the way to success. And *my* training, in particular, is the *only* training that makes you a *"Certified RADIOTRICIAN"*—the magic words that mean valuable recognition for you in whatever type of Radio work you take up after graduation. You'll see *why*, when you receive my interesting book.

### Earn While You Learn

You don't have to quit your present job to take my course! You stay right at home, hold your job, and learn in your spare time. (Lack of high school education or Radio experience are no drawbacks.) I teach you to begin making money shortly after you enroll. My new practical method makes this possible. I give you eight big laboratory outfits that teach you to build and service practically every type of receiving set made. Many of my students earn $15, $20, $30 weekly while learning. Earle Cummings, 18 Webster St., Haverhill, Mass., writes: "I made $375 in one month in my spare time, installing, servicing, selling Radio sets." And let me emphasize right here that a Radio business of your own is one of the money-making opportunities my training prepares you for in case you wish to settle down at home.

### Get My Free Book

Send the coupon below for my 64-page book of opportunities in Radio and information on my home-study training. It has put hundreds of fellows on the road to bigger pay and success. It will tell you exactly what Radio offers you, and how my Employment Department helps you get into Radio after you graduate. I back my training with a signed agreement to refund every penny of your money if, after completion, you are not satisfied with the Lesson and Instruction Service I give you. Fill in and mail the coupon NOW!

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**National Radio Institute,**
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Dear Mr. Smith: Send me your book "Rich Rewards in Radio" giving information on the big-money opportunities in Radio and your famous 50-50 method of home-study training. I understand this places me under no obligation and that no salesman will call.

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**Travelled 75,000 Miles**

"Dear Mr. Smith: I have worked as Junior Operator on board S. S. Dorchester and Chief Operator of the Chester Sun. I have travelled from 75,000 to 100,000 miles, visited ports in various countries, fished and motored with millionaires, been on airplane flights, etc. I am now with Broadcasting Station WREN." (Signed) Robin D. Compton, 1213 Vermont St., Lawrence, Kansas.

**$400 a Month**

"The Radio field is getting bigger and better every year. I have made more than $400 each month and it really was your course that brought me to this." J. G. Dahlstead, 1484 So. 15th St., Salt Lake City, Utah.

## *Employment Service to all Graduates*

# Devil's Salvage

*A ruthless modern buccaneer of the West Indies, an American girl, and a crew of broken creatures who have escaped from Devil's Island —in a story as filled with action, thrills and glamour as an old pirate tale.*

## By HENRY C. ROWLAND

THE auxiliary schooner yacht *Jacana* lay in a back eddy behind a point of mangroves, tugging feebly at a bow-warp to the shore, her stern kept from swinging in by a small kedge anchor. If the bowline were to be cast off the current would quickly swing her head out, when she would have started downstream dragging the kedge anchor through the silt. One did not need be a sailor to perceive that the yacht was moored in a fashion to get out of that place at a moment's notice.

Clare awakened an hour before the dawn, and went on deck. The night before last her brother Jim had taken the motor dinghy and gone upriver, and he should have returned by this time. Clare was worried, and her anxiety increased when she found no anchor watch on deck. She went forward to the forecastle hatch and called down. No response came from below. There was not a soul besides herself aboard, and now as she stood listening the reason for this desertion became apparent.

From somewhere over in the jungle that flanked the shabby little village on the shore there came the low rhythmic pulsing of a drum, a bamboula. A band of the furtive bush negroes were holding a *soireé*, and the lure of the bamboula had been too much for the yacht's black crew. Evidently a canoe had taken them off, for none of the boats was missing.

The girl sat there listening and reflecting on the curious sequence of events that had got them into this sort of business. It had started four years ago with the crash of the family fortune and her father's death.

"I think I can make a more or less honest living out of the yacht," Jim had said, "and with a bit of luck we might even do better."

Clare had at first protested, afraid that he had some sort of outlawry in mind, rum or aliens or other nefarious trade. She had been relieved when they had chartered immediately to a small expedition to search for Maya ruins in Yucatan. Later they had prospected for bauxite up the Essequibo, and afterward left the schooner at the penal settlement at the mouth of the Mazzaruni and gone up to look for diamonds, but with scant success.

Jim knew precisely how to go about such ventures. They had grown up in Tampico and later Maracaibo, their father a free-lance oil man, promoter and driller and speculator, engineer and geologist. There had been ups and downs, the ups fairly high at times and the downs never very low.

Clare had been at school in New Orleans and joined her brother at Tampico when their father died. Jim's college had been mostly the Caribbean, and he was a rich compendium of undirected, unfinished talents and abilities. More than once he had served as confidential agent of revolutionary movements that were based entirely on trade interests, concessions, deals and steals.

Now, as she sat listening to the low throbbing beat that vibrated from an impalpable mass of jungle darker than mere black could ever be, Clare became aware of a growing tautness of her nerves. There was a quality in the exactness of note and rhythm more compelling to the senses than music. It was unrelieved by the slightest departure from an inexorable monotony, and seemed to lure, yet at the same time to repel. There were the usual chantings of insectivora, and from time to time a howling baboon would howl. Close in to the mangroves some nightjars began to purr.

A tremendous sense of utter loneliness swept over the girl. Whatever the summons in that drum—subtle, sinister evil—it was at least sounding a rally. That was what had lured the hands ashore, the urge to mingle with their kind. Whatever ills might be contained in such rendezvous, at least the isolation of mind and body were not among them. Perhaps after all that might be better than sitting out here listening to the throbbing of pagan passions and the snickers of a muddy river.

It was at this low ebb of her desolation that Clare became aware of a faint bumping and slithering along the schooner's side, up under the bow. That would be the deserters sneaking back aboard, trusting that she had not discovered their absence.

She got up and went below. Her cabin was abaft the companionway that went down to what was left of the little saloon, for the yacht was such only in name and register. Amidships it had been bulkheaded off for the carrying of strange cargoes that were often small in bulk but large in values. Their scientific expeditions had made this arrangement plausible enough, but at present the specimen boxes and crates were not all packed with Mayan fragments. There were some few cases of these, over others containing very modern mob guns and ammunition.

Jim had not told Clare the whole working of this last venture, but she had a good idea that there was a small fortune in the perfected small arms stowed away in crates. Jim had merely said there had been a wild ace in the pack —that the next best bet was to slip the gentleman who held the purse for this particular event out of the country as quickly and as quietly as possible; and that was what he had gone upriver to manage. The purse would be lightened a bit, Clare imagined, when the gentleman in question was set ashore at Demerara, or some other port of political sanctuary.

These little side-issues did not interest her much. Jim might find them amusing and to some extent profitable, but for Clare they lacked that dignity that is less a matter of method than of magnitude. It seemed to her that Jim fooled away too much time and effort on *opera-bouffe* conspiracies, at places like the island of Curaçoa, where he would spend most of the night at a table of petty plotters, who were sincere enough in a self-importance that increased with every fresh serving of cognac.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

*The wild and haggard faces were turned in a dumb despair.*

Clare went into the saloon to get a cool drink from a water monkey swung in the draft of a windsail rigged over the skylight. The night breeze down the river had chilled the evaporation on the porous clay, cooling the contents, and Clare's throat was hot and dry. She was drinking thirstily from the spout when she heard the padding of footsteps on the deck above. Then a throaty voice called softly under the raised skylight:

*"Señorita!"*

A scrawny brown arm with the hand clutching a scrap of paper was extended toward her. Clare opened the grimy paper and held it close to the kerosene standing light set in gimbals on the forward bulkhead. She recognized her brother's hasty scrawl in lead pencil.

*"Dear Co-Co,"*—Jim's nickname for her,—*"if this boy reaches you in time, slip downriver and out to sea and make for Trinidad. Lopez and I were nabbed, are now in calaboose. Patrol-boat apt to start down at daylight. If they grab the schooner, good night! Do what you can from Trinidad to get me clear. Give this messenger ten pesos. Love, Jim."*

Clare stood for a moment, thinking hard. She realized instantly that if the yacht were to be seized, searched and confiscated, not only would they be ruined but Jim might even have to face a firing squad. She suspected Jim's clients for this ill-starred gun-running venture to be semi-political brigands. But with the yacht safely in Trinidad nothing could be proven against him, Clare hoped, and his release was apt to be a matter of bribery.

A soft voice said in Spanish from overhead: "The Captain promised that the señorita would pay me ten pesos."

"Yes," Clare answered. She went to the desk in which some cash was kept and took out twenty pesos, then wrote on a sheet of paper:

*"Jim dear, I'll do my best. I'm shoving off at daybreak. Love, Co-Co."*

She put the money and the note in the clutching eager monkey paw. "There are ten pesos more, to take this note to the Captain. Get back as quickly as you can."

*"Si, señorita—muchas gracias!"*—and the messenger flitted off, noiseless as a bat. Clare looked at the cabin clock. The dawn was not far away. It then occurred to her that if she were to start the engine and let it run idle, the noise must be heard all over the place in that breathless silence. It would remind her Bahamans and the weird old cook of their responsibilities.

Once the good engine had got itself to firing properly and smoothly, Clare went to the rail and waited. She wondered if her crew would be worth having, even if they did come clambering aboard. A mixture of goats' blood and rum does not leave a black sailor very useful.

The back eddy in which *Jacana* was moored tugged her head gently outstream so that she was like a hound on a leash, all set to go when it was slipped. In that strong current the little kedge anchor would have been no more than the tail of a kite. Clare was thinking that if she had to leave that place in a hurry, it would not be difficult. And at that moment there appeared urgent necessity for leaving it in a hurry.

Several miles upstream a beam of light shot across the river. It fastened on the salient it sought, then swept ahead in a slow arc, dazzling Clare's eyes for a moment. It was too far distant to pick out the yacht. There were several small sandy islands at that bend, and the river was always building new bars, so this patrol-boat was coming downstream slowly and playing safe.

Clare went to the pantry and got a knife. She was a good housekeeper and hated to lose twenty fathoms of costly line, but the situation was urgent. She cut, then watched to see how the yacht was going to swing. The back eddy caught her bow and headed her downstream. Then Clare went aft and cut the kedge line in the chock.

Jim had re-engined the yacht two years before, and Clare felt no great fear of being overhauled if she could manage to keep the channel. Still, the result must be the same, whether she were to have remained at the moorings or now were to run hard aground. She took the wheel, then gave the engine all it had. The river was falling daily, and Clare knew that if she drove onto a bar under full power with the swift current coming down, there the *Jacana* would remain for many months.

Visual memory—for she had closely watched the contours of the shore on coming up—and the fact that it was still nearly high river, carried her safely down to the Bocca, though once or twice the yacht seemed to drag and the stern wave mounted to the taffrail. The most dangerous shoals were at the Bocca, or river mouth, and dawn came just as Clare reached it. In the tropics the day wastes no time about its breaking. There came a crimson glow, a brightening of the zenith, then broad shafts of light through the big windows in a cumulus cloud to the eastward. Clare breathed a little prayer of thanksgiving as she picked up her landmarks. . . . Looking astern, there was no sign of the patrol-boat. She slowed the engine a little and headed out for open sea.

## CHAPTER II

CLARE had lived continuously aboard the *Jacana* for the past five years, so that to take the schooner single-handed and under power from this river mouth to Trinidad presented to her no more difficulty than it might for a prairie ranch girl to drive a grubwagon a day's journey; rather less, in fact, now that the stormy season was over. It even pleased her somewhat, thus to serve out her A. W. O. L. crew.

No vessel under power can hold its compass course unless steered. Therefore when about fifteen miles offshore Clare slowed the engine and idled it. She looked all about and saw nothing but sea and sky. There was one narrow sector however, directly in the path of the blazing sun, where her vision was baffled by its brilliance.

She went below and changed from pajamas to a linen dress. She found the charts and with parallel rules and dividers laid off her course and distance to Port of Spain.

It occurred to her then that she might as well play safe and glance at the West Indies pilot-book, so she consulted this mariner's Bible. She went to a locker where were kept some cabin stores and made a light breakfast, then turned to the companionway to go on deck and resume her short run to Trinidad.

She was feeling better about Jim, and a little proud of herself. Much of Clare's life, and all of its past four years, had been adventurous, its activities and contacts masculine, so that not only her abilities but also her mental attitude had become those of a capable and resolute boy of her age: she was just turned twenty-one.

As her head and shoulders came above the hatch, these qualities were put suddenly to the test. Close aboard on the starboard side amidships there was a long low *cayuga* or native dugout hewn from the section of a great tree, roughly shaped at either end and with big bamboos lashed along the gunwales to give it more stability, and buoyancy if filled awash. This primitive craft was filled with the most fearful-looking crew the girl had ever seen, and they were urging it toward the schooner with clumsy paddles.

For an instant it looked to Clare as if she had got up on deck too late to save herself from being boarded. She rushed to the wheel. The engine was turning over slowly but smoothly. Clare reached for the controls. There was a churning of brine under the stern and the yacht forged ahead. She put the wheel to port a little.

The dugout was heading straight for the starboard quarter of the yacht and by this time so close aboard that the fouling of its low prow with the schooner's stern was inevitable. A hairy half-naked skeleton flung down the bow paddle, sprang up and scrambled forward to grab at the yacht's rail. But before this swung within his reach there came a slight thud followed by a splash. The *Jacana* forged ahead, won clear. Glancing astern Clare saw the *cayuga* had been rolled over, then righted and was floating awash with the crew clinging to it.

Clare knew them to be unquestionably a party of convicts escaping from the penal colonies of French Guiana: St. Joseph, St. Laurent, Devil's Island and other hell-holes. No castaways or beachcombers could ever look like that, or would make so desperate an effort to reach safety in so miserable a craft, well out in open sea.

And now, Clare reflected quickly, her act had deprived them not only of their last desperate attempt at freedom but even their hope of life itself. It was apparent that they could never bale out the *cayuga* and the trade wind must soon begin to blow.

At a safe distance she slowed her engine, reversed it, and checked the schooner's way. She found herself torn violently between caution and conscience. The former shouted at her to keep on her way, not to look back. The latter said quietly but with terrible insistence: "This is of your doing. If you had not swung the schooner's stern against them, they might have won life and liberty. Both are now lost to these stricken creatures—if you abandon them!"

Clare saw that there were seven of them. They were still human beings, whatever their past crimes, and from what she had heard and read of the Guiana prison colonies any crime must soon be expiated there.

She started slowly ahead, swung the schooner in a semi-circle and moved back to examine them more closely. Coming abreast of the swamped *cayuga* and scarcely more than twice its length away, her scrutiny was the reverse of reassuring. To Clare's surprise they stared at her in silence. There were no entreaties, no protestations. The wild and haggard faces were turned to her in a dumb despair.

She could not stand it. The struggling or scrubby beards of three of them were streaked with white, and their heads looked like hairy skulls, brown from exposure. The girl was close enough to see that two or three were shivering violently, as if in ague. Fever, probably, or nerves, too shattered to endure this suspense, for the water was very warm.

At a short distance beyond them, Clare slowed and idled the engine, then went below and buckled on the revolver-belt she sometimes wore ashore. Coming on deck, she went amidships and dropped a ladder over the side. The refugees were able to see this action, and the silence was broken by a low inarticulate babble. Then, to Clare's amazement a voice cried stridently in English: "Now may God bless and preserve you always, Miss *Jacana!*" This startling benediction ended in a laugh.

White and shaken, Clare went to the main shrouds where a coiled heaving line was hanging on a pin, caught a rolling hitch with one end and carried the other across the deck to the other side. That would be the dead-line. Take these men aboard she must, but trust to their gratitude she would not. Clare had heard tales, whether true or not, of small coasting vessels that had picked up such refugees, perhaps in the face of a squall making up, and paid dearly for the act of humanity.

She returned to the wheel, described another wide arc and drifted the schooner slowly up to the swamped *cayuga* so that it scraped slowly along the side to the hanging ladder. A shock of tawny hair, then a pair of powerful shoulders and a naked torso rose above the rail. A squarely shaped but haggard face was turned for an instant toward Clare and she was startled by the stare of eyes intensely blue, set in red from the solar glare. Even more startling was a smile that showed a double row of strong even teeth, then vanished instantly. This skull set with flashing blue eyes was in a way more terrifying to Clare than were the fearful-looking crew being assisted up and over the side by this first man to come aboard.

SHE could never have imagined such effigies of men made originally in God's image. Evidently they had once been human, and white, but their appearance now was appalling. Their sun-scorched bodies were worse than merely gaunt, they were emaciated, and hung with dirty rags. The faces were still more terrible—eyes glaring and deep-sunken, and the parched skin of some showed deep folds and creases where not concealed by scrubby beards.

As fast as the first man hauled them up and over the side they dropped inertly on the deck, until the last. This one came unassisted, and Clare saw the origin of that English-speaking voice. The man looked at her, saluted, smiled and said in a quavering reedy voice that made ghastly its attempt at a lightness of tone: "Come aboard,

Captain. Clean and sober—and I say, the Good Samaritan shall have to take a back seat when eventually *you* go to Heaven—" He collapsed, wilting on the desk.

Clare started the yacht ahead. There was no time now to be lost in making Port of Spain, and no sleep or other relaxation of vigilance for her until arriving there. She called to her passengers: "There's fresh water in the scuttle-butt, and you'll find some stores in the galley at the foot of that hatchway beside you."

To her surprise the first man answered in perfect but slightly accented English: "Thank you, madame. We shall respect your orders and property and person. Not one man in a hundred would have done as you have—and probably no woman, knowing us for what we are."

He turned to the scuttle-butt, took the gourd and freeing its marlin lanyard dipped out water through the square opening and gave it in turn to his comrades, who drank eagerly. Clare watched him intently. He was unlike the others. There was something Rodinesque about his emaciation, muscles less wasted than hardened to brawn, their outlines distinct under a clear sunburnt skin. The lines of his sharply cut features were fine.

"You had better help your mates down into the forecastle," Clare said. "The sun is getting hot. —What is your name?"

"Call me Ivan, madame."

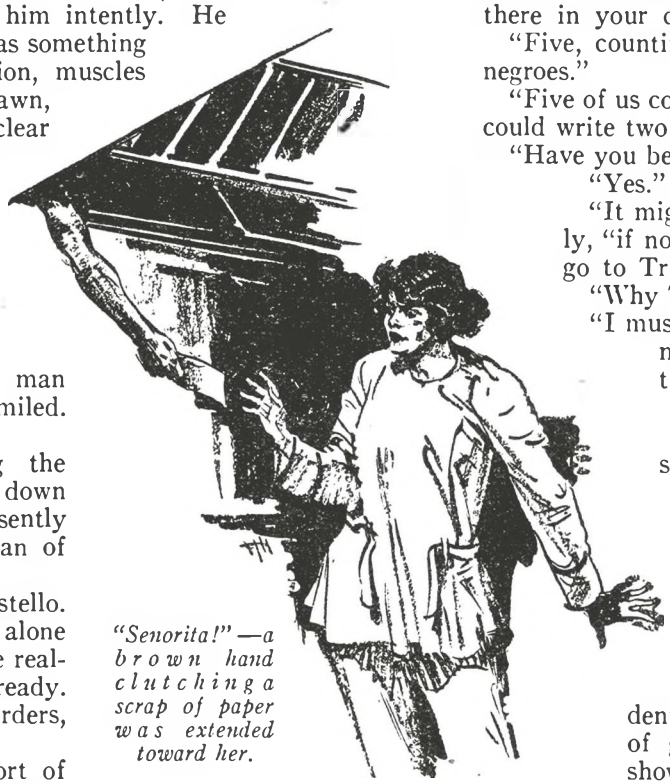
The other English-speaking man raised his head wearily, and smiled. "And I am Frank," he said.

The pair set about easing the weaker ones below. Ivan went down the galley ladder to reappear presently with biscuits and a big saucepan of some other food. Clare called:

"Ivan, I am Miss Clare Costello. My crew deserted and I am alone aboard." This information she realized must be evident enough already.

"You have only to give your orders, Miss Costello."

"I'm bound for Trinidad, Port of Spain. You ought to be safe there."



*"Senorita!"—a brown hand clutching a scrap of paper was extended toward her.*

He shook his head. "Other escaping convicts might be, but not us."

"Why not?"

"We are not the usual sort. By this time our descriptions must have been published, and our arrest demanded."

"Were you political prisoners?"

"No, ma'am. There are other reasons."

"Where were you making for?"

"I wanted to fetch the mainland after dark, tonight. I have some money and hoped to find a native village where I could buy clothes and food for us and a boat to get on with."

"To get on to where?" Clare asked.

"The Dutch island of Curaçoa seemed to me to be our best chance."

"I can't see how you managed to get this far in that *cayuga*," Clare said.

"We have been only five days in the Cayuga. We escaped in her to a small schooner. The captain had been bribed to pick us up a few miles offshore. He was bound for Georgetown and would not take us any farther. Besides, I was afraid he might give us up, so we got back aboard the *cayuga* about this far offshore and kept on. But we had very little food and the other men were exhausted."

"Go get them what they need," Clare said, "and then come back. We must decide what to do next."

"Yes, ma'am."

He went down into the forecastle. Clare's resourceful mind was working rapidly. It had occurred to her that she might use these men to her advantage as long as it was also to theirs.

She was studying this problem when Ivan came up and walked to where she had rigged her deadline. He had found a clean suit of white working-clothes, though they were too small and threatened to burst the shoulder-seams.

Clare said briefly: "Before we start off, we had better decide where to go."

"I am at your orders, ma'am."

Clare explained her situation. It was, for Jim, she told Ivan, as serious as for his comrades and himself. When she had finished he asked: "How many were there in your crew?"

"Five, counting the cook. But they were negroes."

"Five of us could take their names, and you could write two more into the ship's articles."

"Have you been a sailor?" Clare asked.

"Yes."

"It might be done," Clare said slowly, "if none of you land. Then I could go to Trinidad."

"Why Trinidad?"

"I must see what can be done to get my brother released. It's apt to be a question of money."

"Much money?"

"Perhaps. I might have to sell the yacht."

Ivan appeared to be turning this in his mind. Clare watched him curiously. She no longer felt any fear at all of himself or the others. Whatever the crime that had got him deported to Devil's Island, it was evident enough that this man was of good birth and culture. He showed that both physically and in his speech.

"What is the charge against your brother?" he asked finally.

"Trying to get a revolutionist out of the country. At least he called himself that. But the Government would call him a brigand."

"What evidence have they got against your brother?"

"I don't know. Not much, I should say. But if they had grabbed this yacht they'd have had enough to get him shot."

"Arms aboard?"

Clare nodded. There seemed no object in evasion.

"What sort of arms?" Ivan asked.

"Modern valuable ones—they're machine- and riot-guns, mostly."

"In that case you had better not take up the matter with your consul at Trinidad just yet. You had better not go to Trinidad at all. It would make the case worse for your brother."

"How?" Clare asked.

"The answer to your consul's demand would be that your brother was trying to run in arms for these brigands. The consul would then want to examine your cargo. When he found out what it was, his hands would be tied. The case against your brother might be even worse than now."

Clare considered this statement. "You are right. I hadn't thought of that."

"Your brother should have thought of it," Ivan said.

"Then what would you advise?" Clare asked. For some reason the strangeness of her situation did not immediately impress her.

Ivan himself seemed unconscious of their bizarre positions. He appeared to reflect a moment, then said: "The first thing to be done is to get rid of this incriminating cargo."

"How?" Clare asked.

"If it were not so valuable I'd advise dumping it overboard. As it is, the best plan would be for us to land and hide it somewhere—the sooner the better."

"Where?"

"Let me look at your chart of the coast."

"It's at the foot of the companionway, under the one tacked down. You can look at it. Never mind the dead-line."

Ivan went below. Clare began to realize the singularity of her position, and to wonder why it was she felt no fear of these desperadoes. Excepting Ivan, they had impressed her as mere shells of men, burned-out tinder that still preserved the outward forms of life, and able to function automatically. Rest and food and a sense of comparative security might change that, she reflected.

THE man who had told Clare his name was Frank came on deck, lurched unsteadily across to the fore standing rigging and stood supporting himself by a shroud. He was freshly bathed and shaven, his hair brushed smoothly back. He wore a clean white cotton suit and a pair of grass slippers. Though emaciated, his features were of a well-bred sort, aquiline with a good forehead and chin.

Three of the other refugees came up. To Clare's surprise these also presented a singular transformation. Instead of the wild, shaggy, haggard and ragged wretches that had slunk below they now presented the appearance of convalescents of an upper class in the solarium of a hospital. Clare had always insisted that the schooner's crew should keep clean whites for port. All were decently clad in these, two freshly shaven except for mustaches, and one, an elderly man, might have passed for a professor in the Sorbonne.

The man called Frank loosed his hold of the rigging and came walking unsteadily aft. He looked at Clare with a faint smile. "May I be permitted—" he began.

Clare motioned for him to pass the dead-line. "You look worn out," she said.

"That's to put it mildly. I have felt a good many times as if I were half dead. But this is the first time that I have felt as if I were dead and gone to heaven. Heretofore it has been the other place."

"But France claims a high degree of civilization."

"One cannot entirely blame France, Miss—"

"Costello. —Why not?"

"Because the real object of her penal system is to save the mass of her good citizens the burden and nuisance of some few individual bad ones. Especially the chronic cases. The idea is sound enough, though its application rotten. But France has too many more pressing cares to worry about that."

"It doesn't seem to have brutalized you," Clare said.

A quiver passed over his face. "No, I'm an exception—Ivan swears the only one—to the rule that Guiana is worse than the guillotine because that only kills a man's body while the prison slowly kills his soul. However, I agree with Ivan that it would be better for everybody connected with the penal colony to be wiped off the face of the earth —obliterated before it is too late."

"Too late for what?"

"For salvage of soul or body or both. When Ivan got his plans for escape all made, he picked out those of us here to take with him. Not because we could be of any use to him, but because we were the only ones he knew there that he considered worth saving. But before we left he made us each sign a sort of release."

"What sort, Mr.—er—Frank?"

He gave his shadowy smile. "A permit for him to kill us in the face of recapture."

"Would he have done that?"

"Like a shot. Or to be more literal, like a knife. He had a knife."

"What is Ivan, and what was his offense?"

"He is a Russian noble, and ex-naval officer. Naval aviator in the war. He became later a sort of super-Red, whatever that may be, and was sent to Paris by his chapter to kill three traitors. He did."

"And got caught?"

"No, he gave himself up."

"And instead of the guillotine they gave him Guiana."

"Yes; he hadn't counted on that. He has served three years."

"And these others?"

"The old chap who looks like a college prof was that thing—thief, forger, and a party to the removal of a modern *Javert*. He's done twenty years. Made of steel and whipcord. Those two others respectively killed wife and mistress—*crimes passionelles*. They'd have got acquitted if it hadn't been for bad police *dossiers*. One was an actor, the other a farmer. Of the other two beside Ivan and myself, one was a surgeon,—you'll have to guess his trouble,—one a portrait-painter. That leaves me. I was a *rentier*, a man of leisure, until I pleaded guilty to quite a list of indiscretions. The outstanding and last was the killing of my stepfather in a drunken fury."

"Whose—"

Frank laughed. It lightened his still handsome face and showed his even, well-kept teeth. "I say, you're keen, Miss Costello! Well, call it mine. Now let me ask you a question. What were you doing out here all alone?"

CLARE explained her predicament more in detail than she had described it to Ivan. "If Jim gets clear of this I hope it may do him good," she said sadly. "He has been going from bad to worse."

Frank laughed. "If he had done it in British India it might have landed him in the Andamans. They tell me that Guiana hasn't much on that corrective reservation. All he needed was to kill somebody in the course of the job."

Clare was silent for a moment, struck by what the escaped convict had just said. After all, she reflected, the gulf that had seemed to separate herself and Jim from these wrecked men was not so very wide. This thought swept away what was left of her disquiet about them.

As if he sensed this, Frank told her about Guiana a good deal as if he were a descriptive traveler, and she a girl whom he had just met. Five dreadful years had passed since he had looked at such a woman—five years of which each day had been a torment, each night a nightmare. Clare's loveliness was of a sort to light fires even where no combustible material remained. It could generate its own flame in dead cinders, so that they gave out light and heat, like the carbon mesh of a vapor lamp. But Frank's emotions were not entirely burned out. A little pilot jet still flickered deep within him, and it now burned brighter as he looked at Clare.

The girl's type of beauty was that of Galjoia Spain imposed on Galway Ireland, just as her patronymic was prob-

ably *Castello* before King Philip's Grand Armada was tempest-strewn on the Irish coast. Clare had inherited that combination of raven-wing hair and violet eyes, almost purple, with a piquant Irish nose and wide Irish mouth, more alluring than classic. She was slender but full-limbed, supple as a sea otter.

IVAN came on deck. The haggard lines of famine seemed erased, and his eyes, though still reddened from sunglare, held a sort of hard serenity.

"It is time we made for somewhere," he said.

"Why not go to Barbados?" Frank suggested. "That's a British island and Bridgetown's a trans-shipping port. We could put the arms and ammunition in a bonded warehouse under seal, then go to Trinidad, and Miss Costello take steps to free her brother."

"With what?" Ivan asked.

Clare nodded. "Yes, it's going to take money. At the least there's sure to be a fine for entering the country unofficially."

"And another for being collared with this bandit chief," Frank said. "A charge of conspiracy against the government."

"How much could you raise?" Ivan asked Clare.

"Very little. Nowhere near enough, unless I sell the schooner."

"We can't help much there," Frank said wearily. His flash of animation was giving out. His face looked ghastly.

"Go below and rest," Clare said. "Here in this after cabin." She looked at Ivan. "We'd better be starting somewhere."

He nodded, then called in French to the three men forward: "One of you keep watch. Report to me if any vessel comes in sight." And then to Clare: "Let's go below."

She went down, the two following her. Frank stretched himself on a locker. "This *is* heaven!" he muttered, and fell asleep. Clare seated herself and looked at Ivan. "Now tell me what you have in mind." She motioned to a chair.

"This may sound like a wild yarn," said Ivan, "but so is the true story of any convict of upper class. About thirty years ago there was a man who called himself Comte Bernard d'Arcy, of Paris. He was a clever financier and promoter and he swindled a great many people out of a great deal of money. When he saw that he was in danger of investigation and arrest he managed to put his fortune into gold and notes and fled the country. He was believed to have gone to the Argentine, but actually he went to Venezuela. Later he engaged in the pearl fisheries on the island of Margarita."

"I know Margarita," Clare said.

"D'Arcy, as he called himself," Ivan continued, "was Spanish on his mother's side and spoke the language perfectly. He got his concession and a fleet of pearling boats and during the next ten years made another big fortune. Partly because he was never free from the dread of identification and arrest, partly because he became miserly, he hoarded all of his stolen wealth and the most of his pearls. Then one day he had some sort of premonition of disaster; he loaded the bulk of his fortune into a chest, put it aboard one of his little pearling vessels and went to a small island in the Windward group, where he hid his treasure."

Clare sat up suddenly. The idea had come to her that Ivan was lying.

He seemed to read her thought and shook his head. "All of this is true. There are many strange histories in a penal colony."

"A penal colony?"

"Yes, like Guiana. This man was very uncommon. He was of tremendous physique and as clever and as resourceful as the devil. But like many such he made one fatal error. He had gone to this little desert island where he had hidden his treasure alone, and in the hurricane season. Returning, he was caught in the calm that precedes a West Indies hurricane and he knew that his boat could not weather it out. A French steamer from Colon to Marseilles that called at Martinique had touched at La Guayra on that voyage, and Mendoza, as he now called himself, was in her track. He signaled her and was taken aboard, leaving his pearling boat to founder."

"And he was recognized on Martinique?"

"Even before that—by a passenger aboard, one of his former dupes. This man lost the chance of a lifetime for a great fortune—or perhaps he was merely honest. Instead of telling d'Arcy in private that he had been recognized he went to the Captain. D'Arcy was arrested on landing and taken to Paris. There he was duly identified, tried, convicted and sentenced to twenty years in Guiana."

"Didn't he offer to pay back what he had stolen?" Clare asked.

"No. He was then about forty-five, in full physical and mental vigor, and believed that he could escape. That was where avarice downed him. He made three determined and carefully worked out attempts, but failed each time. Then they broke him, body, mind, and spirit. He died about six weeks ago."

"But if his mind was gone—"

"It cleared as he was dying. I had been kind to him at odd moments, as opportunity sometimes offered even in that hell-hole. He told me his secret, where his treasure was hidden and how to find it. I believe he told me the truth."

"Did you make a chart?"

"There was no need. I memorized the place and the marks. His mind was clear at the time. He put me under oath to bank the notes and specie he had got dishonestly, get a draft on the Credit Lyonnais and forward it to their general office in Paris with the statement that it was a restitution fund to such victims of his as could present proof of their claims on him."

"And the pearls?" Clare asked.

"The pearls were to be my own, subject only to one behest that I am sworn to administer."

Clare did not ask what this might be. She sat for a moment thinking hard, then asked:

"How far away is this island?"

"It lies between where we are and Barbados. I believe this treasure to be there. If I find it, I should split it into four shares—one for this behest, one for you, one for myself, and the fourth share to be divided between the comrades."

Clare said slowly: "Treasure-hunting is a slippery game, but I suppose we might as well try. I want it agreed, though, that first we land this stuff below, and hide it."

"Perfectly." Ivan held out his hand. It was the gesture of a bargain sealed, so Clare clasped it. She regretted instantly having done so as Ivan stooped his head and raised her small hand to his lips. They were burning, and she could not help but wonder whether that was due to fever—or to something else. His blue eyes burned also.

## CHAPTER III

FRANK, having cooked and served a supper for all hands, told Clare this band could fill plausible niches to fit the ship's articles. He himself could fill the rôle of Jim, convalescent from fever. Clare was Clare; Ivan was a savant who had chartered the *Jacana* for a scientific ex-

pedition, with the Mayan specimens crated to camouflage the arms as proof. Of the five others, four could serve as sailors and one as cook, under the names of the crew and cook, A. W. O. L., who by this time must be sorely repenting their breach of discipline.

It would take some days, Ivan observed, to make these shattered wrecks, of whom two were nearly comatose from hardship, look anything like sailors; but there seemed nothing to fear immediately. At any rate, men with the vitality to weather out Guiana, even three years of it, ought quickly to recuperate under such conditions as were here.

There were stores and water for at least a month, with economy, and besides the fuel supply for a radius of some twelve hundred miles there were always the sails. Jim's policy had always been to fill up with fuel, stores and water as opportunity offered, never knowing when a long run might be required, and the last from Curaçoa had been an easy one.

Clare decided to trust Ivan. "Super-Red," as Frank described him, he might be—fanatical and ruthless in the carrying out of what, according to his code, he found to be his duty. There was an adamantine clear-cut single-mindedness about him of a sort to make the complete executive whether martial or mercantile or even criminal. He was the type to stop at nothing in the attainment of a fixed purpose.

The others seemed to Clare mere victims of error, irresponsibility and lacking moral fiber. They were burned out. Ivan had told her that even to such as survived their sentences life held no more to make it worth living. They remained in the penal colony as free exiles there, not permitted to leave that dreadful place. They eked out an attenuated existence automatically, no longer clothed nor housed nor rationed, keeping the breath in their lungs precariously until exhaustion finished them.

Ivan had shown on the chart the island for which they were bound. He acted as navigator but made it clear that the girl was always in command. They had made sail as soon as the trade wind started to blow.

Of her crew of refugees only three were able to do any work at all. Their temporary respite from the grueling work of paddling the *cayuga* had left the others unable to stir from their bunks. Fortunately the surgeon who had been sentenced to a life-term was to some extent able to function professionally. He assured Clare that two or three days of rest and food should render them fit for service.

Two days passed. The trade wind dropped usually with the sun. Then the engine was started and they ran through the night at half speed. The weather at this season was dependable, the sea smooth. At night Clare stood watch and watched with Ivan, and in the daytime with the schooner under sail Frank was able to relieve them at the wheel. He told her that he had once owned a yacht.

Frank apparently had suffered more severely than Ivan from servitude, but with the resiliency to be found in the cosmos of the smiling philosopher, he had supported captivity more easily than many another of stronger physical and also stronger mental attributes. Frank himself was a puzzle to the girl. As his strength returned he seemed to accept their position as something in the nature of an adventurous lark. Perhaps the state of exhaustion in which he had come aboard was less due to Guiana than to the hardships encountered after the escape from that inferno. Clare thought him flippant, frivolous to the point of silliness, until the idea occurred to her that this might be to some degree a pose of the former elegant idler he had been. She was surprised at moments by a grimness about his expression, as if he had taken off a lyric mask.

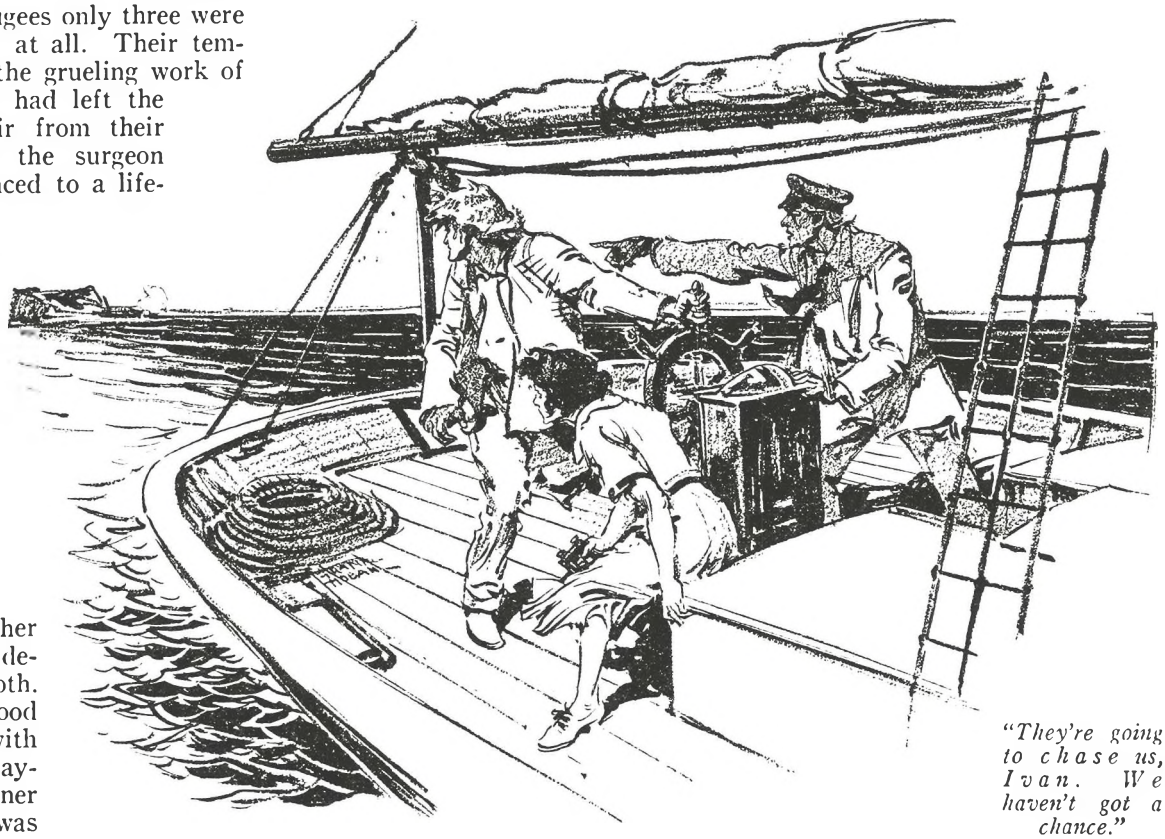
On the third day the breeze had dropped early. There had been a squall of no great violence early in the afternoon. It swept over them in a sort of temperamental burst of wind and rain, the sun blazing out again upon a flat and gleaming calm. The heavy swell coming in rendered the schooner so uncomfortable that Clare ordered all sails lowered, and they proceeded under power.

At four in the afternoon Ivan said to Clare: "I make our island to be dead ahead, not more than twenty miles away. It is not very high. If we raise our speed a little, we ought to sight it in about an hour."

This proved to be exact. When an hour later she went a little way up the fore-rigging with her binoculars she discovered a fine blue line almost on the horizon. The swell was smoothing out and the sun was about ten degrees high.

Ivan had come up from below after an examination of the war munitions that were strongly crated and stenciled "Excavating machinery," probably motor pumps, hoisting-engines and dynamite and hand utensils for a native labor gang.

"What is that four-by-four crate that is so strongly wired?" he had asked Clare.



*"They're going to chase us, Ivan. We haven't got a chance."*

She did not know. Jim had not described the cargoes to her.

"We shall have to open it and land it piecemeal," Ivan had said. "I am stronger than most men but I can not so much as budge it. The other pieces might be hoisted out and set on a staging rigged between the two boats."

Clare remembered then Jim had told her that the revolutionaries were equipped with a bombing-plane that had been put over from a small streamer and hidden in one of the small creeks on the coast. The bombs had been lacking but afterward had been obtained in some way by agents in Pensacola and shipped to Curaçoa with the other munitions.

Clare had been looking at Ivan as she told him this and she had not missed the expression of his face. It was almost as if he had received official information of a pardon. Such a look might have passed over the features of a military officer at the crisis of a great battle when there came an opportunity to save the day by leading his regiment to its destruction. All day she had wondered why the information that these bombs were a part of their cargo should have thus affected him.

NOW as they saw the little island above the horizon, within its clean-cut line, Ivan's tension increased. He moved restlessly about the deck. There was something leonine about his movements, but of the captive lion who paces his cage just before feeding-time. His type was leonine, as the girl had observed. Thick tawny hair, amber eyes widely spaced, short straight, rather low-bridged nose and wide mouth that showed sometimes his clean strong white teeth. Sometimes Clare wondered if he was really sane, and at such moments the flippant semi-mocking indifference of Frank was a relief. The two men seemed at the antipodes of character.

Coming closer into the island they discovered it to be about what they had anticipated. Like most of this region and unlike the Bahaman Archipelago it was plainly of volcanic rather than sand formation, and the submarine forces that had thrown it up showed a trend from North to South.

Ivan studied it closely without glasses, and gave a sort of growl. "Look at that," he said. "Smoke!"

A thin wreath of gray-blue had suddenly risen from behind what seemed to be a short promontory that made a little bay or cove on the southwest projection. They were by this time within a couple of miles, and the last soundings taken by Ivan had shown no bottom. They were standing on a course that was now rapidly opening the bight, and a few moments later they saw to their dismay a small vessel of the motor-cabin-cruiser type at anchor.

There was a short stretch of black beach and back of this what appeared to be a cluster of cabins with corrugated iron roofs. From one of these there was a chimney pipe from which a thin bluish shaft of smoke was rising straight into the air.

Clare was at the wheel and at the discovery that the little desert island was not only occupied but the scene of some sort of activity she felt a stab of suspicion. It looked as if Ivan had tricked her into coming to what he might have known to be a rendezvous of refugees and that his story of the hidden treasure was pretext. He was standing by the quarter rail, his back to her, and as she watched him Clare became aware that her suspicion was unjust.

Something in the set of Ivan's well-shaped head on the round shaft of neck told her beyond all doubt that this occupancy was totally unexpected by him. Moreover there was a bitter disappointment and inspired hostility on his part as if he had a claim on that patch of rock and dry scrub and resented the intrusion. Frank, who was standing near by, said in his flippant way: "Now what do you know about that?"

Ivan turned and said bitterly to Clare: "I hadn't counted on this. The island is off the track of any sort of traffic. Old d'Arcy told me that there were no signs of its ever being visited." He was plainly puzzled and distressed.

"What could anybody be doing here?" Clare asked.

"I can't imagine. I doubt if there is any fresh water and you can see there is very little vegetation."

Frank was studying the island through the glasses. "There's a good-sized cabin with a long smokestack, and there are a couple of lighters hauled up against the beach."

"There might be an asphalt deposit here or phosphates or something of the sort," Ivan said. "But the place is too small for much of it."

They were moving closer in at a little more than half speed and presently the details ashore became easily visible. Several figures in white came out of the building with the long smokepipe and stood for a moment as if staring out at the schooner. Three of them hurried down to the beach where a yacht's small boat was hauled up against one of the loading scows. They shoved this dinghy clear and rowed off rapidly to the cabin cruiser that appeared to be of modern type and about fifty-five feet long.

"Better slow down," Ivan said to Clare. "There's something fishy about all this."

Clare cut down their speed to dead slow, heading for the farther side of the cove. The small boat from the beach disappeared behind the cruiser. A few moments later two of the men appeared on her deck and went forward. It was still too far for Clare to see just what they were doing.

Ivan had taken the binoculars from Frank and was watching the yacht intently. Clare was about to suggest that they fetch up and anchor, when Ivan spun round suddenly and leaped to the wheel. Without saying a word he thrust the glasses into Clare's hands, sweeping her aside. He spun the wheel hard over, at the same time giving the engine full gas.

The schooner turned quickly on her heel and forged ahead. When she had swung so that her axis fore-and-aft bore directly on the cruiser, Ivan steadied the wheel and held her on that course which would barely clear a bold little promontory at the mouth of the cove. Startled and angry at the way in which she had been swept aside, Clare looked back at the cruiser and caught a bright heliographic flash on her bow.

"They're swinging a gun on us," she cried.

"I know it," Ivan said. "I saw them stripping off the cover. That's why I jumped for the wheel. I don't like it."

"But why should they fire—" Clare began. She checked herself as there came from the small gun on the cruiser's bow a white puff and almost instantly a sharp report and the whistle of a projectile. It was so close that it seemed to Clare as if she felt a pulse of air from it.

"That was no warning for us to heave to," Ivan said grimly.

"No," Frank said, and added in his flippant way, "it was target practice."

CLARE could not believe that the cruiser had shot to kill. She could think of no sense or reason for such an unwarranted attack. Then she thought of the ammunition in their hold.

The cruiser fired again. This time the small shell struck so close alongside as to splash a jet of water on deck. It ricocheted and deflected slightly by the schooner's bow wave, struck the end of the point of rock and exploded violently.

"Not so good," Frank muttered. "Explosive shell!"

"Heave to, Ivan!" Clare cried. "If one of those lands in our bombs—"

"That's just it," Ivan answered. "Our only chance is to run for it. For some reason they mean to sink us."

"What if they slip their cable and chase us?" Clare cried angrily. It seemed to her that Ivan was inviting disaster. "That cruiser is bound to have more speed than we've got. She's the express type."

Ivan did not answer. He was heading to cut the promontory closely even at the risk of striking a submerged rock. There came another shot from the cruiser. This missed them by a narrow margin and glanced from the water ahead. Clare, staring at the cruiser through the glasses, saw one man of the two at the gun turn away from it and stoop to clear the mooring pennant from the windlass. The other man disappeared down a fore hatchway.

"They're going to chase us, Ivan. We haven't got a chance."

"It looks that way," he answered quietly. "We seem to have run into something pretty bad. If they had wanted to heave us to they'd have sent their first shot wide. But it was close—a bare miss. I've been shot at enough to know."

"But why should they try to sink a harmless schooner yacht?" Clare asked.

Ivan shook his head but did not answer. Clare glanced at his face and could see that he was thinking hard. The *Jacana* surged past the tip of the bluff rocky point when Ivan swung her slightly so that the cruiser was cut off from view. Clare sank down on the corner of the deckhouse. Her knees had suddenly got weak.

"Whatever they're up to over there it's something that they're taking no chances on having reported," Ivan said harshly.

"It looks to me," Frank said, "as if we'd been mistaken for some outfit they've got reason to fear."

Ivan nodded. "Possibly. But it doesn't matter. They are apt to sink us first or blow us up and get our mistaken identity afterwards." He looked at Clare. "I am going to land Frank and you."

Clare sprang up. "What? Why? There's no good in that!"

"Clear the dory, Frank and get her over," Ivan ordered. He said then more gently to Clare: "It looks as if nothing could save us but some sort of fluke. That cruiser can outfoot us two to one. There's no use in sacrificing you —and Frank."

"But what about you others?" Clare cried.

"I don't know. Something might happen. But I can't see any crowd scragging a defenseless girl like you." He raised his voice and called: "Hurry with that dory."

TWO of the other men were on deck forward. Frank called to them sharply in French. They got up slowly and bore a hand to get the dory overside. Ivan checked the schooner's headway, bringing her nearly to a stop. The dory splashed down into the water and was held alongside by its painter. They were close in to the island and here on the lee side from the prevailing trade wind there was scarcely more than a low wash against the ragged formation of coral and volcanic rock.

"Get aboard, you two," Ivan said. "Then pull in ashore and go over there and give yourselves up."

"I'm not going to leave my ship!" Clare protested wildly. "Let the others go. There's no sense in their sinking us. Ivan, you put about and go back!"

Ivan left the wheel, stepped toward her, and the next moment Clare found herself whisked up as if she had been a little girl, carried to the rail and lowered into the dory. She was an uncommonly strong girl and her life aboard the schooner had hardened her muscles and given her the supple activity of an athlete in splendid training. But the power in Ivan's great arms was irresistible.

Frank offered no protest. He slid over the side into the dory and shoved clear. Ivan tossed the painter aboard and without another word or look went to the schooner's wheel. The brine churned up under the *Jacana's* stern and she forged ahead again.

Clare leaned forward and rested her face in her hands. She felt beaten, not only physically but morally, overwhelmed by the dominating personality of Ivan. She knew that in another moment she must have obeyed his order to abandon her vessel without further resistence. Frank reached down for the thole-pins. He jammed them in and got out the oars.

"Jolly boating weather," he said in his flippant way and started to row in for the shore.

## CHAPTER IV

HERE on the lee of the island the water was comparatively smooth. When Frank had pulled a few strokes Clare raised herself to listen for sounds from the cruiser. She expected at any moment to see her appear from behind the rocky point.

Some minutes passed. Frank rowed along in silence. They were within fifty yards of the ragged shore-line and in the backwash from the low swell that circled indirectly when the light gray bow of the cruiser thrust itself out beyond the low promontory. Before the whole of the vessel came in sight it was evident that something must be wrong with her engines. And that at her present speed she could never overhaul the schooner or even get within range.

Frank rested on his oars and stared at her critically. "I'd say she had twin screws and was only running on one engine."

Clare burst out passionately. "That's it! We needn't have left the *Jacana* at all. Ivan had no right to put me over in the dory, or you either, for that matter!"

"He didn't know that," Frank said mildly. "He acted for what seemed the best."

Clare did not answer. She was too bitterly angry to speak and fighting back an impulse to burst into tears. Then as in silence they watched the cruiser it became apparent that the attempt to get within range of the schooner had been abandoned. The cruiser turned in a wide arc and at the same low speed put back for the cove.

"They must have sighted us," Frank said indifferently. "Not that it matters much." He picked up his oars again, then slewed round on his thwart looking for some spot where they might safely land.

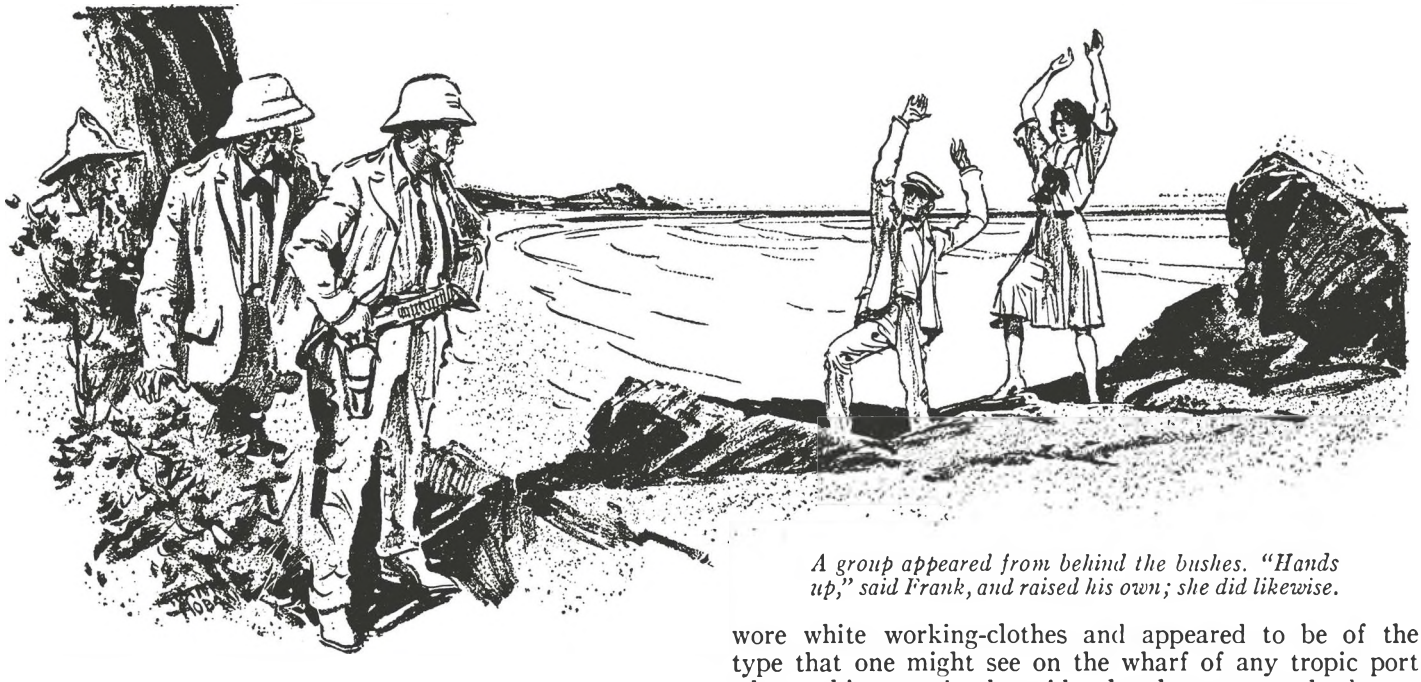
The line of shore was fairly low but bold, with no outlying rocks. Its structure was uncouth and fantastic as is apt to be the case where a submarine disturbance has in the remote past thrown up a mixture of coral and molten lava.

Frank rode slowly along the shore and presently there appeared a little fissure between the rocks where a mass of them had fallen down and forward to form a sort of natural breakwater. He paddled into this small niche where the water rose and fell with no commotion. They scrambled out of the dory and Frank carried the painter up and made it fast.

They climbed up the eroded rocks to find themselves on a barren stretch of turf where the vegetation was scanty. Farther back there were patches of green scrawny grape trees and a sort of palmetto.

"Where now?" Clare asked.

"We can walk in and ask them for a cup of tea," Frank



*A group appeared from behind the bushes. "Hands up," said Frank, and raised his own; she did likewise.*

said, "or wait here until somebody comes to invite us. But first I had better give you this."

He took from his pocket a folded slip of paper and handed it to Clare. "Ivan gave this to me yesterday."

Clare opened the paper. There was written the latitude and longitude in degrees and minutes, the position of the island evidently. Underneath in a clean round hand: "At the foot of the mole southwest from summit a large square block of cocina stone. Ten meters due east from stone a small heap of broken rock. Under this at a depth of one meter."

"Memorize that and destroy it," Frank said.

"No great mental effort," she said, and handed the paper back to him. Frank struck a match and held it to one corner.

"This is a real treasure-hunt," he said. "Everything was rosy—too much so! Like the peaceful sky and lovely sunsets a couple of days before a hurricane. Here in half an hour all of us are out of luck."

Clare nodded, and they started to walk across the ragged uneven ground toward the head of the cove. It was open here; it would have been a sort of rough moor except for the scarcity of vegetation. The sun by this time was very low, a great red-hot disc about five degrees above the horizon. Although there was no perceptible cloud-bank, this outer rim cut cleanly across as if sinking into a slot.

Suddenly there appeared a group of several figures clad in white, from behind the tangle of scrubby bushes.

"Hands up," Frank said to Clare, and raised his own. She did likewise. They continued to walk slowly toward the party that had come in search of them. Drawing nearer and seeing that these men proved to be white, Clare let fall her arms and Frank followed her example. Clare had on a white linen dress, such as she wore at sea in the tropics. Frank's costume consisted of no more than the shore-going whites of which each member of the former crew kept a fresh suit in reserve, for it was necessary to observe the appearance of a yacht.

Even the three days of rest and food and cleanliness had improved Frank's appearance. He was of course still emaciated, haggard of face, but where he had at first shown signs of fearful hardships recently endured, he now looked more like a young man of breeding and culture, convalescent from a wasting fever, malaria or any other tropic illness.

The group who had come in search for them, stood silent and motionless as they approached. All but one of them wore white working-clothes and appeared to be of the type that one might see on the wharf of any tropic port when a ship came in alongside—hotel runners, or hackmen.

One of them stood a little in advance, evidently the chief of the party. He was immaculately clad in fine clean white ducks, white deck shoes and a silk shirt and round pith helmet. As Clare's attention centered on this one it seemed to her that she was looking into the handsomest yet hardest, most merciless human face that she had ever seen. In comparison to other men's expressions, his was dominated by a pair of pale sea-gull eyes. Even Ivan's passing look of ruthlessness became gentle in comparison.

Clare in the last few years of her curious life had seen a great many hard, cruel and even vicious types. But these had been either lower ones in the somatic scale or of a sort to be expected in men of dangerous vocations. And they were apt to be of a temperamental ferocity that might alternate with flashes of humanity.

This man impressed her differently. He was obviously a most dangerous type of individual: that is, the gentleman gone absolutely wrong. His handsome face showed a malevolence that seemed projected with the force of a physical contact. It had been Clare's experience that few men were ever lost to soft emotion on scrutinizing her closely, without at least a flicker of admiration, even though of an offensive sort.

This man's coldly analytical examination of her was all the more terrible because he was still young, thirty-five perhaps, and evidently of superior caste. It was less the scrutiny of a censor than of a scientist who examines some form of life that his analysis has isolated as inimical and dangerous and to be destroyed.

The chill that struck through Clare was of a double sort, dread in the face of what she felt to be a frightful danger and a sense of violation, as if her personality and soul and mind—even her body—were being analyzed. His cold pale eyes seemed to penetrate her clothes and not stopping there, to pierce deeper still into the very workings of her spirit. She felt a sense of faintness and confusion as though she found it impossible to hide anything from this man. She was for the instant almost in a state of hypnosis, as if she had been given a drug that inhibits the power of conscious thought, leaving the subconscious mind naked and unprotected and bound to answer truthfully.

This ordeal, coming immediately on the steps of what she had already passed through, might have overwhelmed her, if at that moment there had not been a startling interruption. One of the other men who was older and whose gaunt face presented the appearance of a piece of old Morocco leather with its innumerable fine lines scarcely hid

den by a square white beard, had been studying Frank with an examination as minute if less cold than that to which the girl had been subjected. He cried out suddenly in French:

"But it is really himself—my good Fanch!"

He plunged forward, seized Frank by both shoulders, gave him a little shake and said, this time in English: "Don't you know me, Fanch? Don't you remember your good old Pierre?"

Frank smiled. "Of course I do, old chap. So you did make it, after all! Well, so you see, did I. My sister came and got me out of that infernal hole."

The old man turned to the chief. "Captain," he said, "here is an old comrade; another of us from that damned Guiana. I called him Fanch. He had a life-sentence."

The chief's cold eyes played over Frank like the eyes of a voracious sea-bird about to strike its strong beak into a stranded fish. He asked in a curt voice that was not unpleasing in inflection: "What was his crime?"

"Murder."

"That is not always a crime. Who was it you killed?"

"My stepfather, sir," Frank said, and added, "He needed it."

A thin smile that had nothing friendly in it, scarcely more than a sneer, lifted the corners of the chief's lips. He turned to Clare and stabbed the question at her: "Who else was aboard that schooner?"

She answered faintly: "They were all convicts, escaped from Guiana."

"All? What about your captain and crew?"

"There was no crew. I was alone aboard the schooner."

SHE described briefly what had happened. The pale eyes never left her as she spoke. More than that, they held her own in a compelling grip, so that she found herself unable to look away. At least, she reflected vaguely, he must know she was telling the truth.

"Why did you two land here?"

"Because we thought your boat would follow the schooner and sink her with all hands," Clare said. The sound of her own voice was bringing back her courage and her shattered moral force.

Again the little writhing smile lifted the corners of his well-shaped mouth that would have been fine but for the stamp of something more than cruelty, a mercilessness that made cruelty scarcely more than the quality one would associate with extermination of some pest.

"That would have happened if we had not taken down our engine," he said. He stood there staring at her again in silence. Clare was conscious of a sensation of ants crawling up her spine. Then the chief said, as if to himself: "This is better than I had hoped. That crowd will have to beach the cruiser somewhere and scatter. Why did you put in here?"

Frank answered quickly: "To look for water, sir. We saw your smoke."

This reply to a question that had been directed to the girl brought a startling result. With the same still malevolence the chief leaned back for an instant, then stepped forward and one arm shot out. There was the sharp impact of a quick, vicious blow that sent Frank to the ground as if shot.

"That will teach you," said the chief, "not to speak until spoken to."

He continued to stare down at Frank, who lay looking up dazedly, as if weighing something in his mind; then his hand went slowly to the pistol in its holster on his hip.

But the old convict interfered. He ripped out a Guiana oath of a sort that is unlike other oaths to be uttered in the presence of nobody but convicts.

"No," he said, "not that!"

The chief gave him a bleak stare. "Why not?"

"Because he is my friend; because we suffered together in that Guiana; because once when I was on the point of death, he brought me back to life."

"What's that to me?" the chief asked.

"Because, Captain Considine, you cannot get on without me, and if you kill him I tell you that you will have to kill me. Then you can't find another to take my place. There are limits to despotism, to cruelty. Bah, what do I care . . . *zut!*" He lunged into a stream of convict French that few Frenchmen of the upper class would probably have understood. Evidently he was working himself into a frenzy. Foam appeared between his white mustache and beard.

The chief seized him by the shoulders and gave him a shake. "Stop it!" he ordered. "No more of these fits!"

It was evident to Clare that for some reason the man was disturbed, and it flashed across her mind that whatever the activity here carried on this old convict must be a necessary organ to it. His paroxysm gradually subsided, and he said more calmly: "You will not blow him out?"

"No, if you think such a precious lot of him."

"But he can be useful to us," cried the old man. "What is there for an escaped convict? It will be to his interest to help you. Fanch is a man of the world, *un grand monsieur*. He is what you English call a toff, or a swell. He would have *entrée* anywhere. Why should he play you false? Why should he run away from the opportunity to become a rich man?"

The argument was not without its effect. The chief looked at Frank again, then said: "Perhaps you are right, Pierre. The idea had not occurred to me." He said to Frank: "You want to serve me and get rich?"

Frank struggled to his feet and stood a little unsteadily. Clare felt for the first time a sort of tenderness for him. Despite his weakness and the blow that he had just suffered he answered with that light cheerfulness, the sincerity of which had several times left her in doubt: "If you had spent four years in that devil's kitchen, Chief, you wouldn't ask the question."

"Then come along."

He motioned to the others. As Frank loitered, evidently to walk with Clare, the chief seized him by his shoulder, and thrust him so violently ahead that he fell again.

"Go on with the rest," he said. "They will take care of you." He added grimly: "This young lady will, I hope, condescend to be my guest." The latter words he directed to Clare, and she felt more frozen at their sound than at anything that had hitherto been done or said. She had passed through few moments of terror, or rather of horror, because she was not of a sort to be terrified. It had been a fearful moment for her when she had decided against her better judgment to take Ivan and his dreadful crew aboard. That had passed. There had been an awful moment when the cruiser had opened fire; and that had passed.

But now it seemed to her that she faced a crisis. These others were merely situations of which the worst ending conceivable might be death. The expression in the pale eyes of this man, playing over her as though she had been a slave, seemed to her to hold dreadful possibility, and she could not see how this could ever pass.

## CHAPTER V

THE group of men with Frank disappeared over the crest of a slope. Clare found herself alone with Captain Considine. She had been surprised when the old con-

vict had called him by this name because it was, like her own, an Irish name of presumable Spanish origin. He spoke with an Anglican English of the Varsity sort, the *A's* drawled, broad, and, in his case, with a sort of mocking swank. There was no trace of any softness of the Irish in his hard metallic voice.

As he loitered slowly along with her, silent, scarcely looking at her, and with the air of a man forming some decision, Clare found the state of her emotions suddenly changed. The first violent projection of this man's personality upon her own had struck with a numbing shock. His virulence and the striking down of the still weakened Frank had seemed to Clare an effort at terrorism that must be effected through violence.

ONCE having decided he was a merciless bully rather than a dominant mind, Clare's first dread of him changed to anger. She discovered another fact that had not been apparent until this change of emotional attitude. At first the captain had impressed her as a tall, commanding figure physically—this through an association of ideas. Probably Napoleon in mufti, unrecognized, looked an insignificant figure to the casual passer-by—yet loomed a Titan, standing with legs apart and arms akimbo, as he harangued his officers.

Now as they walked slowly along, slightly separated, Clare discovered to her surprise that this man was neither above the average in height or breadth nor of any physical superiority at all. He was not much taller than herself and his expression was more sullen than imperious. She could guess that this problem had now to do with his disposition of herself, but for some reason she was no longer frightened. Her deeper qualities of courage were beginning to rest on a foundation of anger that was as hard as concrete.

She began to feel less fear than a growing shame and resentment toward this man beside her, that she could ever have been even momentarily daunted by him. She felt in him a flaw. Her trouble had been, she realized, that the successive shocks through which she had passed were so successive that she had been given no time to recover before the impact of the next. But now the man had overplayed his hand. He would have remained more impressive without the act of brutality in striking Frank. Why he had done so became plain to her—it was partly because Frank's answer had been to a question plainly addressed to her and that for a moment she had been at a loss to answer, and partly to intimidate herself.

She could guess what Considine was turning in his mind. The lightening of his pale eyes as they played over her just before turning back had betrayed it. He was now reasoning that since he was already an outlaw subject to punishment, there was no reason why he should not be complete in all respects and help himself to what he wanted with no regard to possible consequences. He believed himself fairly to have terrified this captive that had walked into his trap, and having learned the true character of those aboard the *Jacana* he would not consider that there was much to be feared from this direction.

Considine did not speak until they had reached the point of the proclivity that ran down to the black lava beach. Then he looked at Clare, and said: "You told me that your brother had been collared and locked up. What about this escaped convict?"

"He is not my brother. I never saw him until three days ago," she answered. Something in her tone, a change in her voice that held a sort of contempt, brought a quick searching look from Considine.

"I knew that. There is not the faintest family resemblance between you two."

Clare said nothing. Considine tried to stare her down, but this time her own eyes met his so evenly that he was forced to look away. He said in a smoother voice than he had yet used: "Then your brother is actually in a tight place and in danger to his life."

"No," Clare said, "they can't have much against him that I can see." She stared around at the short sweep of beach with the low buildings back of it, and saw that there were some smaller cabins behind them.

"What are you doing here that made you want to sink a harmless schooner with no warning?" she asked.

"I should not have tried to sink her if you had not put suddenly about and tried to get away. I can't afford to have my game reported."

"What is your game?"

"Do not get inquisitive," he said.

It occurred to Clare that whatever might be going on here, Considine should know better than to count on continuing his operations indefinitely without investigation. She knew that there was a periodical patrol of all the islands, large and small, in the British West Indies, even including the wide-flung archipelago of the Bahamas. Considine could hardly help but be aware of this fact. But what puzzled her more was what the character of these operations might be.

Slowly Considine said: "I'll tell you this much: what I am doing here is enormously profitable. This island is mine: I bought it from the British West Indies Government and it has already paid for itself several times over." He looked at her again and asked: "Do you want a share in it?"

This direct question took Clare aback. It was a proposition that would not seem to click with the fashion in which she and Frank had been received.

"What are you trying to get at?" she asked and with this peremptory question he gave her another quick look of surprise.

"You seem to be getting high-handed all at once, young lady."

"I am not afraid of you," she said. "You took me by surprise at first." Her self-confidence was returning rapidly.

"I do not want you to be afraid of me. At first it looked as though your schooner had got wind of something and was putting in to try to hold me up, hi-jack, or blackmail me—then, seeing that I had an armed vessel here, decided to get out. Now that I know more about your position I am willing to come to terms with you."

"Why?" Clare asked.

"Because there is a lot in what that old Guiana bird of mine told me. This man Fanch, or whatever his name may be, can be useful."

"And what about me?" Clare asked.

"We will talk about that later."

THEY went down the rough, rather steep proclivity to the beach, walked along its top to the group of buildings past the small low factory, then up a slope to a cabin built of planks with corrugated iron roof.

"My quarters—and now yours," Considine said, and threw open the door. The inside of the cabin was far more attractive than its outside. It was about thirty feet square, the roof raised to permit air space between it and the walls. It was divided into a large living-room and two smaller rooms, the doors of which were closed.

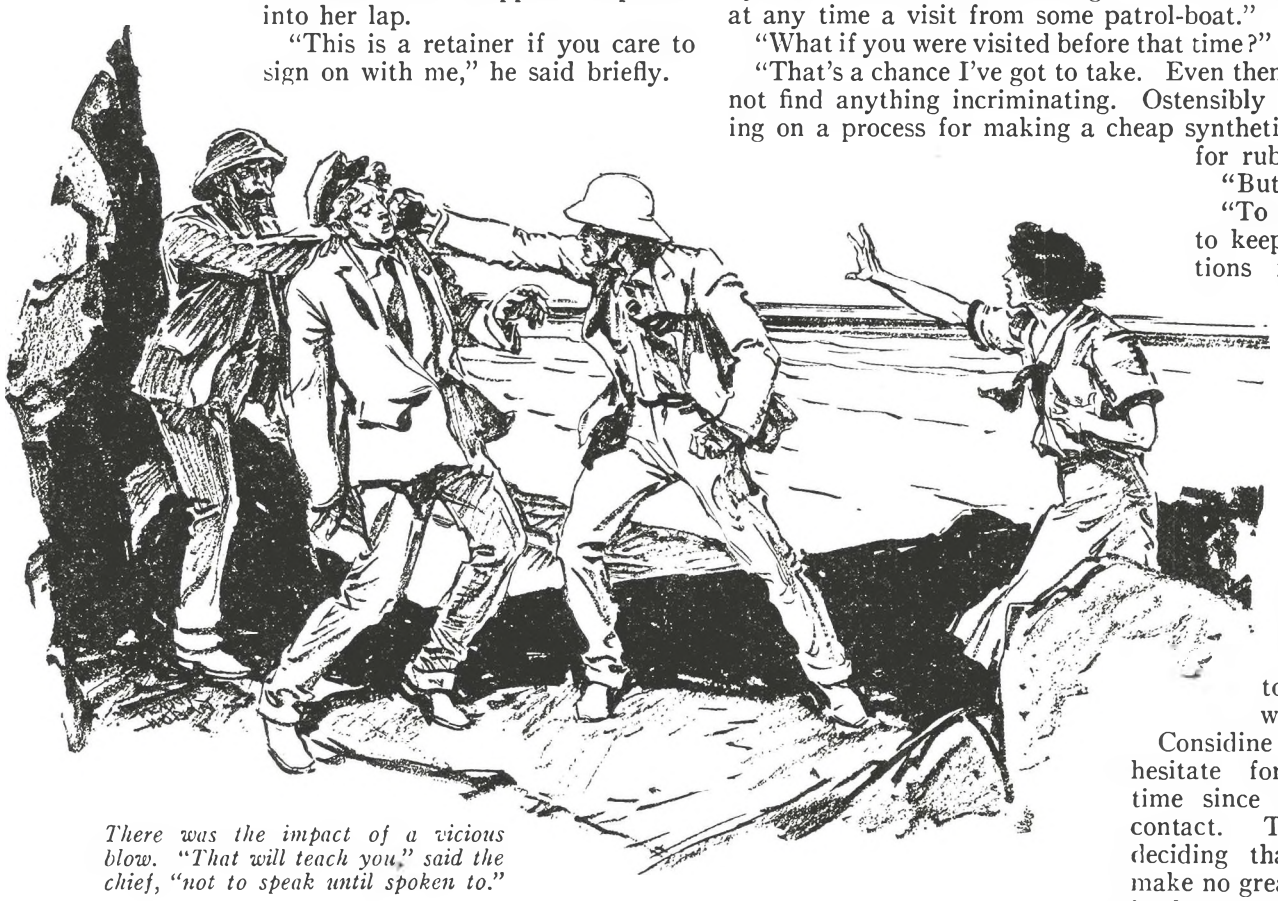
To Clare's surprise the living-room was furnished simply but comfortably, a good deal as might have been found in the bungalow of a manager or chief engineer of some construction work. The floor was planed and spread with some Mexican rugs and there were a table desk and wicker

chairs and in one corner, a small safe. There were bookshelves filled with works that seemed to be of a technical character and even the brighter bindings of fiction. The whole place was spotlessly clean and as Clare stood looking about a Chinaman came to the door and stood waiting orders.

Considine said curtly: "Get that room ready for this lady."

Clare seated herself in one of the wicker chairs. Considine went to a small desk between two long windows, pulled out a drawer and took from it a sheaf of bank-notes encircled by a band of blue paper on which the amount was typewritten as such specie is kept in the drawer of a paying teller. He stepped to where Clare was seated and dropped the packet into her lap.

"This is a retainer if you care to sign on with me," he said briefly.



*There was the impact of a vicious blow. "That will teach you," said the chief, "not to speak until spoken to."*

Clare glanced at the typewritten amount on the band. It was for five hundred dollars. She examined the crisp new notes. They were in United States Treasury gold-certificates of fifty dollars each.

Surprise was following surprise so quickly that she found herself more at a loss than if Considine had opened some new attempt at intimidation.

"Sign on for what?" she asked.

"To take your orders from me."

"She shook her head. "Too indefinite, Captain Considine."

"You want to get your brother out of the calaboose, don't you?"

"Of course. But how can I go about that if I am a prisoner here?"

"I will see to getting him out for you if it comes to that."

"How?"

"Leave that to me. I'll deal directly with those people. They know me over there."

"How am I to know that he is really clear?" Clare asked.

"What if I bring you a letter to that effect in his own handwriting?"

"And the order?" she asked.

"That depends. Would he listen to a proposition to engage himself in a commercial, unlawful but highly profitable scheme? Something that might be expected to pay him let us say to start with, twenty thousand dollars a year?"

Clare was on the point of saying "No" emphatically, but checked herself. "I don't know," she answered. "He might. What else?"

"You would have to stop on here as hostage."

"For how long?"

"For three months. My work here should be finished by that time. It would no longer be safe. I might expect at any time a visit from some patrol-boat."

"What if you were visited before that time?" Clare asked.

"That's a chance I've got to take. Even then they might not find anything incriminating. Ostensibly I am working on a process for making a cheap synthetic substitute for rubber."

"But why here?"

"To be safe, and to keep my operations from being tampered with."

"Before we go any further," Clare said, "you may as well tell me what you are really up to here. That's the only way to get anywhere."

Considine seemed to hesitate for the first time since their rough contact. Then as if deciding that it could make no great difference in the case of a girl who was his prisoner, he seated himself on the corner of the long table desk, stared at her a moment and said: "Examine one of those bank-notes carefully."

Clare did so. The bill was so far as she could see a perfectly good piece of paper money, but her experience in handling such currency was very slight. Considine, however, had given her the clue.

"So that's it," she said slowly. "You are a counterfeiter."

"We are making here three sorts of counterfeit bank-notes; United States dollars, German marks, and Italian lira. This man Pierre is the most experienced in his line of any man living. That was what got him sent to Guiana. He had been at it a long time before they finally collared him and then it was not because anybody was able to detect the falsity of his product. Suspicion was aroused by a fault in distribution and that is the only way in which I could ever get traced."

"But why do it here?" Clare asked.

"For a number of reasons. Some are perfectly apparent. On this island we can keep watch and be given time to get rid of incriminating evidence. Then my operatives are

isolated. The danger lies only in the distribution. That requires a lot of thought, a lot of care, and that is where I think this Fanch could be very useful to me and can enrich himself—and so could your brother.

"Now it is easy for me to see that this convict is devoted to you. And why not? He has evidently been a gentleman at some time and murder is not always a crime. In fact it is the only felony that might be, as I said, not merely justifiable but praiseworthy. You seem to have done a very splendid act in rescuing these convicts, taking such an awful chance, and it looks as if they were grateful. Otherwise they'd never have stopped to set you ashore."

THAT, at least, was true, Clare was forced to admit. The affair was developing on lines totally unexpected by her. She had seemed at first to have fallen into the hands of some sort of ruthless blackguard, and now he was offering her not only Jim's release but to make them both partners in a felonious traffic of which the profits might really prove enormous.

Considine added, in the first pleasant tone that so far he had seen fit to use: "You have been through a hard ordeal and had better rest. I will have some supper brought you from the cookhouse. You can think over this proposition at your leisure. I do not share your hopefulness about your brother. They are quick on the trigger over there and unless something is done about it pretty soon it might very easily be the last you will ever see of him.

"My first intention, I will admit, was to intimidate you but I have seen enough women to know by this time that you are not the sort to be intimidated. You can have this cabin to yourself. I shall not bother you—if we can come to an agreement."

The implied threat in these last words roused Clare's fighting-blood again, that mixture of Irish with a remote Spanish strain that gave her not only her fearlessness but a colder calculating quality.

"And if not?" she asked.

He accepted instantly this challenge and answered slowly with another of his predatory sea-gull looks: "If not, young lady, your brother can rot in the calaboose until they drag him out and shoot him. And you can remain my captive here until my work is finished—and with it, possibly a good deal of your defiance."

He raised himself from the desk, called to the Chinaman, and went out. Clare found herself alone with thoughts that were for the moment chaotic.

She got up presently and looked into the bedroom which the Chinaman had prepared for her. Like the living-room it was clean and simply furnished and it would be cool by virtue of the air space between walls and roof. She felt suddenly exhausted and flung herself down on the simple iron bedstead, with its brass knobs and rails.

It had now grown dark. The plant was equipped with a generator and the cabin lighted electrically; Clare reached up and snapped on a lamp at the head of the bed. She tried to think and finally was able to get some order to her mental chaos. She had come to the cabin prepared to fight physically rather than mentally.

If it had not been for the danger to Jim, Clare would promptly have rejected Considine's offer and taken the consequences. She was perhaps less dominated by scruples than by pride, and her fighting-spirit was not to be coërced, even by covert threats directed toward her own person. She was no longer afraid of Considine nor of his band. Frank had evidently found a friend in the old master counterfeiter and the chances were that the rest of this band were less influenced by any loyalty to their chief than by personal profit that was no doubt very great.

The reason for their operations in this desolate spot became more obvious. It would be of course much safer to counterfeit the currency of a country out of that country. Clare had no idea what the law might be in this respect, but obviously it must be more unwieldy than in the country against whose laws the crime was committed.

What was she to do? To accept Considine's offer meant to sacrifice pride, dignity, honesty—and to sink herself into a criminal class. Moreover, she could not answer for Jim. But to refuse this coërcion meant grave danger to her brother, if only from continued incarceration in the sort of prison Clare had heard described as worse than Guiana. The sort of jail in which Jim was apt to find himself was scarcely better than the medieval *oubliette* into which prisoners were flung to rot or starve or die of filth and fever, practically forgotten as the word implied. . . . Clare did not let the danger to her own person enter into the problem.

The Chinaman came in to bring her supper which he set with a delicacy of service on the desk table in the living-room. Clare was hungry. It was such a dainty supper as might be served aboard a yacht cruiser in the tropics; the Chinaman in his fresh white ducks might have been the yacht's steward, which as a matter of fact he was.

Clare waited until the boy had cleared the table and gone; then she went to the door and looked out. It was in the dark of the moon and the brilliant stars flooded everything with a soft pervasive light of which the aggregate illumination would seem to equal that of the moon by a more even distribution and without the stark clear-cut shadows.

The wind had dropped. The air was very soft and faintly sweet with some odor that was not marine. Except for the low murmuring of the swell against the rock of the shore there were no sounds at all. There was nobody in sight nor were there any lights to be seen. Clare had noticed that the windows of her cabin visible from the sea had the jalousie shutters closed.

She was surprised to find herself unguarded—not even under observation. Apparently she was free to roam about as she chose, the island itself being the only limit to her liberty. With her activity and knowledge of boats and the sea it might not be so hard to escape. The distance to Granada was not great and in that season there would be slight danger even in a small boat.

Clare was very tired. She went into the bedroom that had been tidied by the Chinaman while she was at supper. The bed had a sheet and very light blankets, and on this covering were neatly laid silken pajamas and woven grass slippers. The lack of mosquito-nets and screens spoke well for the absence of insect pests. Clare began to feel herself less a prisoner than a guest. It was amusing to reflect on how she had been thus twice reassured after violent contacts of the most forbidding sort.

She undressed and bathed, and was slipping on the pajamas when she heard the crunching of footsteps outside the cabin, then a light rapping on the door.

## CHAPTER VI

CLARE had already noticed that there was no lock on the door. The Chinaman had laid a sponge-towel bathrobe over the back of a chair. She slipped this on and went out, rather expecting that Considine had returned.

To her surprise she found Frank at the door. She had not expected even if he had been given liberty of the premises that Considine would permit them to discuss the situation alone together. Frank entered. He appeared to be very weak and as he sank into a wicker chair a stab of bit-

ter anger surged through Clare at the sight of the swelled discoloration about his eyes.

"That brute!" she exclaimed.

Frank made an indifferent gesture of his hand. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. So far."

"What do you think of his proposition?"

"So he has made it to you?" Frank asked.

"Yes. I do not know what to think."

"Nor I. It's a sort of fox-and-goose and bag-of-corn problem, and I am inclined to think he is right about your brother. They are apt to dump him in a filthy hole and then forget him."

"Well, what is there to be done about it?" Clare asked.

"It's hard to tell. History repeating itself—like pirates' prisoners three hundred years ago: given the choice of signing up under the Jolly Roger or walking the plank."

"The trouble is," said Clare, "that Jim may have to walk the plank."

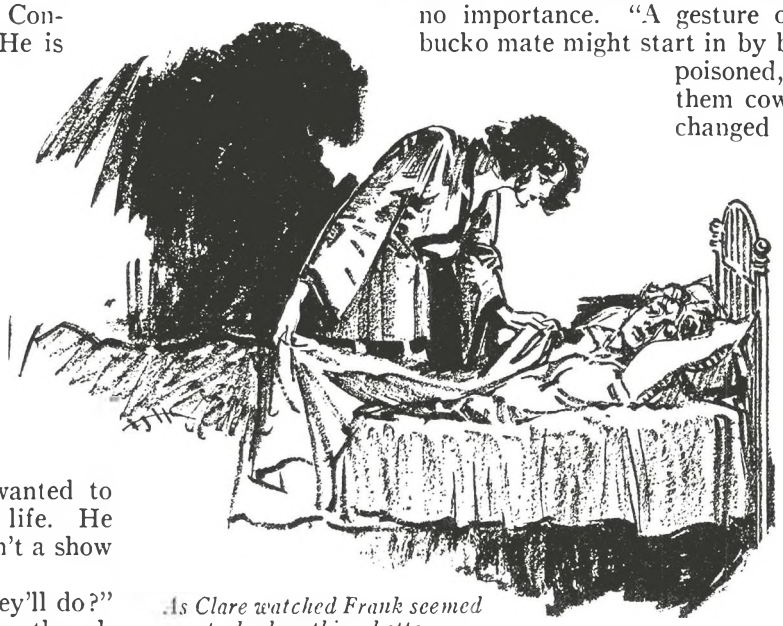
Frank nodded. "This Considine's a crafty swine. He is banking on your loyalty to your brother and my loyalty to you."

Clare asked a question that had been puzzling her since their landing. "Why did Ivan put you ashore with me? It was plain enough that there was nothing you could do for my protection."

"Well, for one thing he felt that you ought not to be landed alone and for another Ivan is really fond of me and wanted to give me a chance for my life. He was certain that they hadn't a show aboard the schooner."

"What do you think they'll do?"

"Hard to say. It looks though as if the only thing left for them to do would be to make for Cuba where they could land at some deserted spot, and scatter. If they were to be overhauled aboard the schooner it would be all up with them."



*As Clare watched Frank seemed to be breathing better.*

"Have you thought about the treasure?" Clare asked.

"Of course. But I can't see how that's going to help us."

"It would help us a lot if we could get it aboard a boat and escape."

Frank shook his head. "No chance. I have been along the beach. The only small boats are those of the yacht, and they are hoisted aboard—our dory too."

"What do you think about his game, Frank?"

"Not bad for a crooked one. My old prison mate Pierre is a wizard in that line. I take his word for it that the only risk lies in the distribution of his product. He says there's no danger of their getting collared here. They are really making or trying to make a substitute for rubber out of kelp and vegetable fiber and a little balata and some other stuff. It's not to be for general commercial uses, but a substitute for car-tires. Pierre showed me some of it and it's good enough to get away with as a camouflage for what they are really doing here."

"What does Pierre advise?" Clare asked.

"He is strong to have me throw in with Considine. He argues that there is a big opening in it for an escaped Guiana bird—and there is truth enough in that. After all, an honest convict must live."

"Then you are considering it?" Clare asked.

"I am considering only one thing," Frank said bluntly, "and that is what may be to your best interest. You took a fearful chance for the salvage of that *cayuga*-load of refugees."

"Don't put it up to me," Clare said. "What would you do if it were not for me?"

"I'd throw in with him. Why not? What difference does it make? He tells me that if we both sign up he will get your brother out, provided—" He checked himself.

"Provided what, Frank?"

"Well, if it's not too late; but I do not think there's much danger of that. I am more worried about his treatment of you."

"That's the least of my cares," Clare said defiantly. "Considine's a bully and a coward. Only that sort would try to sink a defenseless schooner or strike down a man in your condition."

Again Frank waved his hand as if dismissing a point of no importance. "A gesture of intimidation. Just as a bucko mate might start in by beating up a miserable rum-poisoned, shanghaied crew to get them cowed from the start. He has changed all that since he thinks we can be of use to him."

"That you can be of use to him," Clare corrected.

"Well, he will get your brother in through you. Considine reasons that it would be no great strain on a man like your brother to make a pile of money distributing Pierre's product. That's his trouble now. He has got to trust somebody and it might as well be us."

"While that is going on," Clare said hotly, "he intends to keep me here as hostage."

"That's the trouble," Frank said. "I doubt that he would try to harm you, though. He has got too much at stake." He looked at her admiringly. "You don't seem much afraid of him."

"I am not, now that I have got myself together. I have sized him up for what he is."

"What's that?"

"A clever crook but a good deal of a bluff."

"Well, I'm not so sure. He's got a well-worked-out line of graft, but—" Again he checked himself.

"But what?"

Frank hesitated, then said reluctantly: "Well, after all, he may be a cold-blooded proposition, but he is a male human being stuck out here on this island and if you don't mind my saying so, you are a lovely girl. The scoundrel may decide that if worst comes to worst he may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

"I can take care of myself," Clare said hotly.

"Let's hope so. The trouble is, Considine doesn't dare leave this place. He'll stick on here until his shore agents have diluted the currency-market with as much of this stuff as he thinks it able to absorb. You will be all alone with him."

She ignored this. "What I can't understand is how he can trust these agents. What is to prevent their getting rid of their supply, then beating it? How do they go about it, anyhow?"

"The answer to the first question is that his field force come off here and buy the stuff at a big discount and pay for it with good money. It looks as if the graft might be worked indefinitely because as soon as Considine feels that he has put out as big an issue of notes of a certain denomination as may be easily absorbed, he starts distributing a fresh one of another amount. Pierre's working at them all of the time. That man's a genius."

"What if some person with a keen eye should get an idea that he had a false note and turned it in for expert examination?" Clare asked.

"Then he would be stuck," Frank said. "That's the trouble with it, because it puts a premium on keeping them in circulation. It's not in human nature to want to be stung."

"And in a case like that wouldn't the Government that issued the currency redeem it—if only for the sake of knowing what was going on?"

Frank smiled and shook his head. "Not for a second. If that were the case the false money could never get in circulation at all. The counterfeiter's agents would only have to swear that they had been victimized by some crook impossible to trace. But a reputable bank would report it and stand the loss because it would knock a bank's credit galley-west if it were known to have handed out fake money to its clients."

"It seems to me," Clare said, "that Considine takes an awful chance in signing on a man like you that he has so maltreated and whom he believes to be devoted to me. Doesn't he appreciate the risk of your going straight to the secret service and blowing the gaff?"

"Of course he does, both in my case and in your brother's, but he discounts it because he reasons that an ex-convict like myself is pretty sure to fall for a chance at easy graft and you told him enough about your brother to make him believe that he might like it too. Considine reasons that an adventurer of his type would not be apt to stick at distributing counterfeit money, particularly now that he is in jail and has probably lost his means of livelihood. What do you think?"

Clare frowned. "That's what's worrying me more than all the rest, Frank. There's no denying but that Jim's been going from bad to worse. If only I could talk to him! But there's no hope of that."

Frank shook his head. "Not a chance. There's still another consideration. Considine has got things so fixed that at the first alarm he can obliterate all the evidence against him, dump it overboard into the sea. They couldn't prove a thing. There would scarcely be a case against him, especially here under a different Government than that of any country whose currency he'd be charged with counterfeiting."

"He could be charged with kidnaping me."

"He might be charged with it, but what then? He did not kidnap you. We landed here and he declined to send us away."

Clare was silent for a moment and then said: "What upsets me most is that I can't be sure of Jim. He would never steal from an individual, but a Government may be a different matter, and he would be apt to quiet whatever conscience he has left by saying to himself that it was for my sake."

Frank nodded. "That would not be so hard," he admitted; and added, "nor for me either."

"Frank, I don't believe that you were ever a criminal at all," Clare abruptly observed.

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Call it intuition, a hunch. Then, as Considine said, murder may not be necessarily a crime."

"How do you get that?"

"Well, take your own case. If your brute of a stepfather were maltreating your mother, it would be more of a crime for you to let him get away with it."

Frank smiled. "As it happens, she was my stepmother." Then, at the girl's look of surprise: "You see, a few years after my own mother's death, my father married a Frenchwoman. She was kind to me and I was devoted to her. Then my father died and she married again. Otherwise no court would have convicted me."

"Of course not."

"Well, even then," Frank continued tonelessly, "I'd have been acquitted if it hadn't been for a pretty bad police *dossier*. For some years past I had been making a nuisance of myself from time to time. Too much money and not enough to do. I was on record as a bad lot. That's what Guiana is for—the suppression of public nuisances. As I said once, the theory is sound, but its application is wrong. It takes the steady stream of wrong ones and rapidly degrades them from bad to worse until it destroys them, body and soul."

His head sank back wearily and he closed his eyes. His face looked ghastly.

"Frank!" Clare exclaimed.

He did not answer. For a moment Clare thought he had fainted, and then—worse still—that he had ceased to breathe, that he had died. She reached quickly for his wrist and was not greatly reassured to find only a faint flutter.

She stooped down and picked him up bodily, shocked to find his weight scarcely more than that of an emaciated child. She carried him to the door of the bedroom beside her own, and managed to open it. She laid him on the bed, then found the switch and turned on the light.

The room's interior dismayed her, because it showed at a glance that it was Considine's. Some of his toilet articles were on the dresser. Some of his clothes hung from hooks and there were all sorts of personal things such as one would expect to find in the quarters of a man carrying on a work of a legitimate sort in a region far removed from friends and family. There were photographs, and such trinkets as Clare had seen sometimes in the quarters of engineers or traders or agents by whom she and Jim had been sometimes entertained. There was even an air of fastidiousness about the room.

Frank did not stir, but as Clare watched it seemed to her that he was breathing a little better and that his pulse was gaining in strength. His collapse, she thought, was partly the result of shock from Considine's vicious blow. Fortunately his very attenuation had saved him greater injury because there had been no weight to resist it. She took off his shoes, loosened his shirt at the neck, and drew a light covering over him, then switched off the light, closed the door, and went out. There was no lack of air through the open window and free space under the roof.

She stood for a moment in the open door of the cabin and then, feeling very tired, the fatigue of hopelessness added to that of nervousness and strain, went to her room to go to bed. She flung off the towel bathrobe, and clad only in the silk pajamas went to the mirror to tie up her hair that had been bobbed, but had now grown out.

The mirror was on a high dresser between two windows. Clare had not closed her door and now as she stood facing the mirror she was startled to see over her shoulder the reflected face of Considine.

**Clare faces a grim situation from which there seems to be no escape as the mesh of Captain Considine draws closer about her and Frank—in the exciting installment in the next, the March, issue.**

# Ten Fathoms Down

## By HOWARD V. BLOOMFIELD

Illustrated by Hubert Mathieu

A BIG man entered Sloppy Jake's, his shoulders almost filling the doorway. There was a stir along the bar, cautious greetings, shifting feet.

Tom Cotton recognized the tribute, touched with a hint of fear, that weaker men pay to a bucko boss, or a bully. They were a school of small fish into which a big fish had suddenly swum. He looked at the newcomer curiously. "Bully," he decided, with a sense of hostility.

The man was big—tall as himself, but broader, built like a bullock. His leg muscles bulged against his dirty white trousers, his barrel chest stretched the fabric of a sweaty undershirt. He swaggered too much; his heavy jaw thrust too aggressively. He nodded curt greetings to the men at the bar and looked fixedly at Cotton.

Cotton lowered his eyes. He did not want to talk to the stranger, though he felt himself the especial object of the man's attention. He had been asked to keep his mouth shut until the *Pilgrim* would come to the key for him in the morning; he had spread his long legs under a table and followed those instructions. His gray eyes kept counsel with his lime and gin and his cigarette, ignoring the seafaring men at the bar. The night was still too hot for sleep at the hotel, and Sloppy Jake's was the only place to kill time.

He did not need to look up, to know that the big man's eyes were still upon him—he felt the gaze. Absently he fished in his pocket for a cord, rolled it in dexterous fingers, fashioning running bowlines, carrick bends, fishermen's bends. It was a habit of long standing. He knew scores of knots, difficult hitches and bridles—employment for his fingers when his mind was busy in other directions, an outlet for excess energy such as some men find in solitaire.

He heard a chair scrape, and looked up to see the big man seat himself at the table.

"Drink?" asked the stranger.

The voice was harsh, for an invitation, even though the man twitched his mouth into a grin.

Cotton motioned toward his glass.

"Standing pat."

"Suit yourself." The big man called an order to Jake. "My name's Kerr—Captain Billy Kerr."

"Mine's Cotton."

"You come in from Miami this afternoon?" asked Kerr.

"That's right."

Kerr's eyes were suddenly masked and shrewd.

"You're a diver, aint you? I aint seen one around here for months, much less a suit."

"Yes," Cotton agreed.

"What are you after here, brother?"

Cotton lifted his glass cautiously. He was to raise the safe on the sunken *Andros*, a job that called for some haste and, he had been requested, no advance publicity.

"I'm waiting for a job," he said. "You seem pretty thirsty for knowledge."

Kerr's mouth twitched again into a grin.

"No, it aint that," he evaded, and switched the subject. "Bad hurricane we had, huh? Some ships went down."

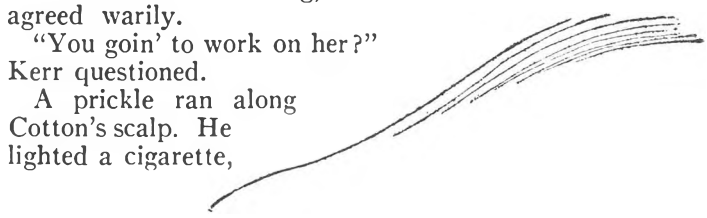
"Too bad, yes," said Tom. He studied the man's hard, still face, trying to read the thoughts behind it. Kerr had a hidden purpose, he felt; was intent upon it.

"Take the *Andros* now—that was mighty bad." Kerr's eyes stabbed into him.

"Lives lost—sad thing," he agreed warily.

"You goin' to work on her?" Kerr questioned.

A prickle ran along Cotton's scalp. He lighted a cigarette,



studied the match flame while he thought rapidly. The man's interrogation was too persistent. Cotton's hostility deepened.

"Kerr," he said, "you got me wrong. I'm a diver."

"Yeah? Well?"

"I'm not in the advertising business."

Kerr's dark skin mottled. He opened his mouth to speak, coughed violently, smirked.

"Don't get me wrong. I aint tryin' to pry into your business here. Fact is, I can use a diver. That's what's on my mind."

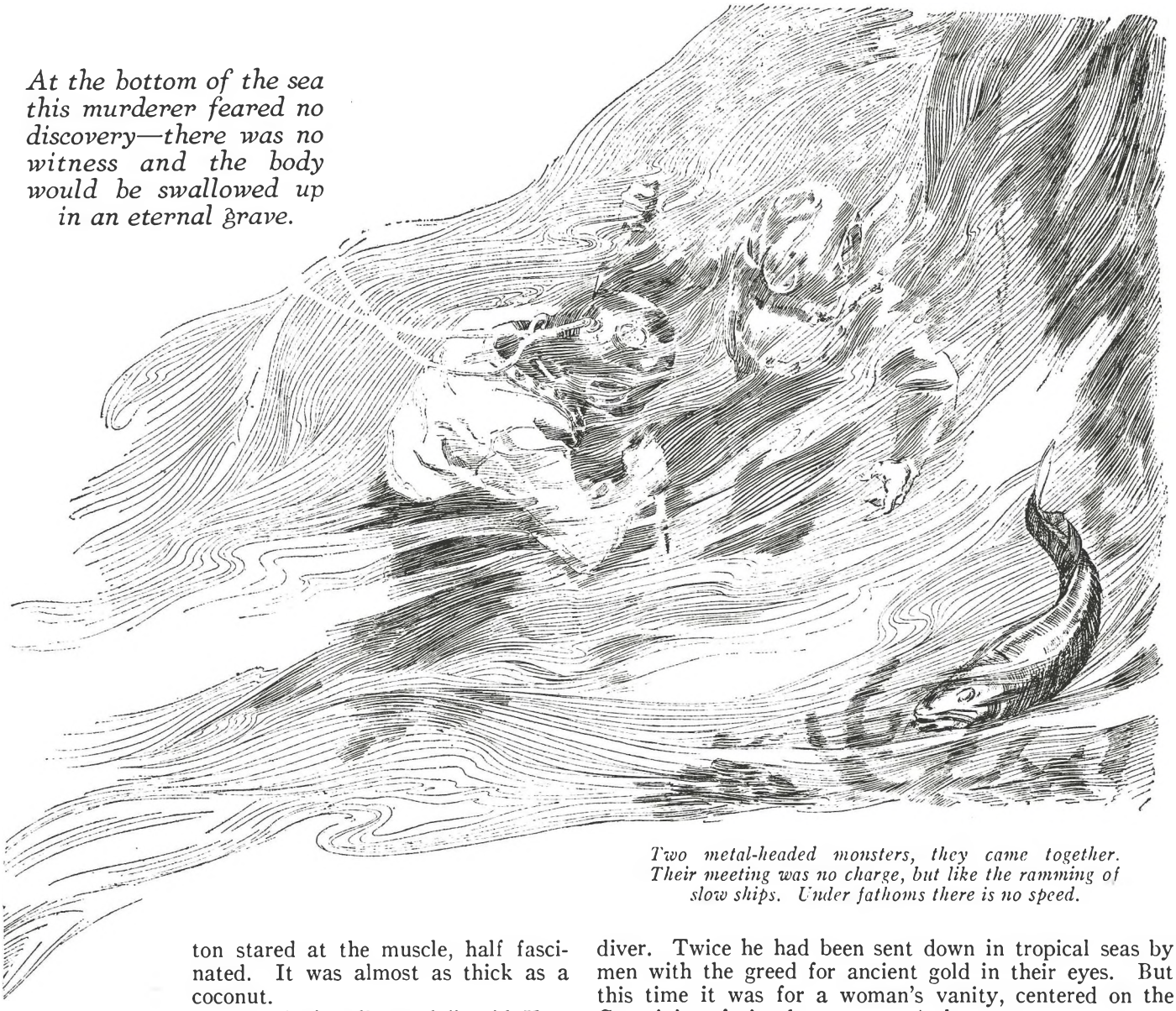
Tom felt the man was lying, trying clumsily to destroy the impression of his previous questioning.

"I know where eighty cases are on the bottom," continued Kerr placatingly. "Just waitin' to be picked up. The hurricane done it. There's a good thing in it for you."

"Not for me," replied Tom. "Sorry, but I'm not interested."

The big man arose suddenly, doubled a fist and dropped it on the table. The motion contracted his biceps. Cot-

*At the bottom of the sea this murderer feared no discovery—there was no witness and the body would be swallowed up in an eternal grave.*



*Two metal-headed monsters, they came together. Their meeting was no charge, but like the ramming of slow ships. Under fathoms there is no speed.*

ton stared at the muscle, half fascinated. It was almost as thick as a coconut.

"You don't talk much," said Kerr menacingly. "You aint been here long. You'll know better before long. You'll find out one thing in the Bahamas—you'd better be with me than against me. See?"

"Glad to know that in advance. Thank you," Tom nodded mockingly, "for the tip."

A growl rumbled deep in Kerr's throat. The lids were drawn down over his eyes. His fist tightened on the table.

Cotton's pulse lifted its pace. He was no weakling himself, handy with his fists and his feet. He had never come off worse in rough-and-tumble fighting, and his work had taken him into some hard corners. He knew he was no match for this man in brute strength, but the fight did not always go to the brute; brains and speed often trumped. Nevertheless, he realized, this was not the time or place for a clash. He felt relieved when Kerr turned away suddenly, even though he went with an ominous snarl. Cotton watched the broad back swagger out into the night.

He reviewed the conversation, seeking a clew to the man's questions. The amendment in the States had bred a hard crew here. It was almost unthinkable that an attempt would be made to loot the *Andros,* yet if that were not so he could not understand Kerr.

And if it were so, it would be bold crime. For Tom was on a Government mission, in a way, though no gunboat would stand by for him. It was an odd job he faced, even in his experience.

Usually he had gone below on thoroughgoing man's work, salvage, engineering, several times to save another diver. Twice he had been sent down in tropical seas by men with the greed for ancient gold in their eyes. But this time it was for a woman's vanity, centered on the Captain's safe in the steamer *Andros.*

He had seen hurricanes, though only the tail of this one. He knew them. The opening salvo of coconuts raining on the beaches, the palms snatched from their roots, huts rolled like paper boxes. On the water, a frothing hell. The snarling reefs, the racing ridges of water and terrible yawning troughs between them in which stout schooners could break their backbones on coral where ordinarily keels slid half a fathom clear. September is not a kindly month. The hurricane had claimed toll—a few schooners and rum-runners, and the rotten old *Andros.*

The steamer had left Miami, been struck on the Gulf Stream, tried for Riding Rock, and missed. The regular salvage would come later. But there was a new Governor-general, a coming inaugural ball. The *Andros* carried in its old safe an eighteen-thousand-dollar necklace from a famous Fifth Avenue firm—intended to grace the Governor-general's wife—and several thousands in currency. The safe was bolted to the wall of the Captain's cabin, and the ship was down in only ten fathoms; it would be a simple thing to unbolt the safe, rope it and haul it up. The steamer lay a few miles from the headquarters of the rum-running and hi-jacking trade, not unknown to have divers on occasion. Therefore the hasty call for Tom Cotton, and the urge for discretion until the job was done.

Tom glanced at the watch on his hairy wrist. The rustle of the trade wind suggested that his room might have cooled. He nodded to the bartender, and passed to the sand outside.

The night was dark, full of stars. The water lapped lightly. He stepped over a prone palm—it was hard to believe the wind had flung it there but two days before.

Beyond the riding-lights of a handful of schooners flashed the red warning at Gun Cay. Tom stopped beneath some palms and watched it. Farther southward, beside the Cat Cays, where the few fathoms of the flat dropped plumb into the half-mile of the Gulf Stream, lay the *Andros*.

He touched a match to a cigarette. The tiny flame blinded him to other things in the night.

He heard feet scuffle behind him, and wheeling, glimpsed a big form launching at him. Before he could dodge, an arm circled his neck. It wrenched his head violently, clamped his windpipe. Gasping, he threw himself forward. A heavy weight was on his back. He buckled his knees, to hurl the assailant forward over his head. That was all he knew. . . .

He awakened with a thumping pain in the back of his head, and his exploring fingers groped against blood-matted hair. He was lying face-down; he rolled to his side and discovered a violent ache in his ribs. The effort of drawing himself up to a sitting position against a palm made him grit his teeth. He sucked the air in great lungfuls, and closed his eyes against the reeling schooner lights. They made him feel dizzier.

He must have sat there half an hour, as he figured it later, before he was steady enough to plod toward the hotel. He did not doubt the identity of his assailant, but his aching head could give him no good reason. A fight, yes—but not this foul attack. His pocket-money had not been taken.

The little desk-clerk eyed Cotton slyly as he went into the hotel and up the stairs. One dim bulb hung in the hallway. He wanted badly to lie down; the walk had taken all the strength he had.

At his door he received a new shock. He had left the door locked; now it was open.

He turned on the room light, sat heavily on the bed. The big chest containing his diving-suit and tackle was gone.

He let himself gingerly back on the pillow and stared at the ceiling. His mouth set in grim lines that were not there by pain alone. He wished he had a revolver, but pocket arms were not permitted in the British West Indies and he was keeping within the law. He was in no condition to fight, but he would hunt up Captain Kerr and shoot the man. There was no doubt in his mind that Kerr was behind the theft as well as the attack. The loss was some hundreds of dollars, practically everything Cotton had.

He opened his shirt to find what caused the ache in his ribs. A bruise was spreading there, turning blue, painful to the touch. He knew that after he had been slugged he had been brutally kicked. It added to the score he determined to pay, his head nodding slowly as a man's does when he has made up his mind.

WHEN he felt strong enough, he went downstairs to the clerk.

"Who's been in my room?" he demanded.

The clerk's black eyes snapped almost to attention; they were too furtive really to fix.

"The men who came for your things, sir."

"What men?"

"Why, the men you sent, sir. Is there anything wrong?"

"What men?" barked Tom. "Wipe that grin off and tell me what men."

The clerk drew back from the counter. "Why, two negroes came in, sir, saying you had sent them."

"You let them in?" Cotton demanded sharply.

"Yes, sir. I—"

Tom wanted to strike the thin sleek face, but he shrugged off the impulse. The clerk was a poor cowardly sort; probably he had been bribed or intimidated. Any irregularity could happen here.

"Who'd those men work for? Who were they?"

"I never saw them before. Didn't you send them, sir? Will you tell me what—"

Tom turned away in disgust. He could hold the hotel responsible, but there would be little use in trying to collect. Beside, he felt he knew where his diving-suit was, and he preferred to get it back direct.

Some loungers were in the lobby, trying to make it appear they were not listening. He asked them whether any schooners had sailed. He was told that two had weighed anchor an hour before.

"Is Captain Kerr still here?"

"He was one of them that went."

"Anybody know where he went?"

No one knew.

"If any of you see him before I do," Tom announced, "tell him I'm looking for him." His belligerent tone made them look at him curiously, and at each other. "My name is Cotton, and I lost a diving-suit. He'll know."

There was nothing more to be done tonight. He locked his door and undressed. His head ached badly. He would go on with his job tomorrow, if there was extra equipment on the *Pilgrim*. When he was done with that, he would wait for Kerr.

IN the morning Cotton moved his suitcase aboard the *Pilgrim*. His side hurt and his head still held a dull pain, but his strength had returned and he felt cheerful enough to liken the lump on his skull to a golf ball. Briefly he related the attack and the loss of his gear to Captain Barker, a spare white-haired veteran of West Indies waters. He did not tell of his suspicions, except to advance a theory the suit might have been stolen to plunder the *Andros*. He did not mention Kerr. He had no proof, and that was a matter he wanted to handle himself.

"Bad lot here," nodded the Captain. "I'm sorry about your head, but I'm damn' sorry about the divin' suit. We'll clear right away. No tellin' where that suit's gone to by now."

There was extra gear brought from Nassau aboard the *Pilgrim*, he added, since they had not known whether Cotton was fully equipped. There was another diver too—though of no great experience—in case two men should be needed below. He was a quiet young chap named Johnson. Tom shook hands cordially.

The *Pilgrim* was an auxiliary schooner, spotless in comparison with the slovenly run of sail craft in the Bahamas. She flew the Governor-general's flag. The rum dock was lined with men watching her depart.

Outside Gun Cay Pass the Stream still felt the influence of the hurricane. The azure rollers bore foam on their crests. Tom and Johnson stood at the weather rail watching them, and cupped their cigarettes against the spray that flung back when the *Pilgrim* thrust her bow into the swells. Cotton did not dodge the cool gusty sheets of flying water. Though he stood half drenched, they were soothing, and the ache in his head was passing rapidly.

They coasted southward. Their trip would not be long. The tall beacon on Gun Cay stood above the palms. A few miles farther ahead lay northern Cat Cay. Somewhere beside its southern partner the *Andros* rested on the bottom.

Gradually the northern Cat Cay drew aflank, the south-

ern loomed near. Tom suddenly shielded his eyes and looked searchingly.

"Schooner over there," he said to Johnson.

"Why, so there is! That's sort of funny."

"What's funny?"

"Schooners sail past there plenty," rejoined Johnson. "But they don't often stop. Nothing there to stop for. Sand, and palms, and not a thing else."

Tom had wondered too. The schooner had her sails down and lay pointing into the wind. That meant she was at anchor.

From the bow a negro bawled the news back to the Captain. Tom looked aft. Captain Barker raised his eyebrows slightly, swung the *Pilgrim* toward the schooner, and picked up his binoculars.

Cotton and Johnson walked back to him.

"Nothing but negroes aboard her, apparently," said the Captain. "Just standing there and looking at us. You can almost see the sweat on 'em." He offered the glasses to Tom. "Want a look?"

The *Pilgrim*, making eight knots under power, was now little more than a mile from the schooner. Cotton adjusted the binoculars. They immediately cut the distance down three-fourths.

"There's a masthead sticking out of the water beside her," he reported in a moment. "I think it must be the *Andros*."

"That's interesting," said Captain Barker ominously.

Tom stiffened at the glasses.

"There's a white man aboard her, Captain," he said. "He just came out of the cabin. He's looking at us. He's ordered the crew to get up the anchor. They're jumping at it."

Captain Barker swore softly, and turned the *Pilgrim* so that it would intercept the schooner if she tried to leave.

"They're having trouble at the windlass. It looks as if the anchor may be fouled," said Tom. "I don't think they're going to get clear. . . . They're not; the skipper told them to quit. They're waiting for us to come up."

He lowered the glasses then. His face was set hard. He had not told them all. He recognized the white captain, had half-seen, half-imagined a snarl on his face at sight of the *Pilgrim*. He was Captain Kerr.

A few minutes later, when the *Pilgrim* slid by the schooner's stern, Tom read the name *Rover* and looked up into the broad swarthy countenance of the man. Kerr was shrugging his shoulders, as if in apology to the *Pilgrim*. He tossed a hand carelessly in recognition of Cotton.

"Friend of yours?" inquired Johnson.

Tom grinned.

"I know him."

"He picked a queer place to anchor," said the diver.

A hundred yards away the *Pilgrim's* chain rattled through a hawse and her hook bit the bottom. Ordering a boat over the side, Captain Barker motioned Cotton and Johnson to him.

"We'll see what that fellow wants, and then size up the job," he said.

With two negroes at the sweeps, they presently bobbed alongside the *Rover*.

Kerr nodded at the *Pilgrim's* flag, and smirked.

"Come aboard, sir? I see you're official."

"What are you doing here?" demanded Captain Barker.

*"You'll find out one thing in the Bahamas," said Kerr menacingly, "—you'd better be with me than against me! See?"*

"The *Andros* is lying here, sir," Kerr replied sullenly.

"I know that. What are *you* doing here?"

"I was on my way to Riding Rock. I saw the masthead here, and I stopped for a look. Now I can't get away. Can't get the anchor up. It must 'a' fouled on the *Andros*. We can't get clear, sir. I don't want to lose the anchor and chain."

The explanation bore out the spectacle of the negroes toiling at the windlass. Captain Barker grunted.

"Well, what do you intend to do about it?"

Kerr shifted his feet, shrugged.

"I've been hoping a ship would come along. I'd wait a week rather than lose my tackle, and I knew there'd be salvage and divers here before long." His eyes fixed on Tom. "Hello, Cotton!"

"What's that?" said Captain Barker, turning. "You know this man?"

"I met him yesterday, sir," said Tom.

"I talked to Cotton about hirin' him, Captain," said Kerr blandly. "I know where some liquor's sunk. We couldn't make a deal, but if you'll send him down to clear my anchor I'll get out of your way, and grateful to you."

Captain Barker snorted.

"Very well," he said. "But this ought to teach you not to anchor on top of a sunken ship."

As they pulled back to the *Pilgrim,* Tom was puzzled that he had seen no sign of his diving-gear aboard the Rover. It might be stored in the hold, but in that case it could not be in use. A diver would have to descend from full view on deck. The presence of Kerr had convinced him that the diving-apparatus had been stolen to plunder the wreck.

"It looks as if I'm wrong," he admitted to himself, but the admission did not satisfy him.

The *Pilgrim* was moved near the schooner. Captain Barker squinted at the masthead in the water, estimated the bulk of the *Andros* beneath, sounded for clear bottom, and ordered the anchor dropped again. In calm weather or later in the year the outline of the wreck would have been dimly visible below, but the disturbed water gave vision only a few feet down. The soundings prevented the *Pilgrim* from getting into the same predicament as the *Rover.*

ALTHOUGH it was nearing time for the noonday meal, Captain Barker decided to clear the schooner's anchor immediately.

"I want to get that fellow out of here," he said.

The diving operation was simple. He beckoned to Johnson.

"Your job," he said. "If there's any trouble about it, unshackle the anchor and let the fool go away with his chain."

The pump was manned and tested, the clumsy suit hauled on deck. Tom scrutinized the *Rover.* A few negroes stood about curiously watching operations on board the *Pilgrim.* A cook squatted beside a fire in a sand-box amidships, tending kettles suspended on pot-hooks from an iron bar; finally he spooned up a plateful and carried it aft to Kerr, who followed him down into the cabin. The cook returned and dished out plates for the negroes. Temporarily Tom's interest in the schooner ceased.

He supervised the adjustment of the heavy helmet on Johnson, helped him down the ladder slung alongside, handed over a heavy crowbar, and answered a parting grin through the glass. A quiet, businesslike fellow, Johnson —Tom liked him. He watched the diver melt out of sight, leaving a thin stream of air-bubbles to trail behind him. The pump clanked defiance of the fathoms.

A few jerked signals came from below, and lifeline and air were fed out in obedience. Soon the signals ceased. The sight of the negroes eating aboard the *Rover* moved Tom to light a cigarette to stave off his appetite. He had eaten little breakfast, but he felt almost himself again.

He finished his smoke, glanced at the air-bubbles, fished in his pocket for cigarettes again. By the time he had finished another, it was evident that Johnson must be having some trouble below. He was taking a long time.

The crew on the *Rover* finished their gulped meals. Kerr came out of the cabin rubbing the back of his hand across a greasy mouth, holding his empty plate. His eyes slid toward the *Pilgrim* and came to rest on Cotton. The big man's head snapped up; the plate fell to the deck with a crash. Kerr sat heavily down upon the cabin roof and for a moment stared upward at Cotton, his eyes wide. Then with an effort he walked obviously forward, looking back with a face from which the color had drained. At the bow of the boat he turned and stood silently gazing down at the lines descending into the water.

A sudden premonition filled Cotton.

"No more signals?" he asked.

"None, sir," replied one of the negroes at the pump.

Tom reached for the line and flicked an inquiry down to Johnson. There was no answer.

He jerked the line sharply. No answer. The line was dead.

A picture swept him of poor Johnson tangled below, or the victim of some grotesque sea-monster—dying, perhaps dead.

"Good God!" he cried. "Captain Barker! —Keep the pump going!" Tom shouted to the negroes. "See if you can haul him in!"

The lines tightened until they quivered.

"No more!" he ordered. "Keep the pump going. Captain, I've got to get down quick!"

Captain Barker snapped orders. Negroes ran about the deck of the *Pilgrim.* A boom slung an air-pump out of the hold. The crew dragged the extra diving-suit up to light. Valuable seconds, minutes, went by. Negroes lined the rail of the *Rover,* eyes rolling, infected by the excitement.

Kerr called over: "Can I help, Captain?"

Captain Barker turned on him a face black with wrath.

"Go to hell!" he shouted, and spun on his heel.

Cotton fumbled frantically into his suit, buckled on a sheath-knife, and called for a crowbar. The helmet was dropped over his head. He stared through the round window at hands that seemed to move slowly at the fastenings. In reality, they were working swiftly. A slap on his back told him all was in readiness.

He lowered himself on the ladder, and, half-turning, took a last look toward the *Rover.* Captain Kerr was going down into his cabin. Cotton swung clear and began to descend.

His pulse raced, but the closing of the waters over his head restored him to a calm and calculating sanity. He was going into a strange world, but one he knew well. He told himself soberly that Johnson was probably dead. He had seen death undersea before—the price of blunder, or bad luck. . . . But here the operation had been simple; the air-pump had not faltered.

A school of grunts swam past his face, and his feet struck the bottom. A dozen yards away stretched the flank of the stricken *Andros.* He felt the uneasy emotion that a sunken ship always produced in him. A graveyard of human terror. Portholes gaped in a staring row. A round life-preserver stood mockingly on the end of a rope from the rail.

These things he took in at a glance. His concern was for the cables that would lead him to Johnson. He looked upward at the long slim outline of the *Pilgrim,* silhouetted in a field of lightest green. The *Rover* was a chunkier bulk near her. The cables he sought led forward over his head. He signaled for more line and plodded on leaden feet. His course led toward the chain that swung in an upward arc to the stem of the *Rover.*

IT was evident Kerr had not lied about the fouled anchor. His chain ran to the stern of the sunken ship, in a line for the propeller, but was yet hidden from Cotton's view. He followed Johnson's lines, walking beside the wall of the steamer. His feet kicked up little dust-like swirls of white sand. A crab sidled before him, a green moray reared its eel-like head from a coral mound, then drew back out of sight. Away from the ship beside Tom, all was a misty green circle, darker, impenetrable beyond. Everything was ghostly, unreal, except the clank of the air-pump sounding in his ears. He rounded the buttock of the *Andros.*

Now he saw Johnson and the anchor of the *Rover*—and his blood boiled. Johnson lay a dark heap on the bottom, beside the propeller. One leg was flung over the fluke

of the jammed anchor. Air-bubbles cascaded from the back of his suit. His lines led over the anchor-chain—had been several times wound about it.

A prickle ran along Cotton's scalp. He looked in all directions, then upward, particularly at the steamer's counter overhead.

Johnson had not wound those lines about the chain himself—that would have been suicidal. Tom hunched down beside the diver. There was a long slit in the back of the suit. It had been cut from shoulder to hip. He swept his eyes again round the void green circle, studied the entangled anchor. There was nothing that could have caused that cut, let alone the tangling of the lines. The slit had been made by a knife. A murderer had walked here—killed in silence—withdrawn like a ghost!

Cotton looked up at the steamer rail. He visualized what had happened. Johnson working on the bottom; a diver—and who could it be but Kerr?—letting himself down over the rail, descending upon the unsuspecting man, pinioning his arms so that he could not signal for help, winding him bodily around the chain so that he could not be drawn up, cutting his suit to let the air escape.

Tom turned the body over. An ineffectual stream of bubbles raced through the water under the glass, across the staring eyes and still face, coursed out from the shoulder and upward.

He recalled the start Kerr had given at sight of himself, on the *Pilgrim* overhead, when there was a diver still below. Kerr had been shaken to the core. Tom knew why, now—the bully had believed this grotesque heap on the sand was the body of Cotton.

A bold crime indeed, it seemed, this murder ten fathoms below a vessel chartered by the Governor-general. And yet Tom knew it might well go unpunished. It would surely have gone unpunished had there been only one diver, as Kerr had evidently presumed. For the *Pilgrim* would have gone for a new diver to find the first, and recover the safe. And by that time Kerr, with the valuables in his cabin, would have been a thousand miles away. Even if caught, there was no case of murder against him unless the necklace and the money were discovered in his possession, as well as Tom's diving-suit.

Tom realized suddenly that Kerr would still go clear, provided he left the second diver dead beside the first. The mist that merged into a dark mysterious wall became doubly sinister. He looked upward again, half-expecting to see a diver clamber over the rail. His own cables ran back through the murk alongside the steamer. The air-hose was his thread of life. The weird fogginess cloaked an almost certain ambush.

*As the pull became more direct, the dead diver was stumbling and lunging beside the ship, only his feet on the bottom.*

He could do nothing for Johnson, except to send the poor fellow's body to the surface. He unwound the dead diver from the chain and signaled to haul in. Johnson dragged away on his belly, his helmet and his lead soles leaving swirls of sand in their wake.

Cotton followed. Fast as he could lumber along, the body moved a rod ahead of him. He knew the excited crew on the *Pilgrim* was bringing it in at all speed. Tom realized he was panting. He signaled for more air. The flank of the *Andros* was beside him now, the schooners were overhead. He stepped farther away from the steamer, to swing his lines clear away from the deck.

It came to him in a flash he had not finished his job. The safe that held the necklace and the money, was that still secure? Captain Barker would want to know; Tom himself would fight any odds rather than have it come into the possession of the murderer. Even as he asked himself the question he feared he was too late. Kerr could at any moment cast his chain loose from his deck and go.

Cotton moved farther from the steamer. Her side was like a wall. It offered no foothold. He scanned her vainly fore and aft to the ends disappearing in the green mist. He turned to go back to the fouled anchor-chain. He knew he could climb to the deck on that.

But as he turned, he saw a black cube rise from the sunken ship. It was suspended from a rope. He made out the stubby legs of a safe. His eyes swept up that rope. It led to the bottom of the *Rover*, and there he saw the answer to the question that had puzzled him: how had the diver operated? In the bottom of the schooner was a hole about three feet square. The safe climbed steadily, disappeared through the hole. Cotton knew the square had been cut in a fishwell, bulkheaded off watertight in the schooner's middle.

He saw another thing, then; it gave his pulse a curious thump. Lines led down still from the fish-well. There was a diver on the deck of the *Andros*. Cotton could not see the man—the high side of the ship prevented.

Tom drew his sheath-knife. He looked toward Johnson, saw the helmet, then the hips, leave the bottom as the pull became more direct. The dead diver was stumbling and lunging beside the ship, only his feet on the bottom.

Over the rail of the *Andros* came a diver. Black against

the upper light, he was a grotesque spider letting itself down on threads. He slid down the wall of the ship, doubled to his knees on the sand, straightened. He made for the swaying body of Johnson, and tackled it in slow-motion. A knife moved like a sluggish fish.

Another mistake, Cotton thought grimly. He plodded toward the man, knife in his hand. As if the diver realized his error but wanted the evidence of crime to stay on the bottom, he tugged at Johnson's lifeline. The cable paid out. The dead man settled again into a heap on the sand. The diver came toward Tom, his knife advanced.

Two metal-headed monsters, they came together. Their meeting was no charge, but like the ramming of slow ships. Under fathoms there is no speed.

Tom thrust for the other's side. Even in that moment he recognized his own suit, his initials painted on it in red. He felt his wrist caught in a mighty grasp. His own left hand seized the diver's armed hand and forced the knife away. Their bodies swung together. They heaved, swayed. Slowly whirls of sand climbed up about their knees.

Tom saw the massive chin of Kerr through the window, the thick lips twisted in voiceless snarl. His helmet butted the other clumsily.

KERR'S hand worked along his wrist, clamped his fist, bent it back with tremendous power to force the fingers open, to make him drop the knife. Tom gasped at the remorseless pressure. All of his strength, he realized, would not enable him to keep that knife. He was not as powerful as this man. He was quicker, more agile. On land it might have been different. But here only brute strength counted. His hand bent back in agony under irresistible leverage. His fingers opened. The knife slid away.

He felt the strength in Kerr redouble. The fight shifted to the knife in Kerr's hand. Tom clung desperately to the man's wrist. He was gasping, the weight on his chest terrific. The air pumped to him in normal flow. He needed more. He was sucking it down, his lungs burning it in gusts. Kerr's free arm was breaking the right hand-hold. Cotton's fingers ached on the other's wrist. His grip could not last; his arm was being drawn away, as if a giant octopus had a tentacle about it.

He released the fingers suddenly, flung the arm round Kerr's helmet, hoisted himself on the other's body. He clamped the helmet face against his chest. It put the man in utter darkness.

Kerr's right arm flailed. Cotton's left hand was still on it like a clamp, keeping the knife away. If only he could reach up and tug his lifeline! They would be drawn together to the *Pilgrim*. But he dared not let go his hold round the helmet.

The man's air-line swung across Cotton's window. He clamped the helmet with his elbow, grasped the line, moved it toward the knife.

Kerr wrenched his right arm free; he could use the knife now. Convulsively Tom released his hold, pushed the man from him, backed away. A chill ran along his neck. He was in retreat; he could not even give the haul-in signal—for his lines ran above Kerr, he would be dragged against the man. Kerr followed with the knife. There would be a new attack. Cotton's flagging strength, his gasping breath, told him it might be the last.

In an agonizing flash he saw Kerr's victory complete—the safe in his cabin, two dead men on the bottom—Captain Barker, suspicious but baffled, going back to Nassau to organize a new expedition—Kerr disposing of the bodies and sailing away, scot-free!

"By God, no!" Cotton's shout boomed in his own ears. He was fighting for time, for seconds of rest. He stumbled over a loose object—the body of Johnson. The slack of the murdered diver's lines lay like loose snakes across him.

Cotton's eyes widened at sight of the ropes. He knew ropes. He saw a final desperate chance. He halted. The body lay between him and Kerr. Kerr stepped on the chest and came over.

GULPING a great breath, Tom went suddenly to his knees. He plunged forward. The knife glanced on his helmet, clanged in his ears. He grasped both of Kerr's ankles and tugged. Kerr swung off his feet, his head hid in a cloud of sand. He was on his back, threshing, turning to right himself.

Tom sidled upon him like a crab. He stamped the armed fist into the sand, pinned it there under a leaden shoe. He sat on Kerr's chest, gasping. He had the advantage for the moment—a fleeting moment only.

Kerr's legs threshed; his back arched. His efforts were tremendous, the weights of the two diving-suits were upon his muscles. He half rolled, bracing himself on his free arm. He heaved upward.

Cotton felt himself sliding off the man's chest. He dared not be dislodged; he would be rolled away—the knife would be free.

He snatched the slack of Johnson's line. His hands tore at the stiff supporting arm, dislodging it. Kerr went down on his shoulders again. In that instant Cotton whipped the rope round Kerr's free wrist once, twice, caught it in a double half-hitch.

Kerr saw what was coming; his face darkened with blood in resistance. His position was against him, his sinews were cramped.

The wrist moved to the helmet by jerks. Tom lashed in there with two turns around the heavy brass casing. He looked down at the contorted face, the thick lips that sent mute curses through the glass—and his own lips parted in a grin.

He stamped the knife from Kerr's right hand, roped the flailing wrist. Kerr rolled and kicked, spent himself in crippled fury. The wrist came to the helmet. Tom knotted it, helpless as its partner.

Then he signaled "haul-in" on Johnson's line and stood clear.

The murderer and his victim dragged away. Tom watched them sway off the bottom, slip up toward the dark outline of the *Pilgrim*—the one figure pitifully limp, like a man who is hanged, the other twisting and kicking. He stood gazing until they broke the surface and were drawn over the rail.

Then he gave the haul-in signal on his own line.

THE safe was brought from the *Rover* to the *Pilgrim*. The combination had been given by the steamship owners to the Governor-general, who had given it to Captain Barker.

On deck, the Captain opened the strongbox, drawing forth two wet bundles of currency and a small casket which disclosed a glittering string of diamonds and sapphires.

Captain Barker held it up in the sunlight.

"Pretty necklace, aint it?"

Tom thought of Johnson lying covered on a bunk; looked at Kerr, who sat sullen against a mast with his hands chained behind it. There would be a grim necklace for Kerr at Nassau—a running-noose!

Tom shrugged.

"I hope the lady'll like it," he said.

*"Throw your weapons to the left of the trail—swiftly, for my finger is uncertain on the trigger!" I said.*

# *The Vulture of the Hills*

*Captain Cormorant's adventurous nature leads him into a diabolical plot of which kidnaping innocent offspring is not the worst that happens.*

*By* BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

PLUMP little Mrs. Cormorant beamed up at her husband, that gaunt, six-foot-six, red-mustached person, Captain Lester Cormorant—late of the Bolivian Light Horse, he invariably maintained—as, having sent the butler out he filled her port glass with his own hands.

"Thank you, Lester dear. I love to have you do a thing like that for me!"

Captain Cormorant pulled at his great drooping mustache, and refilled his own glass.

"When, dear heart, I sink so low that so trifling an attention, so truly trivial an indication of my love and gratitude to you becomes an effort, or anything but a keen joy, then I trust that I may be dealt with as the dastard hound that I shall have become!" he said warmly—and in his warmth, cracked a walnut into a quite uneatable pulp of nutmeat and shell.

"It is true, darling," he continued, "that since birth I have been wholly nonmoral—yes. In their infinite and inscrutable wisdom the gods saw fit to usher me into this world devoid of one single moral, good or bad. And so, Heaven help me, I have forever been afflicted. No fault of mine, *asthore,* God knows. I am—I have always been—as Providence made me."

He sighed deeply.

"And I shall never deny—when, as now, I am in converse with one whose sympathy is boundless—that I was one of the poorest jobs Providence ever turned out! My heart, I drink to your dear eyes! To you, the one sweet soul in all the world who understands me—nay, loves me—and whom I adore! I drink to you!"

He did so, and—refilling his glass—lapsed into a despondent mood, staring at his wine with absent eyes.

"Never, Louise, never shall I cease to marvel within my secret, nonmoral soul that you—you, of all women in the world—should deign to lean down from the height of—ah—your naturally lofty plane, to gather me in under the soft dove-wing of your personal love, and the steel-true, gilt-edged security of your income—me, a man who has been battered and rebattered, buffeted and rebuffeted about the world like an empty can on a lee-shore—a man, dearest of all, who, through no fault of his own, has been anything from a slave-raider to a brigand—"

"A brigand! A brigand, Lester?"

The bright eyes of Louise opened expectantly. She loved to hear the stories of his completely piratical and unashamedly nonmoral past, which Captain Cormorant was capable of pulling upon an instant's notice.

It is even probable that she believed them. People believe more improbable lies than those of the afflicted Cormorant. But whether she believed them or not, they certainly amused and interested her—one of the few women in the world who has been married for her money *by accident* and has never regretted it.

When Captain Cormorant endeavored to acquire illegally her car, which, some years before, he had found standing unattended on a foggy night, he had not known that Louise—not beautiful, but with a heart of gold—was in it, and the delightful matrimonial climax at which they arrived when halfway to Brighton, he discovered her in the stolen car, would always remain in their minds as a wonderful, even miraculous example of what the gods of good luck can do when they try. . . .

"Yes, *alannah,* a brigand, God forgive me! I have been a brigand," admitted the Captain.

"Tell me about it, Lester—please, darling!"

"Why, dear soul, of course—if it is possible that you can

be interested in the account of what, I imagine, must be as futile an enterprise as any poor, nonmoral doomed soul, like myself, Heaven help me, ever embarked on!"

He selected an expensive cigar.

"By your good leave, dearest," he said, and lighted it. . . .

Yes, [he resumed] a brigand! All untrained, improperly equipped,—totally lacking that nice, that hairtrigger technique without which no brigand can ever hope for success,—I took, many years ago, to the mountains in a far country!

If I seem to imply to you, my one woman, that I "took to the mountains," as the saying goes, willingly or with any real zest for a career of brigandage, then I imply that which is incorrect. I left the silver-mining town of Salto de Novo Diamantina for the neighboring mountains in the haste and confusion and total lack of sympathetic understanding on the part of the general public which usually characterizes the exit of a nonmoral man from any town. It was—from our point of view, Louise mine—an ignorant, greedy, passionate, hasty and bloodthirsty populace at Salto de Novo Diamantina in those days. I believe I may say—to you, at any rate, darling—that in spite of the lifelong affliction from which I suffer, I am not a man wholly devoid of personal charm!


*I am ashamed to say how much currency I accumulated by the manipulation of the nutshells.*

No man could have been more popular than I was during the first fortnight of my sojourn in that benighted city of get-rich-quicker-than-ever fans and fantastics. I was popular! I was invited everywhere! And why, do you ask? Was it because of my looks?—my personal charm?—the aristocratic manner natural to me as a scion of a moderately noble old English family? No, dear heart. I had come among them with a novelty. I was at that period a master, an expert, of a small trick designed originally for simple fun and innocent entertainment at the dinner-table. One takes three walnut shells, slightly prepared, and a pea (made, of course of gray rubber) and, placing the pea under, let us say the middle shell, pushes the three shells neatly into line and invites the populace to bet on which shell covers the pea. An amusing little thing. The pea, of course, is not under any shell—it is between the finger-tips of the operator of the shells, and when the bets are completed he merely has to drop it blissfully under the shell which has *not* been bet on. A pleasant joke—to a strictly unmoral man. But those barbarians proved to be uninterested in the trifling sleight as a joke. It was my money that they were after, life-mate of mine! They came at me so eagerly, so avidly that I resolved to teach them a severe lesson. I am ashamed to say, dear heart, how much of the general-purpose currency of that rich but nasty town I accumulated by the simple manipulation of the merry little nutshells within ten days. Most of it, I know. But then a hitch arose—alas, these hitches! A Mexican came into the town who understood such matters. He took a dislike to me for some obscure reason—and, to cut a long story short, dear heart, I left the town (and my accumulation) so narrowly ahead of the leading member of the posse that his bullet struck the first big rock in the foothills of the great mountain range no more than the fraction of a second after I slid behind the rock! A second's delay, an instant's sluggishness, Louise, and I should have been shot like a mad slug—dog—like a mad dog!

Can you then wonder that, having gained the inmost recesses of the mountain, I resolved on a bitter revenge?

I know well that you cannot! Bitterly mortified and hurt, I resolved then and there, Heaven forgive me, Louise, to become a brigand—a vulture of the rocks, a terror of the district, a being without mercy—specializing in the spoliation and punishment of those ungrateful hounds, the denizens of Diamantina!

As I have said, star of my soul, I was but ill-equipped. A revolver, a few cartridges, and the clothes I stood up in—no more! Ah, dear heart, what a capital on which to inaugurate what I hoped to make one of the most profitable concerns in the country! . . .

I slept in a cave with some bats, an owl or two and a few serpents who, by their goings and comings keep me wide awake half the night; the bitter cold at that altitude kept me awake for the remainder.

So you will readily realize, darling, that the man who reeled forth from the cavern into the eye of the rising sun next morning was hardly Lester Cormorant at his best!

Ravenous with hunger, parched from bitter thirst, racked with mortification, yet steely with determination, I made my way, revolver in hand, toward the main track which led to the pass through the mountains. Only the vultures—the great, bone-breaking vultures of those parts—saw me as, an outlaw, an outcast, I prowled to my post. I had not eaten for many hours. I quenched my thirst at a spring, and looked out sharply for game as I went. Nothing moved there but stinging lizards. I shot one—tried to eat it. Fresh stinging lizard is not likely ever to become a popular dish. Dried or smoked maybe—but not fresh. . . . I kept grimly on to the point of vantage at which I was aiming, Louise, reached it, and proceeded to lie in wait—in ambush—for the first comer.

Nonmoral as I freely acknowledge myself to be, hurt and embittered as I unhesitatingly admit I was at that time, nevertheless it was not my intention to include among my forthcoming clientele members of the gentler sex. I have, thank God, always been automatically chivalrous, and I believe I shall always remain so.

Yet so curious are the workings of Fate, my love, that when an hour later, I heard the ring of hoofs on the track and leaped forth out of my rocky ambush, the riders of the mule proved to be a mother and her child!

Had the woman been a stranger to me I have very little doubt that I should have lowered my weapon, swept off my hat with a bow, waved them on with, possibly, a smiling observation to the effect that I, the Vulture of the Hills, did not prey upon women or small families.

But this woman I knew. She was a Mexican; none other indeed than the wife of that self-same greaser—er—Mexican—who had started the propaganda which had undermined my popularity and had headed the posse which had, so to speak, pitched me out of Diamantina on my ear!

Our eyes met. We recognized each other in a flash. She was beautiful in a hard sort of way—but I was in no mood for beauty just then. I held her up, informed her that she was my prisoner, and that the amount of her ransom would be ten thousand dollars.

She objected that the figure was excessive, and we retreated to my cavern to discuss the matter.

Beautiful in her way though she was, she was a haggler from head to foot. But finally we agreed on a figure, namely five thousand dollars in cash and a ninety-day note for twenty-five hundred.

"It's a bare-faced robbery at that," she said. "But I am in your power! I'll get the money now!"

She rose from the rock on which she had been sitting and reached for the bridle of the mule.

In my turn I reached for the child—the hostage.

"Pass the baby," I said—God forgive me.

She stared.

"Pass you my *baby?*" she shrieked.

"Certainly, madame," I said. "Even a brigand," I added satirically, "is entitled to some sort of security or collateral. Is it possible that you figure to yourself that I—I, the Vulture of the Hills—am the species of brigand who releases his prisoners without taking the simple precaution of holding a hostage? No, no—pass me that baby!"

There was, of course, a truly terrific scene. But I beg you, do not hasten to judge me, my dear Louise, until you have heard my story to the end! At first glance, nonmoral through no fault of my own, though I was created, I agree that no man, be he brigand or anything else, should separate mother and child—no, not even for seventy-five hundred in cash and a note for the balance. That I admit. But I was desperate—and I was goaded to the act by hunger and humiliation.

The baby took it well—better far than the woman. It looked charming and tranquil as she finally transferred it, still sleeping, to my arms.

"There is condensed milk in plenty in the saddle-bags, man-eater," she said insultingly, and dumped the cans out, together with a loaf of bread and a bundle of infantile accessories.

The child awoke and began to cry.

"I shall return shortly with the money and if one hair of that child's head is hurt—nay, even out of curl—Heaven help you, vulture or no vulture!"

*"I shall return shortly with the money, and if one hair of that child's head is hurt—Heaven help you!"*

I merely smiled at the threat and with the infant still wailing in my arms, I watched her ride away. She looked back every now and then to shake her fist at me.

I sat down to rest and nurse my little hostage. I glanced at the instructions on one of the tins of milk and noted the feeding hours recommended for children of its age—somewhere about a year old, I figured. For, come what may, dear heart, babes must be fed. I did not feel hurt about that, though the thought did flash into my head that even brigands need to be fed too. Where mine was coming from until the Mexican woman returned I confess I could not imagine!

I was pondering this problem with the crying child in my arms, when suddenly it emitted a yell so piercing that it made me jump. I tried to soothe it. But these Mexican children do not seem to me, my love, to soothe easily. I did all that a man—moral or nonmoral—could do, for the next half hour. But there was no sense of fair play, nor of ordinary gratitude, nor give-and-take, live-and-let-live, about that child. It just fixed its eyes on me in a stare of disgust, hatred, anger and contempt and did its utmost to shout me into a nervous breakdown.

I fed it. I took the most scrupulous care to measure out its milk exactly right as instructed on the tin. I could not have taken more trouble about warming the milk to just the right temperature if I had been a totally moral chef, cooking it for a king! Yes, I worked very hard on that first meal for that child. I broke its bread small.

It understood; it knew; if it could have spoken it must have admitted that it had never eaten a better-prepared meal than that which I, Cormorant, the Vulture of the Rocks, prepared it that day. But it probably would have lied about it—it was that kind of child.

It ate its food with every symptom of sheer, guzzling relish, finished it, grinned sourly at me and began to bawl for more. But I refreshed my memory with a glance at the instructions and was resolute.

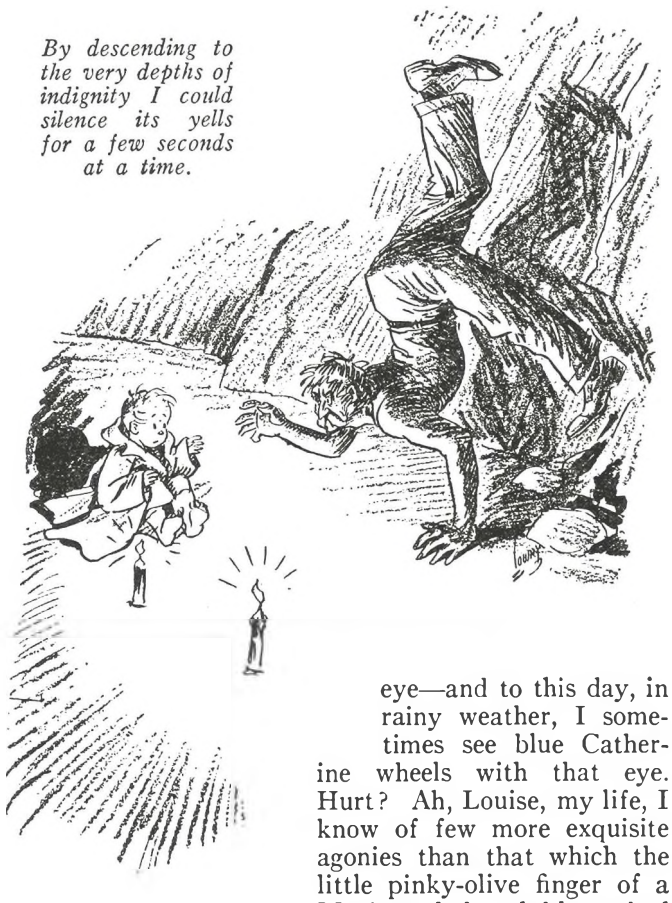
"Not for another two and three-quarter hours do you eat again," I said firmly. "Rules are rules. Be quiet! What would your mother say if she were here, you ungrateful little hound! Quiet!"

Me starving, you understand, heart of hearts! Starving, but of too proud, too aristocratic a temperament to take a bit of bread for myself. As far as the moral side of the thing mattered to me I would gladly have had a taste or two of the food—but my pride sternly forbade it.

If the creature, having guzzled its ration, had left a little, I would have felt that I had a right to it. But it never left anything—not that locust, Louise.

I kept myself well under control.

I picked it up as gently as ever any mother in the world picked up her offspring, speaking kindly to it. It cruelly stuck its finger in my



*By descending to the very depths of indignity I could silence its yells for a few seconds at a time.*

eye—and to this day, in rainy weather, I sometimes see blue Catherine wheels with that eye. Hurt? Ah, Louise, my life, I know of few more exquisite agonies than that which the little pinky-olive finger of a Mexican baby deftly poked into a man's eye can inflict! Then as I attempted to pass that off with a grimace, the young demon clenched on to my mustache and tore out large quantities of it by the roots.

If its parent had returned at that moment I would gladly have given her back her note for the twenty-five hundred to take the child away.

It would yell till it went a deep pink—a rather dangerous-looking pink.

"There, there—rock-a-bye, rock-a-cock-horse and lullaby!" I would say anxiously.

But it took no notice of nursery rhymes—didn't know any, I imagine. It would keep on screaming and gradually turn dark red! With my blood running cold in my veins I would shout out, "Hush-a-bye, hush-a-bye, little Jack Horner on the tree-top!" To no avail, Louise. The child would keep on till it was fairly purple. . . . It scared me, I assure you.

At about that stage I tried firmness.

*"Silence, there! No talking in the ranks!"* I'd shout.

But the child would merely speed up till it was practically black.

The first time that happened I saw that all was over—at least I thought so.

But no! Not at all. That child knew its limits to a millimeter. Every time it was on the point of turning a deeper shade than black it paused for a few seconds, opened its eyes, drew breath, became its ordinary pinky color, tugged at my mustache, or dragged at my nose or my lip or tore at my ear, and looked at me in a cold, sardonic kind of way. Then it would grin an acid sort of grin and do it all over again. If it had been any other kind of human being it would have been hoarse in the first half-hour. But this child was not capable of hoarseness.

I put it down when its feeding-time came again. I got up to prepare its bread and milk and, Louise, it was silent instantly, watching me from behind.

I got the feeling that it was counting every crumb, noting every drop of milk; evidently it didn't trust me. I wouldn't have touched a morsel of its food though I was tottering with hunger. Frankly, dear heart, I would have been afraid to. You see, it had a sort of low cunning of its own. It was getting the ascendancy—and it knew it. It was a bully at heart, and devoid of mercy.

Yes, Louise, there was indeed a Vulture of the Hills in that cave—but it was not I. No, it was that baby! It was young in years but it had the wisdom of centuries under its curls. It ate heartily of its second meal and tried to bite me when I took its spoon away. Then, refreshed, it settled down to howl some more.

I took it in my trembling arms, and it kicked me in the throat.

That night, Louise, resolved itself into a battle of wills between the baby and myself. . . . I lost. I tried everything. Nothing succeeded. Even at this moment, sitting here at my ease, basking in your radiance, I cannot bring myself to describe to you the depths of indignity to which I descended in my efforts to distract for even a few seconds that child from howling and hooting. There were a few candles in that woman's bundle and I lit them all for company. At least I lit all I could hit with the flame of the matches I struck with my quivering hand.

I discovered—in the intervals of feeding it—that by descending to the very depths of indignity I could allay its fury and silence its yells—for a few seconds at a time. If I stood—half naked, for it had most of my clothes to keep it warm—on one ear so to speak, with my feet in the air and the toes turned in, supporting myself with one hand while I waggled the other in the air, the child would pause for as much as a minute and a half and watch me.

But why dwell on what has long become no more than the most important of all my nightmares? Permit me, dear heart, to push forward my story to the hour of dawn. I shall never forget that dawn for it was then that the child having eaten practically all there was left fit to eat, fell into a light and apparently enjoyable slumber.

You can, I am well assured, picture to yourself the haunted wreck of a man which crawled silently on his hands and knees out of the cavern in order to peer down the trail to see whether the mother was yet in sight. So weary I was that sleep, regarded as a cure for such weariness, seemed merely farcical—so nerve-wracked that the least whimper from the child in the cavern would have sent me flying down into the first hole in the ground capable of accommodating me—so cold that I could, in a way, have warmed myself by sitting on the frost-tinged rocks around me! So hungry that had I found a tin of beef or salmon at that moment I certainly should not have stopped to peel it before starting on it!

And it was at this moment I heard the ring of a mule's hoof on the track.

I crept back to the cavern, took my revolver, re-issued and watched, listening. It was not the mother—for I heard a man cough in the raw dawn.

He came abreast of the rock that masked me and I leaped out with my last strength and held him up.

He must have seen that I was in no mood for dalliance, for he put up his hands instantly.

"Throw your weapons to the left of the trail—swiftly, for my finger is uncertain and shaky on the trigger!" I said.

He must have believed that formidable truth, for I have never seen weapons thrown away quicker.

"Pitch what food you are carrying at my feet—and let it be quicker than you pitched those guns!" I commanded. "For I am the Vulture of the Rocks, Junior—and my word goes—at any rate while Senior is asleep!" You can guess my condition from my words, sweetheart.

He pitched the food as swiftly as could a conjuror.

"You are my prisoner!" I said.

"I acknowledge it," he replied. His face was white. I must have looked desperate, my darling. "What are your terms? How much is the ransom?"

"Bah!" I said. "Money? You speak of money?"

Fear settled in his eyes. I think he thought me mad.

"I am Don José di Almazan y Marzipan D'Alcoy," he said. "I am willing to pay a worthy ransom!"

"Very well, Don José," I said. "You shall be accommodated!" I picked up a loaf and a bit of dried meat and took a bite or two.

"I have within the cavern a child, for which I have no further use," I stated, gathering fresh courage and determination from each bite of the good bread, the marvelous meat. "It is not what I personally should describe as a charming child, but nevertheless it deserves its chance! You shall take it away from me—for I have had enough of it recently."

His swarthy face changed oddly. It went white. Evidently, I thought, he knows something about children of the type I had been nourishing. But he said nothing.

"You shall swear to me here and now an oath that you will forever protect and guard and watch over and succor this infant—and having done that you shall take it away with you just about as quick as you can do it! And that," I said, between mouthfuls, "is your ransom!"

"So be it!" he said. "I swear that I will ever be as a father to the child."

"Good!" I said. I picked up his weapons, and fetched the baby. It whooped with fury the instant I picked it up. But I, Louise, I laughed in its teeth—its tooth or two. No more, no longer would it have its way with me; I was wishing it on a person better adapted to handle the problem it presented—a rich man, a titled man, a man of his word, above all a moral man! . . .

Louise, my soul, would you credit it? The instant I handed the child up to the swarthy swell on the richly caparisoned mule it ceased its clamor—even though it was about its feeding-time. He took it, this lean, dark don with arms that seemed most oddly, most singularly adapted to receive it. And it relaxed itself. And—warmly clad in my shirt, though I retrieved the rest of the garments in which I had wrapped it—it seemed to ooze into that don persons arms like warm wax oozing into its mold!

"Yes, señor," said Don José, smiling in a queerish way. "I swear—I affirm to you that I will abide by the oath that is my ransom for the whole of my life's span! Have I, Señor Bandolero, your leave to depart?"

I reached for another piece of dried meat.

"You have it, señor," I said.

He pulled round his mule and left.

Breakfasting happily in the increasing sunlight, dearest Louise, I found myself wondering what the mother would say to it all when she returned.

Well, I was soon to discover, for even as I devoured the last crumb of bread, the final fiber of meat, she came galloping up the trail.

"Scoundrel," she said, thrusting a bundle of notes on me. "Here's your money! Where's my baby?"

I rejected the proffered notes—a mistake, as it proved.

"No, no—no money, señora!" I said. "I have parted with the child!"

"Parted!" she shrieked.

"Yes," I said brutally. "It half killed me. I was glad to let it go—for it had become a question of it or me! It is now in charge of a local grandee—one Don José di Almazan y Marzipan D'Alcoy, to whom any application for its return should be made!"

She stared at me like a person thunderstruck. Her lips moved, her jaw moved, her entire face moved, but even so it was some seconds before she uttered a sound. Then she said: "You parted with that kid to Don José? You actually did that? You mean it?"

"I did," I said. "I do!"

"You fool!" she said. "You imbecile! You—" Well, never mind the things she said I was, dear heart. I'm not—at least not all of them. . . .

"Why so?" I asked, when she stopped for breath.

"Why, that child was Don José's *son!*" she shrieked. "It was worth a hundred thousand Spanish dollars' ransom to the D'Alcoys. It took me a year's planning to kidnap it! And you, you fool, you give it back for *nothing!*"

She glared round.

"Man, the hills are crawling with armed searchers after the child! It was lucky for you that Don José chose this trail! But that's how it always goes!" She dragged her mule round. "Luck for the lunatics!"

She drove the spurs into the mule and clattered away.

But I, comfortable and quiet and warm, reclined in the rays of the rising sun, and listened to the sweet silence of the hills, dear heart. And I was content. . . .

CAPTAIN CORMORANT ceased, finished his port, crushed his cigarette-end in an ash-tray, and pulling his long mustache, smiled across at his wife. The keen eyes deep-set in his rather ravaged face caught an unaccustomed sparkle in her eyes, even though she was smiling.

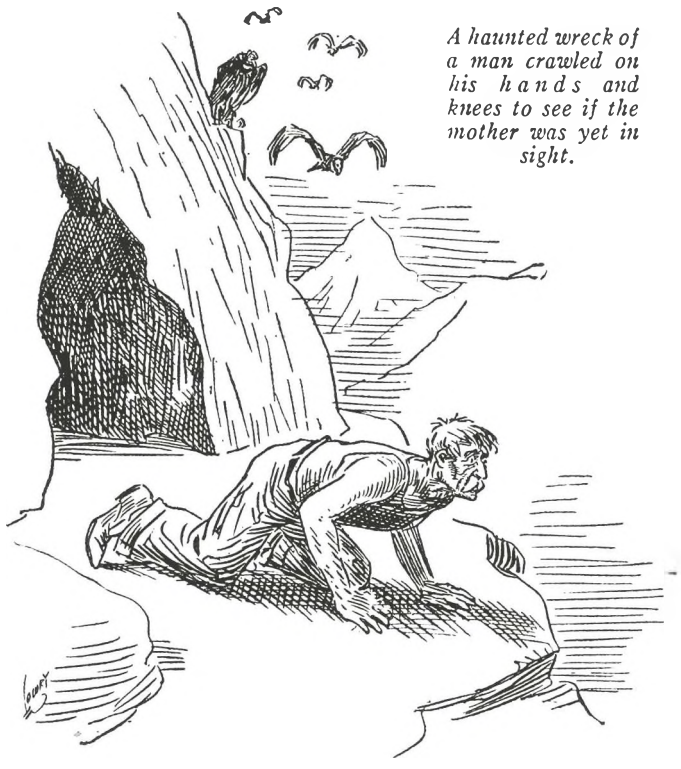
"My dear," he said very softly, "that was perhaps a trifle exaggerated—a fault to which I rarely give way—just to make you smile."

Then he pressed his finger firmly on the bell.

"In the course of a singularly varied career, dearest of all, I have noticed that ever after laughter comes a touch, a tinge of that reaction which approaches tears. But I have also discovered that the finest antidote to that reaction is a bottle of the best champagne in the house—"

"Very good, sir," murmured the soft-footed butler from the doorway—and went to fetch it.

"Ah, Lester," sighed the happy wife, "you may be nonmoral, but you *do* understand about things!"



*A haunted wreck of a man crawled on his hands and knees to see if the mother was yet in sight.*


*"Git up, hobo! Sittin' thar stuffin', while yer betters is standin' up!"*

*They had never seen a man like him in the West before —and when he finished, they never wanted to see another.*

# The Sacrament of Fire

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Illustrated by Ralph Nelson

FOUR men rode hard through Madison Square, with grim, ill-humored recklessness, and jammed their lathered mounts into a huddled tangle at the hitch-rail of the Hoffman House. At the moment, in another Madison Square, endless double columns of hansom cabs, broughams, and victorias were rolling north and south over a smooth pavement, while in another Hoffman House sleek Senators, financiers, and dandies were dining on terrapin and broiled partridge with iced *Moet et Chandon.* These two Madison Squares were three thousand miles apart. In the Hoffman House of the land of tarantulas and rattlesnakes a solitary guest was dining at a bare plank table with a shallow bowl of stewed beef and frijoles before him.

"I been headvaiter vonce at der Hoffman House, Noo York," said Hans Wedel, proprietor, *maitre d'hotel,* and barkeep of the sagebrush hostelry. "You efer been at der Hoffman House, Noo York?"

"Nev' did get to New Yawk," the guest drawled gently. "I been to New Awl'ns, an' that's a right nice place, suh."

"Ach, it is Noo York you should see!" sighed Hans Wedel, "an' der Hudson River."

"Miss'sippi's a right smart river, I reckon," said the guest.

Then the four horsemen shattered the drowsy peace of eventide and entered the Hoffman House lobby and dining-hall with pounding feet which shook the floor beams. They yelled at Hans for food and drink, and one of them—a hard-featured, fish-eyed fellow with a strawberry-roan mustache—posed in the middle of the room, bowed legs braced apart, and glared at the solitary diner.

"Whar the hell did yer get this, Dutchy?" he roared.

Hans flushed with sudden anxiety and busied himself over bottles and glasses back of the bar. The lone guest appeared unruffled. He smiled very slightly, took another forkful of frijoles, and remained silent, like one waiting for an introduction. The rough customer began publicly to appraise the equipment of the guest.

"Ca'tridge belt, an' a couple o' forty-fives, like a reg'lar bull man!" he observed, squinting at the walnut butts of the stranger's army service-style revolvers. "Tenderfoot boots, with Mex' spurs—city feller's breeches—an'—an' a damn' dirty dishpan fer a hat!"

The object of the rude scrutiny, still calm and untroubled, glanced with another faint smile toward his headgear where it lay on the edge of his table. It was a hat the like of which would scarcely be found in a search between the Presidio of San Francisco and a certain section of Long Island, New York, and of the six men in the room not one of them knew that it was designed for use in the game of polo, with its cleverly molded bowl-shaped crown and slightly flaring brim of canvas-covered pith.

"It's a nice, easy kind of hat," remarked the owner, with naïve friendliness. "Got it for six bits in a secon'-han' sto' up to Sacramento."

"Git up, hobo!" snapped the roan-mustached critic, and leisurely drew a revolver from its holster. "Sittin' thar stuffin', while yer betters is standin' up. Git on yer feet!"

"Step right up, gents!" invited Hans Wedel with feverish cordiality, clinking the glasses. "This one, it iss on der house."

"I aint done with this yere galoot," said the bad-man. "Funny, what trash blows in on them northers—but I aint seen nothin' like this mav'rick before!"

"Aw, cripes! Let the bum alone, Pete," snarled Gus Burnley, a big man with a recently shaved, deeply lined bulldog face. "I aint lookin' for no fun here. I want some grub an' some licker, that's all."

"Come on, Pete; let the poor hobo alone," seconded the

youngest of the quartet, a clear-eyed lad of little more than twenty years. "No use lookin' for trouble when it comes so easy."

"Git yer licker an' lemme alone!" snapped Pete crossly. "I got a pers'nal scientific int'rest in this yere critter. Might sell 'im to a museum. —An' *you,* bum! I tell yer to get up!" he added fiercely, gesturing with the revolver in his hand.

The lone traveler looked squarely at him, with large mild eyes showing neither surprise nor obvious annoyance; then lowered his glance again to his plate, and casually dusted a little salt on the few remaining morsels of stewed beef. A little too daintily, perhaps, for Pete's taste, he applied his knife to one of the morsels and neatly divided it in halves.

*Bang!*

In the narrow confines of the bare, pine-sheathed room, the revolver mimicked a cannon in its roar. Under the table a floor-board was splintered within a half-inch of the toe of one of the quiet stranger's boots.

Hans Wedel squalled like a terrified woman and disappeared behind the bar.

"*Mein Gott*—dose lookin'-glasses!" he shrilled. "For dem I pay *zwei hundert* dollars. Have some hearts, gents!"

The bully's three comrades were on their toes, startled and disturbed, ready for trouble. "You damn' jackass!" blurted Gus of the bulldog face to his friend.

The victim of the hazing was still the calmest man in the room. He had started, instinctively, at the shot, but he settled back in his chair and looked curiously between his knees at the hole in the floor. Then—

"*Dog-gone!*" he muttered—a subdued verbal explosion. "Might 'a' smashed one o' my toes!"

"Now—you git *up!*" yelled Pete, brandishing the gun.

The stranger met his gaze and held it.

"Why, yo' low-down, stinkin', ornery houn'-dawg!" he said crisply, scarcely raising his voice. "Dog-*gone!* I been a-travelin' up'ards o' five thousan' mile round this yere country, an' I vow 'n' declare I aint met up with no passel o' lousy carrion buzzards like yo'-all! Ef there wa'n't no other human critters in the worl' but yo'-all an' me, an' I was a-pinin' for friends—Lawd heah me! I'd go 'n' take up with a stinkin' polecat, an' a rattler, an' a yaller groun'-hawg, an' a yippin' coyote, 'fore I'd have any truck with filthy varmints like yo'-all. An' I take back what I said 'bout yo'r bein' a houn'-dawg. I got too much respec' fer the mangiest yaller houn' I ever seen ter cas' insinuations 'bout yo' an' yo'r pals bein' kinfolks o' his!"

The arraignment came fluently off the tongue, and it was uninterrupted to the last syllable; the audience seemed spellbound at the speaker's audacity and eloquence.

The vicious Pete Renton glared in ugly stupefaction, but at the last sounding period he let out a bellow of pent-up fury, and his gun-barrel flashed up, then down.

PRACTICALLY no one saw the stranger's hands move —but in the flicker of an eyelash the two service revolvers were out and one of them was spitting fire and smoke.

Pete yowled like a wounded cougar, dropped his gun, and grabbed with both hands for the ear that the stranger's bullet had torn half off.

"H'ist 'em! Way up—over yo'r haids!" commanded the master of the situation.

Tip Ackland, a pasty-faced, taciturn member of the quartet, was slow in obeying the peremptory order, and got a bullet through his forearm. Then eight hands were straining to touch the ceiling, Pete Renton whimpering as the blood from the lacerated ear ran down his neck, and Tip Ackland groaning and cursing solemnly.

"Mr. Wedel," the victor said to the proprietor, whose face was rising like a pale moon above the level of the bar, "yo' will do me the kindness to collect these squealin' rats' shootin'-irons an' put em' away for safe-keepin'!"

"Jed Kimber's my name," he added, addressing his captives, "an' yo'-all better remember my name an' my face. I aim to treat mos' all livin' critters kind an' tender-like when they act decent—but when I find rattlers an' tarantulas, or anything that's plumb pizen, I scrunch 'em under my heel."

"I'll do the scrunchin' next time, feller!" muttered Gus Burnley, his bold, passion-seamed face gray and drawn with fury. "I'll allow you've got some nerve, and you're quick—but no guy's ever lived to get the drop on me twice runnin'. You can talk big now, but we're goin' to meet up again, Mr. Kimber—an' I'll remember the face an' the name, don't worry!"

"Take my advice," seconded the suffering Tip Ackland, wincing at every throb of pain in his arm, "and travel with yer guns in yer hands, Mister. There won't be no time for talk when we meet again. Ask any man you meet in these parts if he knows Tip Ackland!"

"Four mighty bad *hombres!*" Jed Kimber said contemptuously. "One ol' gray desert-rat—brains all burnt up by the sun. One po' young lad, scarcely learnt how to shave, tryin' to make out like he's as bad as the rest of yer. "An' you two," he added, his glance darting from Burnley to Ackland, "yo'-all never did have much time out o' jail, did yer? Seem like the ol' sun can't tan them dough-faces right, somehow."

THE door opened suddenly, startling all those with overwrought nerves. A bright-faced young girl stood on the threshold.

"Ralph! Oh, Ralph!" she cried, as she glanced from one grim face to another.

"It's all right, Kitty," said the youngest man gently, a little hoarsely. "This here two-gun man's showin' off, like they all do. Better run home an' send your daddy round here."

"To hell with her daddy!" snarled Gus Burnley. "I'd rather have the devil fussin' round."

"Better keep that mouth o' yo'rs shet tight whilst there's a young lady present," Jed Kimber warned him sternly.

"I sho' am right sorry about all this, lady," he assured the girl earnestly, "an' it wa'n't—exac'ly—all my doin', ma'm. If yo' wanter take yo'r young man away from yere, I'll be right glad to see 'im go—out o' the comp'ny he's been keepin'."

There was a heavy step on the porch, and an elderly man, tall and rangy appeared beside the girl.

"Get along home, Kitty," he said gravely. "This aint no place for you, no time! What's all the ruckus?"

Hans Wedel had timorously collected the firearms and gathered them back of the bar, and Jed Kimber folded his arms, a six-shooter drooping from each hand.

"Rest yo'r arms, gents," he said; "but don't go movin' round none."

"I'm Sheriff McIver," announced the new arrival, a whimsical grin twitching the corners of his mouth as he stared at Jed Kimber. "Looks like—like order was restored."

Jed tucked one of the guns under his arms and solemnly shook hands with the Sheriff.

"There wa'n't much disorder, suh; seems like they jus' didn't like my hat."

"What you doing down this way, anyhow?" demanded McIver suddenly, scowling at Burnley and Ackland. "Jim Ferens on your trail again?"

"No law against men travelin', is there?" retorted Burnley sullenly.

"Who stuck up the bank at Sherman?"

"Better write to Marshal Ferens and ask 'im," said Tip Ackland insolently. "He's so smart, he must 'a' caught 'em by this time."

"I'm surprised at *you*, Ralph," sighed the Sheriff, turning on the youngest man; "after what you promised Kitty."

"What have *I* done?" demanded the youngster spiritedly. "If Kitty and you don't understand my friends, no reason I'd oughter turn against 'em, is it? Friends is friends! They stuck by me. Think a man ought to go back on his friends for a woman's notion, Mr. McIver?"

"Seems like your friends are a pretty sorry-lookin' lot of sports right now, Ralph," observed the Sheriff; "one man making them jump through hoops for 'im."

"All right, rub it in while you have the chance!" growled Gus Burnley. "Give me an even show with this feller, an' we'll see who'll jump through hoops! He made off he was the dumb, sleepy kind. That was his trick to shoot Pete and get the drop on us. You've reached for the sky more'n' once yourself, Sheriff."

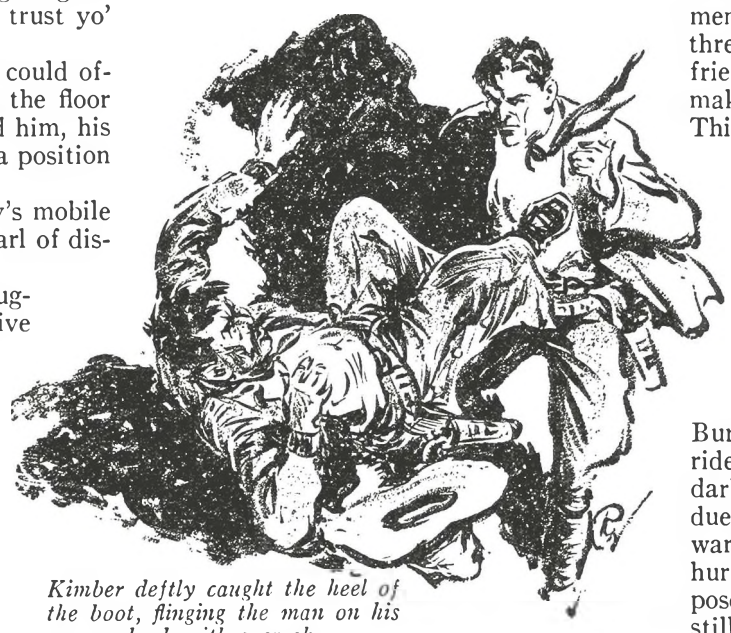
"An even show's all I ever ask fer, Sheriff," said Jed Kimber, suddenly thrusting his guns into McIver's hands. "I trust yo' to see I get it, suh."

Then before the Sheriff could offer objections, he crossed the floor to Gus Burnley and faced him, his hands held before him in a position for defense.

The corners of Burnley's mobile mouth went down in a snarl of disdain.

"Make it clean!" he suggested handsomely. "Give me a gun, out in the street."

Kimber raised his hand deliberately and cracked the man across the face with his open palm, the blow resounding like a pistol-shot.



*Kimber deftly caught the heel of the boot, flinging the man on his back with a crash.*

Burnley grunted and lurched forward like a mad bull, reaching for the lighter man and lunging a wicked kick at his groin. Kimber sidestepped and deftly caught the heel of the boot, heaving it upward and flinging the man on his back with a crash. Burnley leaped up with agility, and met a straight jolt on his bulldog jaw. As he fell again, Kimber jumped him and landed both feet on his mid-riff and ribs, cracking bones.

Pete Renton and Tip Ackland let out yells of fierce protest, starting forward, but McIver covered them with the guns.

"I beg pardon o' yo'-all," said Kimber mildly, "but I been in lumber-camps too. His kind, I don't let 'em get as fur as eye-gouging!"

Burnley was groaning and writhing on the floor.

"Take 'im out—take care of 'im somewhere," advised the Sheriff, with little feeling.

"If this galoot's got so much nerve," rasped Pete Renton, "gi' me a show at him with guns."

"Don't, Father—don't let 'em!" cried Kitty McIver, clinging in terror to the pale-faced Ralph Cory.

"This aint a circus, Pete!" snapped the Sheriff. "I'll give you a chance to clean up your mess and git out, that's all."

Two new figures appeared silently in the doorway, and the excited Hans Wedel flung up his hands.

"*Himmel!* It's der Bishop!" he cried. "An' sooch a mess in my blace!"

A venerable white-haired man, with a countenance that was both bland and radiant, took a step into the room. He wore a round black clerical hat and a clerical collar, with a short riding-cape, and black trousers buttoned into leather gaiters. His companion was young, a thin, nervous man, in ecclesiastical dress.

"Monsignor!" gasped the young man. "We cannot stay here; it is no place for you. This is terrible—shameful!"

"My son," said the missionary bishop gently, "I am too old a man, in this country, to be startled or confused by such a scene. There are good men here, and perhaps the bad ones are not as bad as they appear."

"I'm sorry, Father Ignatius," said the Sheriff deferentially. "We don't often have much trouble, but it'll come sometimes, sir."

The veteran missionary nodded and shook hands with the Sheriff, then glanced swiftly about the room, with eyes that missed nothing.

"Pete Renton and Ackland—and Burnley and young Cory," he murmured, drawing on a memory that was the marvel of three States. "What a pity, my friends, that white men should make trouble for one another! This is a land of promise. With all the aridity of plain and valley, the scorching sun and the parched desert, the days will come when it will all be green and fertile—irrigation and the magical inventions of man—with God's guidance. I say it's a pity, Mr. Ackland," he went on, turning on the sullen Tip, "that wherever you and Burnley and Renton go, trouble rides with you, as with spirits of darkness. The Indians are subdued; I've seen them turned from war to peace in my own time. It hurts me, that white men still oppose the law—that force of arms is still invoked to preserve the peace."

"I made no trouble here, Rev'rend," Ackland complained. "Pete started it, with his jokes. This feller Kimber, here—he's a fighter. Ask any of 'em what I did."

"I'm not a magistrate—I'm not holding court, Mr. Ackland," said the missionary. "But I know about these things, and you know that I know. You and your kind do not work for a living: you ride like the lawless knights of feudal times, and levy tribute as you go. I had hoped it might pass in a generation, but you draw neophytes into your ranks and perpetuate the evil. I knew young Cory's father—an honest man—and it pains me to see the son—"

"Ralph's going to stay here with us, Father Ignatius," interrupted Kitty McIver, clasping her hands about the young man's arm. "He's not so bad—just kind o' wild and headstrong. He'll settle down."

"Bless you, my dear!" said the missionary fervently. "Many a poor lad has been saved by a good girl."

"Beggin' yo'r pardon, Parson," spoke up Jed Kimber, "ef yo'-all would take charge o' them guns we got back o' the bar, I reck'n there'd be no more trouble, for a spell."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the missionary in consternation. "Guns! The wretched things would explode in my hands! But the idea is good, my son. Give the guns to my friend McIver; he'll take them and keep them cool.

I fear no trouble here. The good Hans always forces his own room upon me, and I sleep in luxury."

"That wounded man will groan all night," persisted the young priest. "It's no place for you, Monsignor!"

"My son," returned the patient bishop, "I've slept soundly in a frontier fort, with a thousand Apaches storming the stockade. I pray you go and fetch the saddle-bags."

"I'd like right well to hear the parson preach, suh," Jed Kimber said softly to the Sheriff. "I reckon he's a right smart preacher."

IN the morning Jed Kimber heard from the rejoicing Hans Wedel that the latter's unwelcome guests had departed at the crack of dawn, peaceably, for men of their stamp. Hans was gratified because they had even deigned to bargain with him for a buckboard in which to transport the disabled Gus Burnley. They traveled straight west, he said, over the old stage road, Tip Ackland driving two ponies hitched to the buckboard, and Pete Renton riding behind. Young Ralph Cory had not appeared, and Hans hoped he was staying at Sheriff McIver's house.

Jed breakfasted like a hearty man on half a dozen eggs and a quarter of a flitch of bacon, allowing one mug of coffee to each egg. Then he went to the corral and cut out from a collection of stage-horses and pack-mules an elderly white crowbait of a mare which he did not disdain to call his own.

The hotelkeeper came out presently to get the two fat ponies of his reverend patrons, and was vastly amused and touched to see Jed currying and brushing the mare as if she were a cherished thoroughbred charger.

A little later, at the hitch-rail of the Hoffman House, Monsignor Ignatius Manton was inspecting the mounts, as his aide Father Paul adjusted the saddle-bags, when Jed came riding round the house, armed and panoplied for the trail.

"As I live!" exclaimed the Bishop under his breath, "it is none other than *Don Quixote redivivus!* See, Paul, the rattling bones of *Rosinante* perambulate the New World. The Helmet of Mambrino rests again upon the troubled head of the noble knight of La Mancha."

All unconscious of the kindly satire of the venerable churchman, Jed came to a halt at the hitch-rail, slid to the ground, and doffed his picturesque headpiece with grave respect.

"I sho' hope I see yo' well this mawnin', Parson," he said earnestly, "an' the same to yo'r friend."

"I thank you, my son, I'm well," returned Father Ignatius, "and glad to see you again. The good Hans speaks well of you, and he has seen no mean portion of this great world. You are a brave man; I have no doubt that you're a good man."

"That aint always so easy to tell, suh. There's times when I thinks to myself as how I'm kind o' low-down an' ornery. I aint done nothin' to be right proud of, I reckon. Travelin' round, though, I sho' have been pestered a heap."

"That's it!" cried the Bishop brightly, "we are all pestered a heap, aren't we? Sometimes it seems that our trials bear down on us like millstones. You've traveled far, and you're still traveling?"

"Quite a little piece yet, I reckon, suh. I was raised down in Miss'sippi, but I done a heap o' travelin'—kinder lookin' for some place where I might stop for a spell. I was on the river a right smart while, steamboatin', but there's a pile o' argyin' an' fightin' up along the river. Reck'n 'twas even worse up where I was cuttin' timber, up in Canady. There's a pile o' hard, ornery fellers up there, suh. I been in the mount'ns quite some, too—prospectin' for gold. All las' year I was ridin' herd in Colorado. Bought my ol' mare up there—for eighteen dollars. I—somehow I felt kinder sorry for 'er, she was so tacky an' mis'able-lookin'. She's a right willin' hawse."

The Bishop smiled slightly, and there was a suspicious brightness in his eyes as he regarded the faded gray mare with her moth-eaten mane and tail, thin ewe-neck and bony Roman nose.

"Poor old *Rosinante!*" he murmured. "But there's a contented look in her eye."

"Now that's right funny!" exclaimed Jed, "the name yo're givin' her, Parson. I been callin' 'er Rosie myself. Seemed like it might kinder chirk 'er up to have sort of a *pretty* name."

"Have you read 'Don Quixote'?" the Bishop asked a little doubtfully.

"No, suh, I reckon not."

"According to the tale, he was a brave, good man. He rode up and down the world, my son, like you—'looking for some place.' He called his old horse *Rosinante.* Forgive me for drawing the comparison! Your hat vaguely suggests the helmet he wore—the Helmet of Mambrino, as he called it. Believe me, my son, I'm not making fun of your hat or your horse. And I assure you that *Don Quixote* was a worthy man, riding against evil, searching for the beautiful and good. He—*he* was pestered a heap!"

"I reckon so," said Jed, vaguely embarrassed. "I'm ridin' south from yere, suh. It's a right pretty country, I hear tell."

"As you ride south you must stop and see my poor old mission chapel, Saint Hubert's," Father Ignatius offered. "It's deserted, save for one poor Indian. The Indians who lived all about it went away—moved off to a reservation. There was no one left.

"San Huberto, they called it. It has a history. Many poor wanderers and fugitives have sought sanctuary there. A man was safe there. No evil or violence profaned its cloisters. The sound of its bells quieted the hostile Indians. General Crook met Cochise, the Apache chieftain, in the chapel for conference; they met as friends, when their men sought one another's blood through all the valley.

"Look there," he added, pointing toward the rose and mauve battlements of cloud and rock castles in the mists of the southern horizon. "See the great mesa—that huge fortress of solid rock? Pass to the west of it, and you'll find the trail to San Huberto."

"I thank yo' kindly, suh," the Mississippian said softly. "I'll be right proud to see that place, an'—I thank yo' kindly."

"My time here may not be long," the venerable man said, with the suspicion of a quaver in his gentle voice, "but I pray we may meet again, my friend. I shall remember you. God go with you, my son."

"THAT'S a right pretty place, Rosie Nancy," observed Jed, suppressing his emotion even in communion with the aged mare, but speaking in a hushed voice of reverential awe. "Yes, ma'am, a right pretty place, just like the parson said. I never seen any place look like that, anywhere I been; them bells' an' ever'thing; yet somehow it seems kinder homey, for all that."

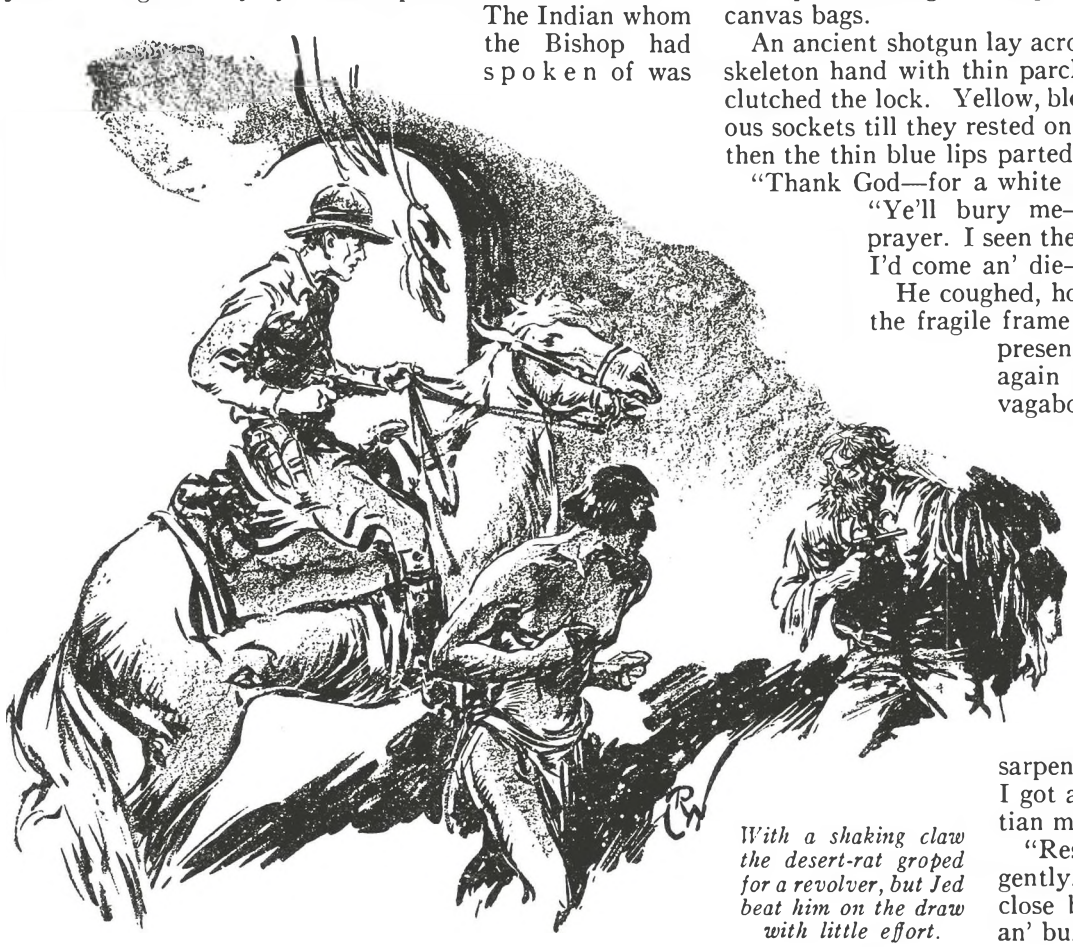
The mission was an oasis in an arid and barren wilderness, though it had been neglected, probably since the secularization of the missions by the Mexican governors, and virtually abandoned since the Indians were restricted to United States Government reservations. A rude aqueduct of hollowed logs, patched with sections of cracked tile, brought a trickle of water from some mountain spring, and a system of tortuous little canals, shallow as eave-troughs, kept the once cloistered garden alive and green in the midst of melancholy ruin.

The adobe chapel appeared to have stood against the buf-

fets of wind and weather with some success. It was a rectangular building of severely plain design, embellished by the placing of a graceful campanile before the principal entrance. The campanile was composed of one arch set upon another and wider arch, and a bronze bell of fair size swung in the upper arch, while three smaller bells hung in a row in the lower one.

Half a dozen gnarled olive trees, somewhat stunted, stood about the garden, and there were sparse thickets of juniper, tangled with wild-pumpkin vines, and some bravely struggling acacias and tamarisks. An anemic grapevine straggled over a rustic arbor, and a patch of garden under cultivation showed corn, yams, onions, beans, and some pepper bushes.

Something stirred in the brush near the grapevine, and Jed saw bright beady eyes fixed upon him from the covert. The Indian whom the Bishop had spoken of was observing the intruder with the alert suspicion of the red nomads of the Southwestern desert.



*With a shaking claw the desert-rat groped for a revolver, but Jed beat him on the draw with little effort.*

"Howdy!" Jed called out sociably, and rode on down into the garden. "I aint aimin' to disturb yo' none, brother. The parson told me to stop here for a little spell—him they call Father Ignatius."

"Padre Ignacio!" exclaimed the watcher, rising slowly from his hiding-place, and the dark face lighted up at the sound of the name that was obviously a password and a charm.

To Jed's surprise another man appeared suddenly in the narrow space between the chapel and the campanile; a typical desert-rat, lean and feverish-looking, with thin gray hair and beard, and leather skin the color of the ochre dust.

"Keep goin', *hombre*—this aint no hotel!" he shrilled, and showing two yellow tusks between the fringes of beard.

"Yo' look like yo' might need a church fo' the good o' yo'r soul," Jed replied quietly, "but I don't reckon yo' need a whole one. Happens I aim to stop yere—fo' the night, anyhow."

"Happens yore goin' ter turn that camel o' yourn round an' move off," snarled the rat, swelling with rage as the puff-adder swells to inspire terror in its foe. With a shaking claw he groped in the drapery of rags about his waist and dragged forth a revolver, but Jed beat him on the draw with little effort, and at a sharp command the gun dropped from the palsied hand.

The rat cursed obscenely and retreated around the corner of the chapel, and the mildly curious Jed rode after him. Along the west wall of the building was a crumbling ruin of a cloister, and in a sheltered nook under the pent roof lay another denizen of the barren lands—a man hoary with age, stretched on straw and tattered blankets, his head pillowed high on a pile of gunnysacks and smaller canvas bags.

An ancient shotgun lay across the old man's body, and a skeleton hand with thin parchment drawn over the bones clutched the lock. Yellow, bloodshot eyes rolled in cavernous sockets till they rested on the newcomer and his horse; then the thin blue lips parted under the white beard.

"Thank God—for a white man!" wheezed the derelict. "Ye'll bury me—won't ye? Mebbe say a prayer. I seen the cross—on the roof. Thought I'd come an' die—in a church."

He coughed, horribly, and Jed doubted that the fragile frame could survive the shock, but presently the ghastly eyes moved again and sought out the vicious vagabond standing a little way off, muttering to himself.

"Then," croaked the dying man, "then come yonder buzzard—ter sit an' watch me die—ter pick my bones! The Injin—he's all right. The Injin gi' me water—an' soup. But the buzzard—mouth waterin'—watchin' me die! Devil's always had 'is imps after me—imps an' buzzards an' sarpents! But they haint got me. I got a Bible. I'm a-dyin' a Christian man."

"Rest yo'self, brother," Jed said gently. "Don't worry; I'll stay close by. I'll 'tend to the devils an' buzzards."

He looked about the place, and saw two mangy burros browsing near the end of the cloister.

"If one o' them jackasses is yours," he said sternly to the glowering human buzzard, "yo' saddle up an' make tracks outer yere, fas' as yo' can go. This is a sanc'chary—free to all, but that don't take in rats an' buzzards. Now yo' git started—yo're goin' to die o' lead-pizen if yo' linger round yere!"

Slowly, to a running accompaniment of curses, the rat made ready for the trail, and presently rode out of the mission garden.

The eager Indian watched him and tracked him a mile from the chapel, till the trail dipped into a narrow cañon which led to the lowlands and the main trail going south.

"I'm goin' out—in the night," the old man said faintly. "Yer a white man. What I got—it's yourn. There's some dust in the bags; it's worth somethin'. I aint got no kin."

He did "go out" in the night; Jed and the Indian buried him and put a little rustic cross at the head of the grave.

Later on, reluctantly—held back by vague scruples—Jed examined the canvas bags and found gold-dust and some tiny nuggets—the fruits, he surmised, of weary wanderings and arduous, patient labor. Roughly he estimated the value of the hoard at a thousand dollars.

The Indian witnessed the appraisal without emotion, with little interest. He was, of his kind, an eccentric.

"Get a lot o' money for this, brother," Jed remarked self-consciously, "but I don't guess I could rightly take it fo' my own, nohow. Don't seem hardly right for one man to work so hard for it, an' another spend it 'thout doing any work. I don't rightly know what to do with it, but I sort o' reckon we'll cash in on it, an' then spend it somehow on this yere church, fixin' up the sluice for the water, an' mebbe patchin' up the roof in places. Reckon that ol' feller might 'a' been proud to pay up for the shelter he got yere—an' he's stoppin' yere from now on, anyhow."

"I think," said the Indian impulsively, "you good white man—same like Padre Ignacio! My name Chombo. Chombo your friend—you like to have friend."

Jed shook hands with him solemnly.

"I think yo're a good lad, Chombo. I sho' do like to have a friend. Friends come high, mos'ly, an' a feller don't always get what he pays for."

IN lingering at San Huberto, Jed was scarcely aware of any definite object. Often he spoke vaguely to the Indian of moving on southward, but Rosie Nancy grazed in contentment beside the old prospector's burro. Jed hoped the rest and good forage might put some flesh on her bones and was reluctant to put her so soon to the trail again.

Chombo cooked a variety of vegetables, and an occasional sage-hen or rabbit, with success beyond the usual scope of his race, and the two men were peculiarly congenial, in a silent, tranquil way. Each found the other's English strange and not always comprehensible, for Kimber knew little of the Mexican border vernacular, and the Apache was puzzled by the lazy drawl of the Mississippian.

In such conversation as they attempted, however, Jed dwelt continually on the history of the mission, and persuaded Chombo to talk, now and then, by repeating some of the statements of Father Ignacio.

The idea of the inviolable sanctuary had captured the Southerner's fancy, and he quizzed the red man and was gratified by repeated assurances that the altar of San Huberto had never been defiled by the stain of blood.

Visitors to the Mission San Huberto were few. Jed Kimber was devoting himself to patching the chapel roof, against the time when new tiles could be fetched from the Coast, when two men came over the trail and hailed him as they rode into the garden.

"Who are you?" challenged the elder of the two, on whose breast a bright badge glittered.

"Reckon it's good 'nough manners for me to tell yo'-all that, when yo've interduced yo'se'f, suh," Jed drawled languidly, sliding down from the roof.

"Ferens is my name," announced the man brusquely, scowling at Jed and at Chombo, who was peering out at him intently from the cover of the grape arbor. "I'm a United States Marshal. This here is my deputy Fred Vance. Now it's your move."

"My name's Jed Kimber—'thout any handle."

The Marshal was a powerful, long, lean man, with silvery hair gleaming under the brim of his wide-brimmed hat against a skin tanned to terra cotta.

"Yer pretty flip, aint yeh?" he muttered, a scowl of disfavor knitting his brows. "I don't set up to bother with what happens to this lay-out, but if you're aimin' to pilfer the copper flashin's on that roof, and mebbe them bronze bells, wal, I don't care a pewterinktum!—but yer takin' long chances. What d'yer s'pose has kept this place from being pilfered so long? Wal, it's the superstition of the Injuns an' some o' the white folks: they think there's some kind o' witchcraft all round here. Load them bells an' things on that hoss an' the jackass, an' try to get away. That sleepy-lookin' Chombo, there, he'd have a knife in yer 'fore you got to the trail—an' if he didn't do it, you'd find Injuns risin' up out o' the desert an' trailin' you from here to the coast. As I was sayin' though, I aint commissioned to stop yer. Pack up an' tote the whole damn' outfit plumb to hell, if you want to take the chance."

"Yo' shet that blasphemin' ol' trap o' yours!" cried Jed fiercely, his face dark with wrath. "If Uncle Sam knowed what a low-down orn'ry ol' catamount's wearin' that silver badge, I reckon he'd come right on from Washington to yank it off'n yuh! None o' yo'r business nohow, but I'm fixin' ter plug up the leaks in that ol' roof; an' as for them bells, I done scrubbed 'em up brighter a'ready, so's I can mos' play a tune on 'em."

The Marshal grinned—as the grizzly bear grins—and appeared to enjoy Jed's rage in his own dour way.

"If you're some new-fangled kind o' missionary, you might 'a' said so," he mumbled. "Nothin' surprises me, anyhow: we get all kinds o' bughouse folks comin' through here. I got as much respect for a sky-pilot as any one, I guess. Wal, I aint got time jes' to chew the rag. I'm trailin' three mighty mean *hombres*, an' I figgered they was about due to slip around here an' hide out for a spell. You happen to see three galoots about as han'some an' genteel-lookin' as rattlesnakes? Reckon you wouldn't tell me if you *had* seen 'em, you're so cantankerous!"

"I might tell, an' then again I mightn't—but I aint seen 'em—round yere," said Jed, and eyed the Marshal with cold defiance.

"He's kinder queer, Jim," observed the deputy-marshal, gathering up his reins by way of a suggestion to move off.

"If them three cusses yo're trailin' *was* here," Jed murmured reflectively, "I reckon yo'-all must know that yo' couldn't touch 'em. This church—this place yere—'taint no place for hawse-thieves, nor low-down rapscallions, nor Sheriffs, nor Marshals—no trash like that! But happen they come yere, they can rest easy-like for a spell. That's what it was built for. Seems like there aint no man nor beast so ornery an' mean but he can come yere an' be safe from them that's huntin' 'im—jes' so's he behaves himse'f right an' proper yere."

The Marshal wheeled his mount slowly alongside that of his deputy and headed for the trail.

"He's got religion, that feller," he muttered. "I've seen it affect 'em all kinds' of ways, Fred."

"Yeah! I seen 'em so's they had to be hawg-tied," agreed the deputy.

Jed watched the two men ride away, regarding them thoughtfully, then hunched his shoulders and grinned silently at the attentive but speechless Chombo.

THREE days later he was standing for a moment in the nave of the chapel, contemplating the mystery of the bare, abandoned temple, when he was disturbed by the sound of voices and the padding of hoofs outside.

There was a man's voice and then a woman's voice. Chombo answered their hail and passed around the campanile to meet the visitors.

Jed started to go out, but halted and listened uneasily as he heard a question.

"There's a white man here, aint there?" the man inquired. "Some folks have seen 'im, they say—kinder fussin' round fixin' up things. Must be a preacher or missionary or something, huh?"

"Ugh!" returned Chombo in a guttural affirmative, with

*"If Uncle Sam knowed what a low-down, orn'ry ol' catamount's wearin' that badge, he'd come right on from Washington to yank it off'n yuh!"*

a vagrant note of pride breaking through his restraint. "Ugh! White man. Good man—same like Padre Ignacio. Me think um *padre.*"

"You go find 'im, pronto!" directed the man. "We're fixin' to get married, you *sabe?*"

Jed Kimber appeared suddenly from the chapel. The young girl uttered a little gasping cry and caught the arm of her companion.

"You!" muttered the young man. "You the feller they're tellin' about?"

"I do' know what they're tellin'," Jed responded, "but I aint claimin' to be no preacher, nor no missionary—not even a justice o' the peace. Don't look like yo'-all goin' to be married yere t'day. Yo've come a right smart piece from home, I reck'n, but seems like yo' might as well tu'n right back."

"We can 'tend to our own affairs," snapped the young man. "I'm not askin' advice from the likes of you. No law against getting married. I figger 'most anyone would say we're doing the right thing."

"Yo'r eyes don' say so, Mister Cory. I had a fool bird-dawg back home; his eyes looked mighty like yours when he'd been sneakin' off an' runnin' rabbits. Wa'n't a mean dawg, but he'd look mighty mean an' low-down when he'd done wrong. I don't guess Sheriff McIver sent his little gal way out yere in the desert for a weddin' 'cause there wa'n't no church at home."

"Keep your nose out of other folks' business!" growled young Ralph Cory.

"Mos' gen'ally do," replied Jed. "But I've took notice, when there's a skunk comes around, my ol' nose is jes' na'chally goin' to do its work anyhow."

THE hot-tempered youth ripped out an oath and swung himself from the saddle, but Kitty McIver was beside him on the instant, clinging to his arm.

"These useless rows, Ralph!" she protested with desperate earnestness. "You promised, you know. Don't stop here. Let's go on. Father will forgive us, when we go back and he knows everything is all right; but he's awful mad now, and he might come and find us here if we stop long."

"I'm not afraid of your old man," said the hero of the hurried romance brusquely. "It's getting late. We'll go on tomorrow. Come on in out o' the sun. We'll take a look—see what for a place we got to stop in."

Kitty, pathetically miserable, glanced furtively, fearfully, at Jed and the little Indian, and followed her lover into the chapel.

Jed pondered for a moment, gravely uncomfortable, then went slowly after the pair.

"Yo' got as good a right as I have, here," he said, "but I reckon yo'-all know that folks don't use a church like this for a hotel. There's a right smart lot o' room on the shady side over yonder, under the shed roof."

Cory leered at him contemptuously.

"We'll stay where we like," he replied. "But it's too damn' hot in here—not winders enough. We'll take a look around."

All at once they were startled by the sound of galloping hoofs, followed by a challenging call from Chombo.

Instinctively Jed whirled toward the door, and his hand went to his belt.

"Stick 'em up! I got you covered!" cried Ralph Cory; and as Kitty McIver screamed in fright, Jed turned to stare into the muzzles of two revolvers.

Chombo, in the garden, cried out in shrill rage and pain as some one struck or kicked him. Then the outlaws, Renton, Burnley, and Ackland, stalked into the chapel, swearing and laughing harshly. They grew fiercely hilarious as they saw the plight of the well-remembered Jed Kimber.

*"We-ough!"* chortled the boisterous Pete. "In time fer the weddin', I reckon—an' the bride shore is blushin'!"

The coldly practical Tip Ackland was already engaged in disarming Jed and going through his pockets.

"Everything's all right," said young Cory. "Jim Ferens has gone north. He thinks you doubled back, I guess. He stopped at Hans Wedel's last night. Told Hans you were headin' for Colorado."

"What about the Sheriff?" asked Burnley.

"Sheriff, he's only thinking o' one thing," said Cory, with the suspicion of a smirk. "He may drop in on us, but he aint going to hurt any one while we got Kitty along with us. I don't figger he'll raise a posse, 'cause he's too worried about a family scandal."

KITTY was staring at him with blazing eyes. "It's a put-up job!" she cried. "You expected 'em here, did you? You tricked me into coming along, Ralph Cory! God help me, if I've got any McIver nerve I'll make you so sorry you've got me along—"

"Dry up!" snarled Cory. "You're all right. You don't need to worry; I'm going to marry yer."

Jed Kimber's face was gray. His eyes traveled swiftly over the group about him, and presently he met Gus Burnley's gaze squarely.

"I got no favors to ask," Jed said with icy coldness.

"We're going on south, feller," the burly jailbird informed him. "We're not bothering with you, though. We're leavin' you here. I been plannin' this, while I was sick. I'm going to stomp you, feller, like you stomped me.

"I'm aimin' to give my friends and the bride a show," he went on, grinning at the white-faced Kitty, then glaring at Jed again. "I'm going to entertain 'em. Before I stomp yer to a finish, I'm going to rip your ears off'n yer, an' mash your face, an' I'll take yer eyes outen yer head an' pass 'em round. I'm going to—"

*"Hands up!"*

The harsh voice was like a trumpet blast. A veritable battery of blue-steel revolvers stretched across the narrow doorway at the left of the chancel, and above them were the grim faces of Marshal Jim Ferens, Sheriff McIver and Fred Vance the deputy. The cocksure outlaws had their guns in the holsters, and they obeyed the command with sullen celerity. The Marshal stepped forward, his hard old eyes glowing with the ardor of the chase.

"It's been a long hunt," he observed. "You've been hunted so many times, Gus—an' you too, Tip Ackland—you're getting pretty slippery. Reckon this will be the last

time, though; it's life for both you birds—an' old Pete, too. Cory, you fool brat, you'd oughter been locked up when you was ten years old. You'll mebbe be a wiser feller when you get out, but I doubt it."

Kitty stared at her father in hopeless remorse, and he looked at her sorrowfully, his bent shoulders drooping.

The triumphant Marshal glanced at Jed Kimber.

"Mebbe you're sort o' glad to see me this time!" he chuckled, returning Jed's weapons to him.

"I sho' am—right glad, suh," Jed responded gravely. "Yo' couldn't 'a' come no better time fo' me, I reckon. I was thinkin,' Marshal, it's right hot an' close in yere, suh—all cluttered-up like. Some of us might move out inter the yard, I reckon. If some o' this yere white trash wants to remain, yo'-all could take their guns an' leave 'em in yere for a spell."

"What all's biting *you,* now?" demanded Ferens.

"Nothing like this ever did happen yere befo', Marshal—all these yere guns, an' the low-down, orn'ry talk goin' on yere! When there was a reg'lar war, the Injuns an' soldiers had mo' respect for this place. But of co'se, if these scalawags aim to remain, yo' can't do nothin' but wait for 'em outside."

"Like hell I can't do nothin!" cried the Marshal in exasperation. "Say, you're plumb loco!"

The kindly Sheriff McIver spoke up conciliatingly.

"He's a pious kind of a feller, I guess, Jim; and he's been talking with Father Ignatius and some others. We all might as well be movin' along, anyhow, and seems like Fred better gather up all the guns an' things before there's any trouble."

Ferens nodded to his deputy.

"Put the nippers on them three rats, Fred—and the young feller too. And get their guns."

Vance strode down the nave of the chapel into the middle of the group, his weapons leveled in front of him.

"All stand fast, an' keep them hands high!" he ordered.

But the burly, bulky Gus made a lightning stroke. He flung his arms about Kitty McIver, crushing her to his breast. As her shriek rang in the rafters of the chapel, his gun flashed from the holster, fire spouting from the muzzle.

Fred Vance stiffened, doubled at the waist, and sank to the floor. White-haired, white-faced Jim Ferens stood erect, staring at the gun-man. A spot appeared in the middle of his forehead, and he swayed backward and fell to the stone floor.

Old Tom McIver, his horrified eyes fixed upon his struggling child, let his guns fall, and raised his shaking hands above his head.

"*You!*" Gus Burnley yelled at Jed. "Get them hands up, or you're the next."

Jed stared at him across two dead men, his arms still hanging at his sides.

"Yo're goin' ter stand befo' the Judgment Seat t'day, man," Jed said. "Don't add another charge to yo'r reckonin'. I aint fightin' now—not in this yere place—but I won't take no commands from no mortal man."

BURNLEY the killer, with Ackland and Renton, his desperate accomplices, stared at Kimber, the three of them strangely fascinated by his bravado, but with their fingers trembling upon triggers.

Deliberately Jed turned to the right, and, evidently with definite purpose, mounted the winding steps to the high pulpit. In a moment he stood under the minaret-like canopy, facing the nave. His hands rested on the broad rail in front of him and he raised his eyes.

"Looney as a locoed maverick!" mumbled Pete Renton.

"Lawd Gawd," Jed said, "it says in Yo'r Book 'bout them as live by the sword, they're goin' ter die by the sword, too—an' I reckon Yo' would say the same about powder an' shot. An' then in the Gospels it tells how there was some mighty bad men come inter one o' Yo'r temples, an' they was dickerin' about money an' swindlin' folks, I reckon—an' the Lawd Jesus didn't have no patience with 'em nohow, but got after 'em right smart, an' whup 'em out o' the temple—an' I reckon that when these ornery fellers bring black shame on Yo'r house they got to get their just deserts, if there's any Christian folks round to 'tend to it."

Gus Burnley, his hard eyes riveted on the man in the pulpit, relaxed his hold on the young girl. She staggered a few steps toward her father, then fell fainting to the floor.

JED KIMBER ceased to speak, but his hands slowly left the rail of the pulpit; as slowly and deliberately they moved to the revolvers at his belt.

Undeterred by word or action from those who stood in the nave, he drew forth the weapons and carefully placed them on the rail.

"Lawd Gawd," he said, "if in my po' judgment I'm bringin' mo' shame on Yo'r house,—if I'm guilty of a great sin,—I know Yo' will punish me accordin to Yo'r will. But if I'm doin' right, Lawd, I ask Yo' to steady my hands, and make these yere guns shoot straight."

He paused an instant after the last word, then slowly picked up a revolver with each hand.

"Plug 'im!" yelled Pete Renton in a shrill and frantic voice, flinging up his gun, and two bullets splintered the thin, dry wood of the canopy above the pulpit.

Orange flames darted from the guns in Jed's hands. Twelve shots were fired at split-second intervals.

"If under the law I am guilty of a crime, I surrender to you, Sheriff McIver," said Jed Kimber, coming down to the foot of the pulpit steps.

"I've seen judgment rendered and executed. I am satisfied," the Sheriff said in a low, shaky voice. "If I can be of service to you, I'll stop a while. Then me and my child will go home. I've no wish to arrest this young Cory."

Jed looked at the quaking young man.

"Yo'd better go away by yo'self, boy," he said gently. "All I ask yo' don't come yere no mo', onless yo' have good an' proper reasons to come to such a place. Me—I reckon I shall stop yere for a spell, if the Lawd is willin'."

Chombo the Apache was kneeling on the stone floor of the chapel, staring at Jed with the eyes of one entranced.

*"Stick 'em up! I got you covered!" cried Cory; and as Kitty screamed, Jed turned to stare into the muzzles of two revolvers.*

*The varying threads of this skillfully woven tale begin to draw together in a vivid pattern of intriguing adventure.*

# TARZAN

# *Guard of the Jungle*

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

*The Story So Far:*

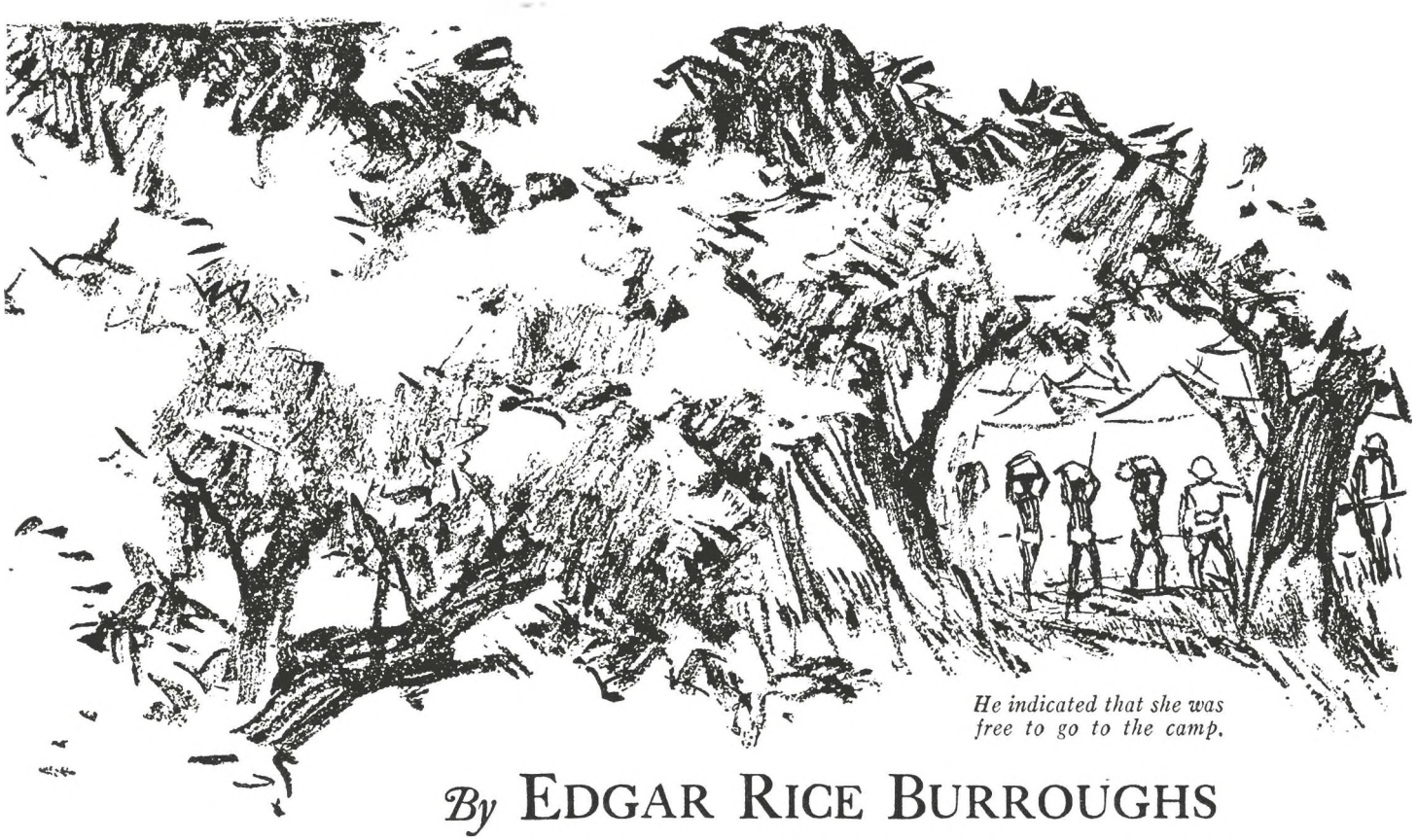
"MAN-THINGS are the only enemies of the jungle," Tarzan said to his animal friends. And Tarzan was determined to force out the invaders of his domain. Zveri was the Russian leader of a party of communists who were attempting to loot the fabled gold of Opar as the first step in conquering the world for communism. Zveri secretly planned to betray his comrades and make himself emperor of Africa, with his secretary Zora Drinov, a lovely Russian girl with whom he was in love, as empress.

Tarzan had discovered their plans and had struck terror more than once to the hearts of the black warriors, undermining the morale of the party. He had entered Opar to warn his old friends but was unexpectedly attacked from behind, imprisoned, and told that the high priestess La had been dethroned in a conspiracy. Tarzan escaped, and took La with him. In the jungle they became separated.

Zveri's two assaults on Opar failed, because the weird cries of the Oparian half-men frightened his warriors away, leaving captive Wayne Colt, the American member of the party. After the first attack Zveri left Sheik Abu Batu in charge of his base camp. The Sheik had the Aarab's antagonism for Europeans and was in the party only to regain power lost by British rule. But he took Zveri's order as an aspersion on his courage and deserted, after looting the camp of everything valuable. His blacks were loaded with all they could carry, and he burned the remainder of the supplies before his departure.

La, in her wanderings, had stumbled on the camp and Abu Batu took La and Zora Drinov with him as captives, intending to sell them on the slave-block. Covetous desires ruined this plan, however. Ibn Dammuk, an Aarab lieutenant, became infatuated by La, and attempted to steal her after separating the two girls by a ruse. La killed him and escaped in the jungle. There she met Jad-bal-ja, a lion who had once attached himself to Tarzan. Jad-bal-ja recognized her as a friend of Tarzan and became her bodyguard.

Meanwhile Zora Drinov tried to escape from her captors and her ensuing struggle with Abu Batu was witnessed by Wayne Colt—who had gained release from Opar through the friendship of a little priestess, Nao, and was now lost in the jungle, making a vain effort to find Zveri's camp. He leaped upon the Sheik and killed him. After Colt and Zora had evaded pursuit by the rest of the Aarabs, Colt told her how Zveri's cowardice had caused him to be captured by the Opar half-men. Colt also explained that Zveri's party was greatly demoralized and reduced to two



*He indicated that she was free to go to the camp.*

# By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

other Russians,—Michael Dorsky and Paul Ivitch,—a Mexican named Miguel Romero, and Colt's Filipino friend Antonio Mori, besides Kitembo, an African chieftain with his black Galla warriors. Zora and Colt found pleasure in simply being together, even in their precarious condition, while they continued their search for the camp.

But their ignorance of the jungle doomed their paradise. While Colt was away hunting for food, Zora was captured by the king ape To-yat. He was carrying her to his tribe, deep in the jungle, when Tarzan, still searching for La, dropped out of a tree in his path.

"Put down the she," Tarzan demanded.

"No," bellowed To-yat. "She is mine!"

Tarzan drew his hunting-knife and advanced on the bull-ape in a fighting crouch. To-yat dropped the unconscious Zora and circled, snarling, for an opening. At that moment, Tantor the great elephant, scenting the spoor of his friend Tarzan mingled with that of an ape, crashed through the forest. To-yat saw death in those angry eyes and gleaming tusks. He turned and fled into the jungle. *(The story continues in detail:)*

PETER ZVERI was in a measure regaining some of the confidence that he had lost in the ultimate success of his plan, for his agents were succeeding at last in getting to him some of his much-needed supplies, together with contingents of disaffected blacks wherewith he might recruit his forces to sufficient numbers to insure the success of his contemplated invasion of Italian Somaliland. It was his plan to make a swift and sudden incursion, destroying native villages and capturing an outpost or two, then—retreating quickly across the border—pack away the French uniforms for possible future use and undertake the overthrow of Ras Tafari in Abyssinia, where his agents had told him conditions were ripe for a revolution. With Abyssinia under his control to serve as a rallying point, his agents assured him that the native tribes of all Northern Africa would flock to his standards.

In distant Bokhara a fleet of some two hundred planes —bombers, scouts and fighting-planes—made available through the greed of American capitalists, were being mobilized for a sudden dash across Persia and Arabia to his base in Abyssinia. With these to support his great native army, he felt that his position would be secure. The malcontents of Egypt would join forces with him and, with Europe embroiled in a war that would prevent any concerted action against him, his dream of empire might be assured and his position made impregnable for all time.

Perhaps it was a mad dream; perhaps Peter Zveri was mad, but then what great world-conqueror has not been a little mad? He saw in his mind his frontiers then pushed toward the south as little by little, he extended his dominion until at last he should rule a great continent—Peter I, Emperor of Africa!

"You seem happy, Comrade Zveri," said Antonio Mori one day.

"Why should I not be, Tony?" demanded the dreamer. "I see success just before us. We should all be happy, but we are going to be very much happier later on."

"Yes," said Tony, "when the Philippines are free, I shall be very happy. Do you not think that then I should be a very big man back there, Comrade Zveri?"

"Yes," said the Russian, "but you can be a bigger man if you stay here and work for me. How would you like to be a Grand Duke, Tony?"

"A Grand Duke!" exclaimed the Filipino. "I thought there were no more Grand Dukes."

"But perhaps there may be again."

"They were wicked men who ground down the working-classes," said Tony.

"To be a Grand Duke who ground down the rich and took their money from them might not be so bad," said Peter. "Grand Dukes are very rich and powerful. Would you not like to be rich and powerful, Tony?"

"Well, of course—who would not?"

"Then always do as I tell you, Tony, and some day I shall make you a Grand Duke," said Zveri.

The camp was filled with activity now at all times, for Zveri had conceived the plan of whipping his native recruits into some semblance of military order and discipline. Romero, Dorsky and Ivitch had had military experience, and the camp was filled with marching men, deploying,

charging and assembling, practicing the manual of arms and being instructed in the rudiments of fire discipline.

The day following his conversation with Zveri, Tony was assisting the Mexican, who was sweating over a company of black recruits.

During a period of rest, the Mexican and Filipino were enjoying a smoke when Tony turned to his companion. "You have traveled much, comrade," said the Filipino. "Perhaps you can tell me what sort of a uniform a Grand Duke wears."

"I have heard," said Romero, "that in Hollywood and New York many of them wear aprons."

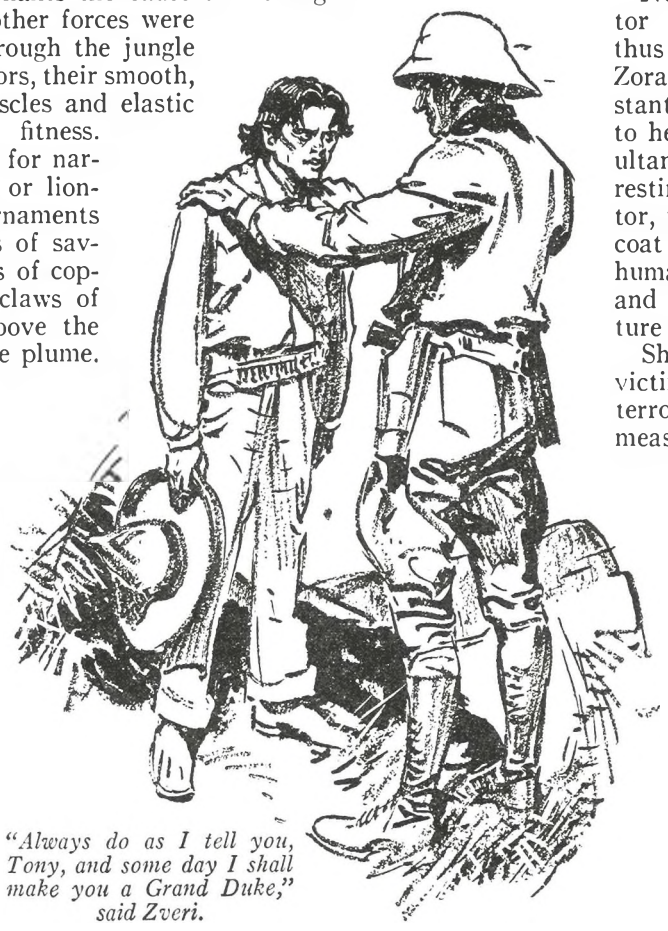
Tony grimaced. "I do not think," he said, "that I want to be a Grand Duke."

The blacks in the camp, kept sufficiently interested and busy in drills to keep them out of mischief, with plenty of food and with the prospects of fighting and marching still in the future, were a contented and happy lot. Those who had undergone the harrowing experiences of Opar and those other untoward incidents that had upset their equanimity had now regained their self-confidence, a condition for which Zveri took all the credit to himself, assuming that it was due to his remarkable gift for leadership. And then a runner arrived in camp with a message for him and with a wild story of having seen a white woman hunting in the jungle with a black-maned golden lion.

This was sufficient to recall to the blacks the other weird occurrences and to remind them that there were supernatural agencies at work in this territory, that it was peopled by ghosts and demons, and that at any moment some dire calamity might befall them.

But if this story upset the equanimity of the blacks, the message that the runner brought to Zveri precipitated an emotional outbreak in the Russian that bordered closely upon the frenzy of insanity. Blaspheming in a loud voice, he strode back and forth before his tent—nor would he explain to any of his lieutenants the cause of his anger.

And while Zveri fumed, other forces were gathering against him. Through the jungle moved a hundred ebon warriors, their smooth, sleek skin, their rolling muscles and elastic step bespeaking physical fitness. They were quite naked but for narrow loin-cloths of leopard- or lion-skin, and a few of those ornaments that are dear to the hearts of savages—anklets and armbands of copper, and necklaces of the claws of lions or leopards—while above the head of each floated a white plume. But here the primitiveness of their equipment ceased, for their weapons were the weapons of modern fighting-men — high-powered service rifles, revolvers and bandoleers of cartridges. It was, indeed, a formidable-appearing company that swung steadily and silently through the jungle, and upon the shoulder of the black chief who led them rode a little monkey. . . .



*"Always do as I tell you, Tony, and some day I shall make you a Grand Duke," said Zveri.*

Tarzan was relieved when Tantor's sudden and unexpected charge drove To-yat into the jungle, for Tarzan of the Apes found no pleasure in quarreling with the Mangani, which he considered above all other creatures his brothers. He never forgot that he had been nursed at the breast of Kala the she ape, nor that he had grown to manhood in the tribe of Kerchak the king. From infancy to manhood he had thought of himself only as an ape and even now it was often easier for him to understand and appreciate the motives of the great Mangani than those of man.

At a signal from Tarzan, Tantor stopped and assuming again his customary composure, though still alert against any danger that might threaten his friend, he watched while the ape-man turned and knelt beside the prostrate girl. Tarzan had at first thought her dead, but he soon discovered that she was only in a swoon. Lifting her in his arms, he spoke a half-dozen words to the great pachyderm, who turned about and putting down his head started off straight into the dense jungle, making a pathway along which Tarzan bore the unconscious girl.

Straight as an arrow moved Tantor the elephant to halt at last upon the bank of a considerable river, beyond which was a spot that Tarzan had in mind to which he wished to convey To-yat's unfortunate captive, whom he had recognized immediately as the young woman he had seen in the base camp of the conspirators. A cursory examination of her convinced him she was upon the verge of death from starvation, shock and exposure.

Once again he spoke to Tantor and the great pachyderm, twining his trunk around their bodies, lifted the two gently to his broad back. Then he waded into the river and set out for the opposite shore.

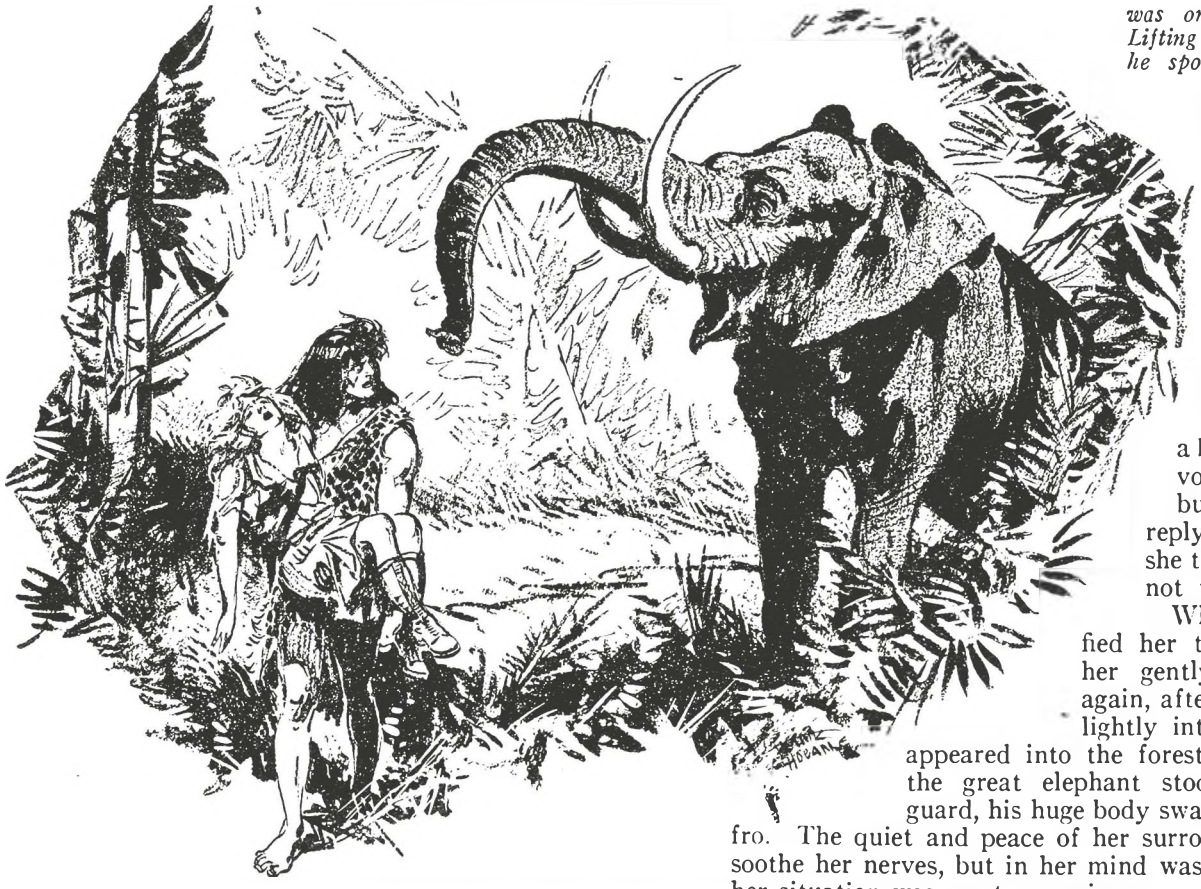
The channel in the center was deep and swift and Tantor was swept off his feet and carried downstream for a considerable distance before he found footing again, but eventually he won to the opposite bank and here again he went ahead, making trail until at last he broke into a broad, well-marked game trail.

Now Tarzan took the lead and Tantor followed, and while they moved thus silently toward their destination, Zora Drinov opened her eyes. Instantly recollection of her plight came to her consciousness; then almost simultaneously she realized that her cheek, resting upon the shoulder of her captor, was not pressing against a shaggy coat but against the smooth skin of a human body—and she turned her head and looked at the profile of the creature that was carrying her.

She thought at first that she was the victim of some strange hallucination of terror, for, of course, she could not measure the time that she had been unconscious, nor recall any of the incidents that had occurred during that period.

The last thing she remembered was that she had been in the arms of a great ape, who was carrying her off to the jungle. She had closed her eyes and when she opened them again the ape had been transformed into a handsome demigod of the forest.

She closed her eyes and turned her head so that she faced back over the man's shoulder. She thought that she would keep her eyes tightly closed for a mo-



*Tarzan discovered she was only in a swoon. Lifting her in his arms, he spoke to the great pachyderm, who started into the jungle, making a pathway.*

ment, then open them and turn them stealthily once more toward the face of the creature who was carrying her so lightly along the jungle trail. Perhaps this time he would be an ape again, and then she would know that she was indeed mad, or dreaming. When she did open her eyes the sight that met them convinced her that she was experiencing a nightmare, for plodding along the trail directly behind her was a giant bull elephant.

Tarzan, apprised of her returning consciousness by the movement of her head upon his shoulder, turned his own to look at her and saw her gazing at Tantor in wide-eyed astonishment. Then she turned toward him and their eyes met.

"Who are you?" she asked in a whisper. "Am I dreaming?" But the ape-man only turned his eyes to the front and made no reply.

Zora thought of struggling to free herself, but she realized that she was very weak and helpless and at last she resigned herself to her fate and let her cheek fall again to the bronzed shoulder of the ape-man.

When Tarzan finally stopped and laid his burden upon the ground, it was in a little clearing through which ran a tiny stream of clear water. Great trees arched almost overhead and through their foliage the great sun dappled the grass beneath them.

As Zora Drinov lay stretched upon the soft turf she realized for the first time how weak she was, for she attempted to rise and found that she could not. As her eyes took in the scene about her, it seemed more than ever like a dream —the great bull elephant standing almost above her and the bronzed figure of an almost naked giant squatting upon his haunches beside the little stream. She saw him fold a great leaf into the shape of a cornucopia and, after filling it with water, rise and come toward her. Without a word he stooped and putting an arm beneath her shoulders, he raised her to a sitting position and offered her the water from his improvised cup.

She drank deeply for she was very thirsty; then, looking up into the handsome face above her, she voiced her thanks, but the man did not reply and naturally she thought that he did not understand her.

When she had satisfied her thirst, he lowered her gently to the ground again, after which he swung lightly into a tree and disappeared into the forest. But above her the great elephant stood as though on guard, his huge body swaying gently to and fro. The quiet and peace of her surroundings tended to soothe her nerves, but in her mind was a conviction that her situation was most precarious.

The man was a mystery to her and while she knew, of course, that the ape which had stolen her had not been transformed miraculously into a handsome forest god, yet she could not account in any way for his presence or for the disappearance of the ape, except upon the rather extravagant hypothesis that the two had worked together, the great ape having stolen her for this man who was its master.

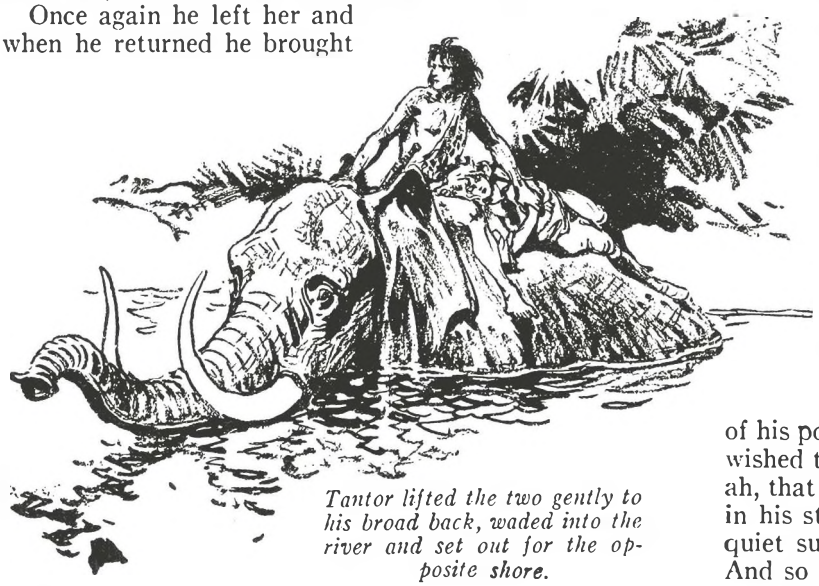
There had been nothing in the man's attitude to suggest that he intended to harm her and yet so accustomed was she to gauge all men by the standards of civilized society that she could not conceive that he had other than sinister designs.

To her analytical mind the man presented a paradox that intrigued her imagination, seeming, as he did, so utterly out of place in this savage African jungle, while at the same time he harmonized perfectly with his surroundings, in which he seemed absolutely at home and assured of himself—a fact that was still further impressed upon her by the presence of the wild bull elephant, to which the man paid no more attention than one would to a lap-dog. Had he been unkempt, filthy and of a degraded appearance, she would have catalogued him immediately as one of those social outcasts, usually half demented, who are occasionally found far from the haunts of men, living the life of wild beasts—whose high standards of decency and cleanliness, however, they uniformly fail to observe. But this creature had suggested more the trained athlete in whom cleanliness was a fetish, nor did his well-shaped head and intelligent eyes even remotely suggest mental or moral degradation.

And as she pondered him, the man returned, bearing a great load of straight branches from which the twigs and leaves had been removed. With a celerity and adeptness that bespoke long years of practice, he constructed a shelter upon the bank of the rivulet. He gathered broad leaves to thatch its roof and leafy branches enclosed it upon three sides, so that it formed a protection against the prevailing

winds. Then he floored it with leaves and small twigs and dry grasses, after which he came and, lifting the girl in his arms, bore her to the rustic bower he had fabricated.

Once again he left her and when he returned he brought



*Tantor lifted the two gently to his broad back, waded into the river and set out for the opposite shore.*

a little fruit, which he fed to her sparingly, for he guessed that she had been long without food and knew that he must not overtax her stomach. Always he worked in silence and though no word had passed between them, Zora Drinov felt growing within her a conviction of his trustworthiness.

The next time that he left her he was gone a considerable time, but still the elephant stood in the clearing, like some titanic sentinel upon guard.

When next the man returned he brought the carcass of a deer and then Zora saw him make fire, after the manner of primitive men, and as the meat roasted above it the fragrant aroma came to her nostrils, bringing consciousness of a ravening hunger. When the meat was cooked the man came and squatted beside her, cutting small pieces with his keen hunting-knife and feeding her as though she had been a helpless child. He gave her only a little at a time, making her rest often, and while she ate he spoke for the first time, but not to her, nor in any language that she had ever heard. He spoke to the great elephant, and the huge pachyderm wheeled slowly about and entered the jungle, where she could hear the diminishing noise of his passage until it was lost in the distance.

Before the meal was over it was quite dark, and she finished it in the fitful light of the fire that shone redly on the bronzed skin of her companion, and shot back from mysterious gray eyes which gave the impression of seeing everything, even her inmost thoughts.

Then he brought her a drink of water, after which he squatted down outside her shelter and proceeded to satisfy his own hunger.

Gradually the girl had been lulled to a feeling of security by the seeming solicitude of her strange protector, but now distinct misgivings assailed her and suddenly she felt a strange new fear of the silent giant in whose power she was, for when he ate she saw that he ate his meat raw, tearing the flesh like a wild beast; and when there came the sound of something moving in the jungle just beyond the firelight and he raised his head and looked, and there came a low and savage growl of warning from his lips, the girl closed her eyes and buried her face in her arms in sudden terror and revulsion.

From the darkness of the jungle there came an answering growl, but the sound moved on and presently all was silent again.

It was some time before Zora dared open her eyes again and when she did she saw that the man had finished his meal and was stretched out on the grass between her and the fire. She was afraid of him, of that she was quite certain; yet, at the same time, she could not deny that his presence there imparted to her a feeling of safety that she had never before felt in the jungle, and as she tried to fathom this she dozed and presently was asleep.

The young sun was already bringing renewed warmth to the jungle when she awoke. The man had replenished the fire and was sitting before it, grilling small fragments of meat. Beside him were some fruits, which he must have gathered since he awakened. As she watched him she was still further impressed by his great physical beauty, as well as by a certain marked nobility of bearing that harmonized well with the dignity of his poise and the intelligence of his keen gray eyes. She wished that she had not seen him devour his meat like a—ah, that was it—like a lion! How much like a lion he was, in his strength and dignity and majesty and with all the quiet suggestion of ferocity that pervaded his every act. And so it was that she came to think of him as her lion-man, and though trying to trust him, always fearing him not a little.

Again he fed her and brought her water before he satisfied his own hunger.

Before he started to eat he arose and voiced a long low call and then once more he squatted upon his haunches and devoured his food, but while he held it in his strong brown hands and ate the flesh raw, she saw now that he ate slowly and with the same quiet dignity that marked his every act, so that presently she found him less revolting. Once again she tried to talk with him, addressing him in various languages and several African dialects, but as for any sign he gave that he understood her she might as well have been addressing a dumb brute. Doubtless her disappointment would have been replaced by anger could she have known that she was addressing an English Lord, who perfectly understood every word that she uttered, but who, for reasons which he himself best knew, preferred to remain the dumb brute to this woman whom he looked upon as an enemy.

However, it was well for Zora Drinov that he was what he was, for it was the prompting of the English Lord and not that of the savage carnivore which had moved him to succor her because she was alone and helpless and a woman. The beast in Tarzan would not have attacked her but would merely have ignored her, letting the law of the jungle take its course as it must with all creatures.

Shortly after Tarzan had finished his meal, a crashing in the jungle announced the return of Tantor and when he appeared in the little clearing the girl realized that the great brute had come in response to the call of the man, and again she marveled.

And so the days wore on and slowly Zora Drinov regained her strength, guarded at night by the silent forest god and during the day by the great bull elephant. Her only apprehension now was for the safety of Wayne Colt, who was seldom from her thoughts.

Nor was her apprehension groundless, for the young American had fallen upon bad days. . . . Almost frantic with concern for the safety of Zora, he had exhausted his strength in futile search for her and her abductor, forgetful of himself until hunger and fatigue had taken their toll of his strength and he had awakened at last to the realization that his condition was dangerous; and now when he needed food most the game he had formerly found reasonably plentiful seemed to have deserted the country. Even

the smaller rodents that had once sufficed to keep him alive were either too wary for him or were not present at all. Occasionally he found fruits that he could eat, but they seemed to impart little or no strength to him, and at last he was forced to the conviction that he had reached the end of his endurance and his strength and that nothing short of a miracle could preserve him from death.

He was so weak that he could stagger only a few steps at a time and then, sinking to the ground, he was forced to lie there for a long time before he could arise again, and always there was the knowledge that eventually he would not arise. Yet he would not give up. Something more than the urge to live drove him on. He could not die—he must not die—while Zora Drinov was in danger! He had found a well-beaten trail at last where he was sure that sooner or later he must meet a native hunter, or perhaps find his way to the camp of his fellows. He could only crawl now, for he had not the strength to rise, and then suddenly the moment came that he had striven so long to avert—the moment that seemed to mark the end, though it came in a form he had only vaguely anticipated as one of several which might ring the curtain upon his earthly existence.

As he lay in the trail resting before he dragged himself on again, he was suddenly conscious that he was not alone. He had heard no sound, for doubtless his hearing had been dulled by exhaustion, but he was aware through the medium of that strange sense, the possession of which each of us has felt at some time in his existence, that told him eyes were upon him.

With an effort he raised his head to look and there before him in the trail, stood a great lion, his lips drawn back in an angry snarl, his yellow-green eyes glaring balefully.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Shot Down

TARZAN went almost daily to watch the camp of his enemy, moving swiftly through the jungle by trails unknown to man. He saw that preparations for the first bold stroke were almost completed and finally he saw uniforms being issued to all the members of the party—uniforms which he recognized as those of French Colonial troops and he realized that the time had come when he must move. He hoped little Nkima had carried his message safely, but if not, Tarzan would find some other way.

Zora Drinov's strength was slowly returning. Today she had arisen and taken a few steps out into the sunlit clearing. The great elephant regarded her. She had long since ceased to fear him, as she had ceased to fear the strange white man who had befriended her. Slowly the girl approached the great bull and Tantor regarded her steadily out of his little eyes as he weaved his trunk to and fro.

He had been so docile and harmless all the days he had guarded her that it had grown difficult for Zora to conceive him capable of inflicting injury upon her—but as she looked into his little eyes now there was an expression there which brought her to a sudden halt and as she realized that after all he was only a wild bull elephant, she suddenly appreciated the rashness of her act. She was already so close to him that she could have reached out and touched him, as had been her intention, with the thought that she would thus make friends with him.

It was in her mind to fall back with dignity, when the weaving trunk shot suddenly out and encircled her body. Zora Drinov did not scream. She only closed her eyes and waited. She felt herself lifted from the ground and a moment later the elephant had crossed the little clearing and deposited her in her shelter. Then he backed off slowly and resumed his post of duty. He had not hurt her; a mother could not have lifted her baby more gently, but he had impressed upon Zora Drinov that she was a prisoner and that he was her keeper.

As a matter of fact, Tantor was only carrying out Tarzan's instructions, which had nothing to do with forcible restraint of the girl, but were only a measure of precaution to prevent her wandering into the jungle where other dangers might overtake her.

Zora had not fully regained her strength and the experience left her trembling, though she now realized that her sudden fears for her safety had been groundless. She decided that she would take no more liberties with her mighty warden.

It was not long after that Tarzan returned, much earlier in the day than was his custom. He spoke only to Tantor, and the great beast, touching him almost caressingly with his trunk, turned and lumbered off into the forest.

Then Tarzan advanced to where Zora sat in the opening of her shelter. Lightly he lifted her from the ground and tossed her to his shoulder and then, to her infinite surprise at his strength and agility, he swung into a tree and was off through the jungle.

At the edge of the river that they had crossed before, Tantor was awaiting them and once more he carried Zora and Tarzan safely to the other bank.

Tarzan himself had crossed the river twice a day since he had made the camp for Zora, but when he went alone he needed no help from Tantor or any other, for he swam the swift stream, his eye alert and his keen knife ready should Gimla the crocodile attack him. But for the crossing of the woman, he had enlisted the services of Tantor

*The vision of a beautiful girl running toward the savage beast almost overwhelmed Wayne Colt.*

that she might not be subjected to the danger and hardship of the only other means of crossing that was possible.

Tantor clambered up the muddy bank and Tarzan dismissed him with a word, as with the girl in his arms he leaped into a near-by tree.

That flight through the jungle was an experience which would long stand vividly in the memory of Zora Drinov. That a human being could possess the strength and agility of the creature who carried her seemed unbelievable and she might easily have attributed a supernatural origin to him had she not felt the life in the warm flesh that was pressed against hers. Leaping from branch to branch, swinging across breathless voids, she was borne swiftly through the middle terrace of the forest. At first she was terrified, but gradually fear left her, to be replaced by that utter confidence which Tarzan of the Apes has inspired in many a breast.

At last he stopped and, lowering her to the branch upon which he stood, pointed through the surrounding foliage ahead of them. Zora looked, and to her astonishment saw the camp of her companions lying ahead and below her.

Once more the ape-man took her in his arms and dropped lightly to the ground into a wide trail that swept past the base of the tree in which he had halted. With a wave of his hand he indicated that she was free to go to the camp.

"Oh, how can I thank you?" exclaimed the girl. "How can I ever make you understand how splendid you have been and how I appreciate all that you have done for me?" But his only reply was to turn and swing lightly into the tree above them.

With a rueful shake of her head, Zora Drinov started along the trail toward camp, while above her Tarzan followed through the trees to make certain that she arrived in safety.

Paul Ivitch had been hunting and was just returning to camp when he saw something move in a tree at the edge of the clearing. He saw the spots of a leopard and raising his rifle, he fired. At the moment that Zora entered the camp the body of Tarzan of the Apes lunged from a tree almost at her side, blood trickling from a bullet-wound in his head as the sunshine played upon the leopard-spots of his loin-cloth. . . .

The sight of the lion growling above him might well have shaken the nerves of a man in far better physical condition than was Wayne Colt, but the vision of a beautiful girl running quickly toward the savage beast from the rear was the final stroke that almost overwhelmed him.

Through his brain ran a medley of recollection and conjecture. In a brief instant he recalled the fact that men had said they had felt no pain while being mauled by a lion—neither pain nor fear—and he also recalled that men went mad from thirst and hunger. If he was to die now it would not be painful, and of that he was glad; but if he did not die, then surely he was mad, for the lion and the girl must be the hallucination of a crazed mind.

Fascination held his eyes fixed upon the two. How real they were! He heard the girl speak to the lion and then he saw her brush past the great savage beast and come and bend over him where he lay helpless in the trail. She touched him and then he knew that she was real.

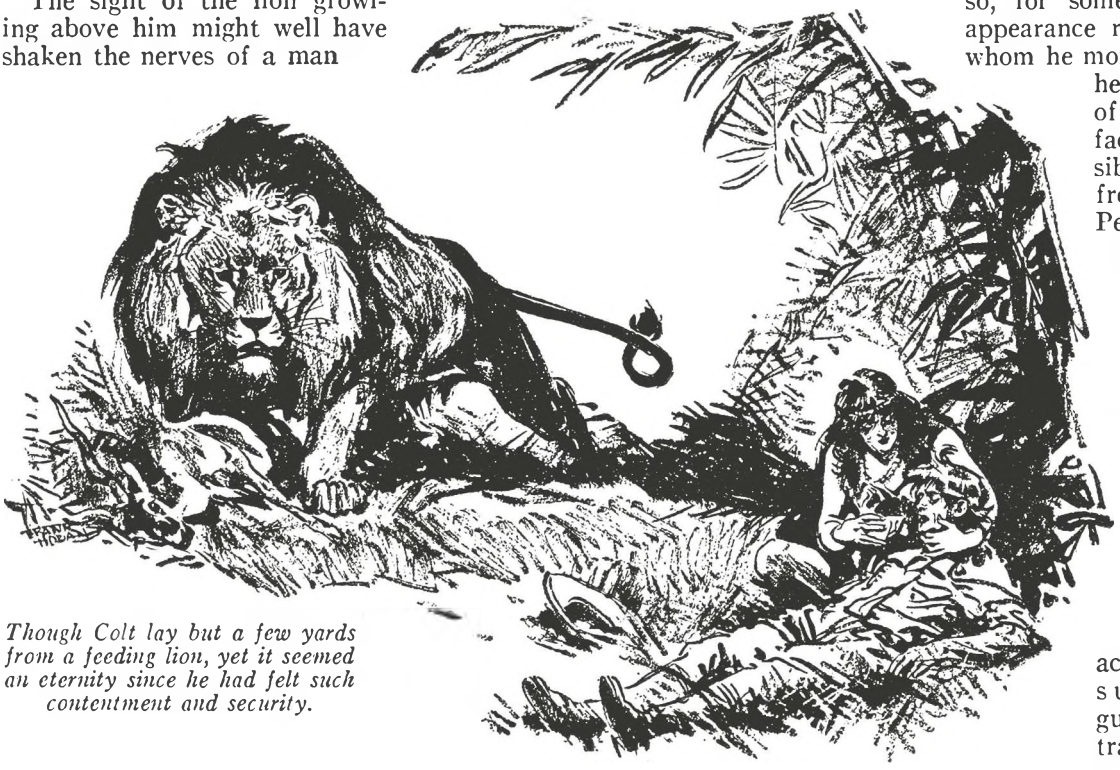
"Who are you?" she asked, in limping English that was beautiful with a strange accent. "What has happened to you?"

"I have been lost," he said, "and I am about done up. I have not eaten for a long while." Then he fainted. . . .

Jad-bal-ja the golden lion had conceived a strange affection for La of Opar. Perhaps it was the call of one kindred savage spirit to another; perhaps it was merely the recollection that she was Tarzan's friend. But be that as it may, he seemed to find the same pleasure in her company that a faithful dog finds in the company of his master. He had protected her with fierce loyalty and when he made his kill he shared the flesh with her, though after she had cut off a portion that she wanted she had always gone away a little distance to build her primitive fire and cook the flesh, nor ever had she ventured back to the kill after Jad-bal-ja had commenced to feed, for a lion is yet a lion and the grim and ferocious growls that accompanied his feeding warned the girl against presuming too far upon the new-found generosity of the carnivore.

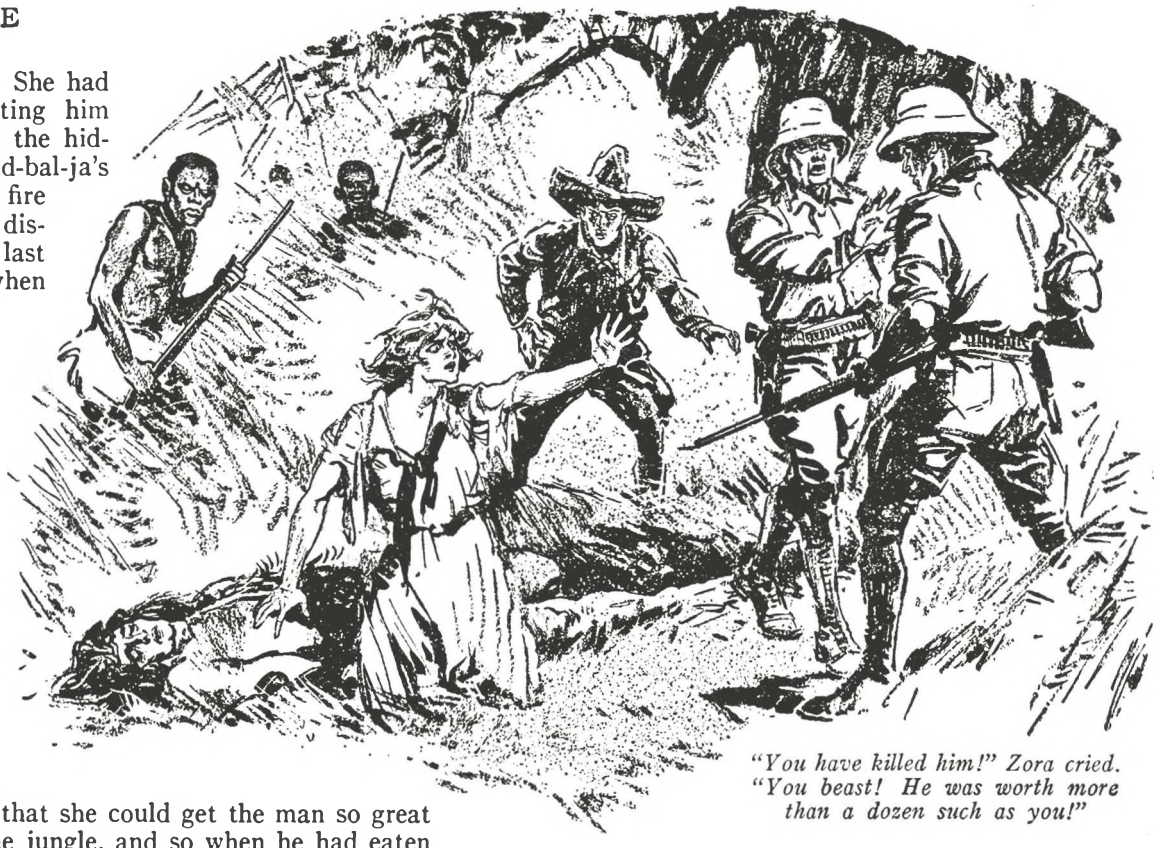
They had been feeding when the approach of Colt had attracted the lion's attention and brought him into the trail from his kill.

For a moment La had feared that she might not be able to keep the lion from the man and she had wanted to do so, for something in the stranger's appearance reminded her of Tarzan, whom he more nearly resembled than he did the grotesque priests of Opar. Because of this fact she thought that possibly the stranger might be from Tarzan's country. Perhaps he was one of Tarzan's friends and if so, she must protect him. To her relief, the lion had obeyed her when she had called upon him to halt, and now he evinced no further desire to attack.



*Though Colt lay but a few yards from a feeding lion, yet it seemed an eternity since he had felt such contentment and security.*

La tried to raise Colt to his feet and with considerable difficulty and some slight assistance from the man she succeeded in doing so. She put one of his arms across her shoulders and supporting him thus, guided him back along the trail, while Jad-bal-ja fol-



*"You have killed him!" Zora cried. "You beast! He was worth more than a dozen such as you!"*

lowed at their heels. She had some trouble in getting him through the brush to the hidden glen where Jad-bal-ja's kill lay and her little fire was burning a short distance away. But at last she succeeded and when they had come close to her fire, she lowered the man to the ground, while Jad-bal-ja turned once more to his feeding and his growling.

La fed Colt tiny pieces of the meat that she had cooked and he ate ravenously all that she would give him. A short distance away ran the river, where La and the lion would have gone to drink after they had fed, but she doubted that she could get the man so great a distance through the jungle, and so when he had eaten all that she dared to feed him, she left him there with the lion and went down to the river, but first she told Jad-bal-ja to guard him.

Near the river La found what she sought—a fruit with a hard rind. With her knife she cut an end from one of these fruits and scooped out the pulpy interior, producing a primitive but entirely practical cup, which she filled with water from the river.

The water, as much as the food, refreshed and strengthened Colt and though he lay but a few yards from a feeding lion, yet it seemed an eternity since he had experienced such feeling of contentment and security.

"You are a friend of Tarzan of the Apes?" asked La.

He shook his head. "No," he said. "I have heard of him, but I do not know him."

La frowned. "You are his enemy then?" she demanded.

"Of course not," replied Colt. "I do not even know him. I am an American; my name is Wayne Colt."

A sudden light flashed in La's eyes. "Do you know Zora?" she asked.

Colt came to his elbow with a sudden start. "Zora Drinov?" he demanded. "What do you know of her?"

"She is in trouble," La asserted.

"Yes, I know it; but how did you know?"

"I was with her when she was taken prisoner by the men of the desert. They took me also, but I escaped."

"How long ago was that?"

"The Flaming God has gone to rest many times since I saw Zora," replied the girl.

"Then I have seen her since."

"Where is she?"

"I do not know. She was with the Aarabs when I found her. We escaped from them and then, while I was hunting in the jungle, something came and carried her away. I do not know whether it was a man or a gorilla for though I saw its footprints, I could not be sure. I have been searching for her for a long time, but I could not find food and it has been some time since I have had water; so I lost my strength and you found me as I am."

"You shall not want for food nor water now," said La, "for Numa the lion will hunt for us and if we can find the camp of Zora's friends, they will go out and search for her."

"You know where the camp is?" he asked. "Is it near?"

"I do not know where it is. I have been searching for it to lead her friends after the men of the desert."

Colt had been studying the girl as they talked. He had noted her strange, barbaric apparel and the staggering beauty of her face and figure.

"You have not told me who you are," he said.

"I am La of Opar," she replied, "high priestess of the Flaming God."

Opar! Now indeed Colt knew that she was not of his world. Opar, the city of mystery, the city of fabulous treasures. Could it be that the same city that housed the grotesque warriors with whom he and Romero had fought produced also such beautiful creatures as Nao and La, and only these? He wondered why he had not connected her with Opar at once, for now he saw that her stomacher was similar to that of Nao's and of the priestess that he had seen upon the throne in the great chamber of the ruined temple. Recalling his attempt to enter Opar and loot it of its treasures, he deemed it expedient to make no mention of any familiarity with the city of the girl's birth.

The lion and the girl and the man lay up for the night beside Jad-bal-ja's kill and in the morning Colt found that his strength had partially returned. During the night Numa the lion had finished his kill and after the sun had risen, La found fruits which she and Colt ate.

"Numa will not kill again until tomorrow," she said, "so we shall have no meat until then, unless we are fortunate enough to kill something ourselves."

Colt had long since abandoned the heavy rifle of the Aarabs, to the burden of which his growing weakness had left his muscles inadequate, so he had nothing but his bare hands and La only a knife with which they might make a kill.

"Then I guess we will eat fruit until the lion kills again," he said. "In the meantime we might as well be trying to find the camp."

She shook her head. "No," she said, "you must rest. You were very weak when I found you and it is not well that you should exert yourself until you are strong again. Numa will sleep all day. You and I will cut some sticks and lie beside a little trail, where the small things go."

WHEN Zora Drinov saw her lion-man lying lifeless on the ground she ran quickly to him and knelt at his side. She had heard the shot; now seeing blood running from the wound upon his head, she thought some one had killed him intentionally and as Ivitch came out, rifle in hand, she turned upon him like a tigress.

"You have killed him," she cried. "You beast! He was worth more than a dozen such as you!"

The sound of the shot and the crashing of the body to the ground had brought men running from all parts of the camp, so that Tarzan and the girl were soon surrounded by a curious and excited throng of blacks, among which the remaining whites were pushing their way.

Ivitch was stunned, not only by the sight of the giant white man lying apparently dead before him, but also by the presence of Zora Drinov, whom all within the camp had given up as irretrievably lost.

"I had no idea, Comrade Drinov," he explained, "that I was shooting at a man. I see now what caused my mistake. I saw something moving in a tree and I thought that it was a leopard—but instead it was the leopard-skin that he wears about his loins."

By this time Zveri had elbowed his way to the center of the group. "Zora!" he cried in astonishment as he saw the girl. "Where did you come from? What has happened? What is the meaning of this?"

"It means that this fool, Ivitch, has killed the man who saved my life," cried Zora.

"Who is he?" asked Zveri.

"I do not know," replied Zora. "He has never spoken to me. I think that he does not understand any language with which I am familiar."

"He is not dead," cried Ivitch. "See, he moved."

Romero knelt and examined the wound in Tarzan's head. "He is only stunned," he said. "The bullet struck him a glancing blow. There are no indications of a fracture of the skull. I have seen men hit thus before. He may be unconscious for a long time, or he may not, but I am sure that he will not die."

"Who the devil do you suppose he is?" asked Zveri.

Zora shook her head. "I have no idea," she said. "I only know that he is as splendid as he is mysterious."

"I know who he is," said a black, who had pushed forward to where he could see the figure of the prostrate man. "And if he is not already dead, you had better kill him, for he will be your worst enemy."

"What do you mean?" Zveri demanded. "Who is he?"

"He is Tarzan of the Apes," replied the black.

"You are certain?" snapped Zveri.

"Yes, Bwana," replied the black. "I saw him once before, and one never forgets Tarzan of the Apes."

"Yours was a lucky shot, Ivitch," said the leader, "and now you may as well finish what you started."

"Kill him, you mean?" demanded Ivitch.

"Our cause is lost and our lives with it, if he lives," replied Zveri. "I thought that he was dead or I should never have come here, and now that Fate has thrown him into our hands we would be fools to let him escape, for we could not have a worse enemy than he."

"I cannot kill him in cold blood," said Ivitch.

"You always were a weak-minded fool," said Zveri, "but I am not. Stand aside, Zora!" As he spoke he drew his revolver and advanced toward Tarzan.

The girl threw herself across the ape-man, shielding his body with hers.

"You cannot kill him," she cried. "You must not!"

**Tarzan lies wounded and unconscious in the camp of his enemies. Read of his thrilling escape—and what happened then—in the forthcoming March issue.**

# CAMPHOR

*Three white men found their concession to exploit the Malay island was more of a challenge than a gift.*

*By*

## WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

"THEY were suspiciously easy with the concession, dear old chap. The only difficulty with our island is that it is infested by a pirate, and is owned by a Chinese plutocrat."

Mark Aldrich, the American manager of Pulo Mokko Camphor, Ltd., grinned lazily at Greville Kellet, Esq., who had made that ironic comment on their camphor concession. The Dutch Government did not give away these concessions unless they were something of a white elephant. The island in question lay on the horizon of the Indian Ocean dead ahead as their native proa swept toward it before the west monsoon—a tuft of green foliage jutting out of a sparkling blue sea. Eighty per cent of it was enormous camphor trees, a peculiarly gregarious species that occurs in thick stands or none, and always near the sea. Pulo Mokko was, as Kellet had hinted, an aggravation to the Dutch patrol boats—hence the prompt concession. A fortune in camphor gum grew there. But it had its complications, a piratical Arab dhow known to visit the island to pilfer all the gum it could when the patrol boats were somewhere else, and the plutocrat, who owned the entire island but had claimed he was unable to work it.

"On the whole I prefer the pirate," said Aldrich. "He has at least the virtue of courage. The plutocrat has not even that. He picks your pocket under the law—and incidentally makes the law that lets him do it."

Kellet, the financier, shook his head with a pleased grin. "Debatable ground, that! Involves all the difference of opinion between your nation and mine, old thing. Tariff and free trade, and all that, y' know. But our particular rapscallion—"

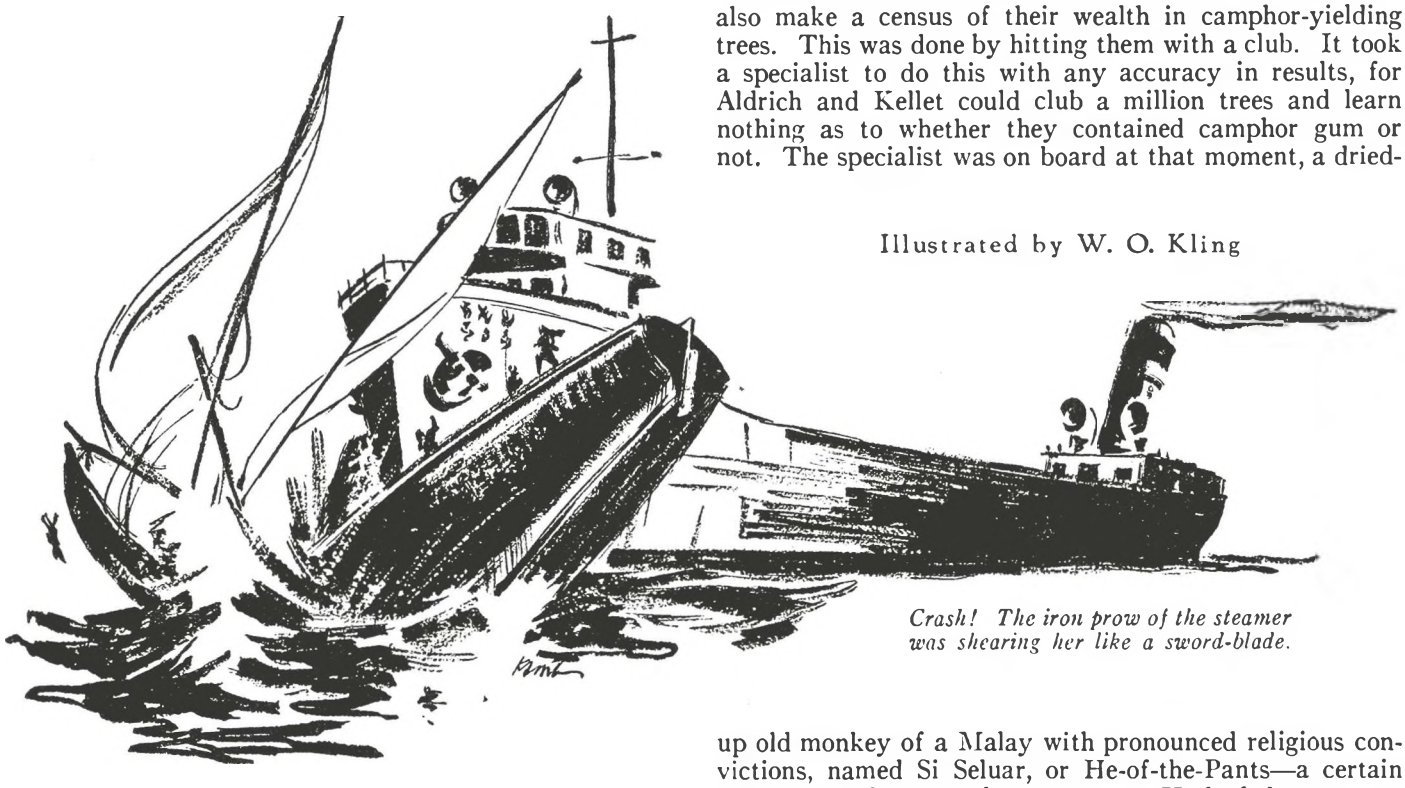
"Hush!" Aldrich laughed. "We're mentioning no names. But Kian Gwan, Ltd., of Semarang, Sourabaya, and Singapore—Majoor Oei Tiong Ham is sole proprietor. He's the sugars, copra, pepper, coffee, kapok, and all the rest of it. Also he's back of the Heap Eng Mo Steamship Company, those scandalous little tramps out of Singapore. And this island camphor he is unable to work—"

"*Bei!* It iss Nature's little irony to give you an island with no harbor and no water—and then grow a stand of pure camphor on it!"

That exclamation came from the third member of the concession, and the most necessary one—Willem Van Heusden, estate broker, in Semarang, and Dutch subject. Without him in this firm of three young business-men of the Far East no concession at all would have been granted

# ISLAND

Illustrated by W. O. Kling



*Crash! The iron prow of the steamer was shearing her like a sword-blade.*

under the Dutch East law. But Van Heusden was by blood and instinct a sailor. His first thought on sighting their island was of a harbor and a water-supply ashore. They were raising its shores above the horizon by now. As was expected, its west coast was impossible, the heavy Indian Ocean surf foaming high on rocky formations. The east coast would have coral reefs growing out, a fringe of mangroves, but no safe anchorage. And Pulo Mokko lay a good eighty miles out to sea off the Sumatra west coast—up near the Acheen end. No wonder the naval boats had become tired of watching the Government's valuable property! The concession had been given, with thanks, to these three venturesome enough to exploit it. The Chinese plutocrat had forfeited his rights for non-use, so their document set forth. Well, with reservations from Oei Tiong Ham's side of the fence, they were all agreed! He still had his fleet of rusty little tramps that went, heaven knew where, out of Singapore. . . .

"Poisonous place to get on with anything, the Far East!" Kellet guffawed at Van Heusden's disgusted observation on the ways of Nature in growing camphor trees. "Why are you so confoundedly energetic, Yank?" he asked Aldrich whimsically. "You might have been considerate enough to let the pestilent gum stop in the beastly trees! And then this valued representative of Peek, Frean & Co., Ltd., bankers, would have been still fanning himself in the Padang office. Here you go, letting me in for a pirate, shipwreck, snakes, a plutocrat whom I'll be bound is in cahoots with the pirate—and mosquitoes. Particularly mosquitoes! The rest are negligible."

The long and bony Englishman yawned and stretched his sunburned arms while a grin cracked the tanned features under his sun helmet. He would be all there in the pinch, Aldrich knew, but his pose was flippant, trifling, with any such serious enterprise as this. Van Heusden could be depended on as shipmaster. He owned this proa, a treasure bought in Padang for a hundred and thirty dollars gold, Malay captain and crew complete for thirty dollars a month and their rice. The task, as a preliminary to exploitation, was to survey the island, locate a tank site for water and a barracks site for Chinese laborers—also make a census of their wealth in camphor-yielding trees. This was done by hitting them with a club. It took a specialist to do this with any accuracy in results, for Aldrich and Kellet could club a million trees and learn nothing as to whether they contained camphor gum or not. The specialist was on board at that moment, a dried-up old monkey of a Malay with pronounced religious convictions, named Si Seluar, or He-of-the-Pants—a certain distinction where people wore none. He had the pants on now—violent silken affairs covered with huge orange flowers on a shouting green background.

"No can do, Tuans," he said with abundant gesticulations. "Lo, it is the island of Sif-ed-Din—may Allah wither his liver! Also there are *hantus*."

Some particularly atrocious devils also inhabited Pulo Mokko, it seemed. The old native had not been told he was going to this island to practice his art of clubbing trees, lest he bolt. He knew, now!

"May dogs defile his grave! May Allah destroy his dhow and utterly drown all his crew! Nay, murder is like the drinking of milk with Sif-ed-Din, Tuans! Ye are all dead men if ye land. Nay, I step not ashore, lest also the woods-devils entice away my brains!"

The white men guffawed at him, and Kellet said: "Would you miss them if they were gone, Si Seluar? And, my word, those preposterous pants of yours should be devil-proof, what?"

Si Seluar turned on him with fury. "Gibe not, Tuan! I take refuge in Allah; the spirits of departed and wicked rajahs haunt this here!" He sawed a violent hand at the island, now within a mile of the proa's bow. "They are buried in the trees. Yea, 'twas a custom of our people before the Dutch came. He who oppressed, robbed, tortured, put his folk in jail, was wrapped in bamboo when the wrath of Allah overtook him in his sins. Yea, he was brought out here by proa and buried lest his spirit trouble the people further. High in the trees ye will find the bamboo caskets."

"Important, if true," commented Kellet. "Check off complication Number Five for Camphor Island, Aldrich! Assorted ghosts, having frightful dispositions. Beastly go, what?" He grinned broadly at He-of-the-Pants, who lowered at the three like an offended ape.

"Upon ye, fools!" Si Seluar chattered. "Nay, I land not!" He stamped a horny foot on deck.

"Enough," growled Van Heusden. "You were hired to test trees. Beware, lest you break the Kumpanie contract and taste jail!"

Si Seluar cringed, looked glum, became sullen. He knew the dividing line, the Dutch master who had but to speak, and these other white foreigners who had no more authority than their own ready fists. In silence the group on the forecastle studied their island as the proa soared on in. It was oval in contour, about five miles long north and south, had the usual green fringe of mangrove swamps along its eastern shore. Low in rock formation, the great camphor trees on it made it seem high. Their boles, over fifteen feet in circumference, rose writhing and branched behind a narrow fringe of coconut palms leaning out for sunlight. Billions of small oval leaves having a long point or tail winnowed in the monsoon breeze like sparkling silver. Three thousand dollars the *picul*, of a hundred and thirty-three pounds, was the price for the product of those trees.

A glow of satisfaction swept over the three concessionaires as they viewed their prize. Even old Si Seluar perked up with the ejaculation: "*Kapur!* Never was such a stand, Tuans! But haunted—it is an evil place, the abode of malignant rajah spirits! It is taboo to our people since the memory of man."

Aldrich grinned sardonically. Good thing for the concession that the island *was* taboo, or the Malays would have felled and split up all the trees for gum long ago! As it was, the pirate Sif-ed-Din—who cared nothing for the souls of departed rajahs—had been the sole man doing business here in a small way—with one eye out for a Government patrol boat catching him at it.

THE proa came to anchor about midway along the coast where a gap in the coral reefs below water promised at least a landing for small boats. Her wooden anchor, made of a tree fork and a lashed stone, crashed down amid much shouting from the *jurugan* and his men. The three white men waited philosophically under the cool attap roof of the house on deck until the sampan was announced as ready to go ashore. Van Heusden retained his seat.

"I stay by my sheep," he told them. "You can trust these *kalassies* for nothing! One of us must stay—and I mount my one-pounder."

That treasure he had wangled from the navy yard in Sourabaya. One was not supposed to carry ordnance, where all was humdrum peace in Dutch East waters, but every yacht did—below decks. Van Heusden had a ring of stud bolts on the forecastle of his proa where the conical base of that little gun would fit. She was a handy boat for island exploration, there being not an iron nail in her and everything replaceable by what could be found in any jungle.

The other two nodded agreement with his decision.

"Right-o! Come on with us, Aldrich," said Kellet briskly. "Catch His Pants before he bolts and hides, I would," he added with a glance through the door, searching out Si Seluar. They went on deck to find that expert looking overside at another complication introduced casually enough by Nature herself: Sea serpents—the reef waters abounded with them, beautiful striped ones six feet long with an oar tail, green and yellow ornaments of the *peludo bicolor* persuasion measuring fourteen feet. As they were all deadly as so many cobras, this was not a good place to fall overboard in, nor even dangle a careless hand overside!

"My word!" ejaculated Kellet. "I thought Penang held the record for number and variety of sea snakes, but this island's got it beat!"

Si Seluar turned from contemplation of the snake school hissing around the proa's white sides and said: "Devils! Said I not the souls of wicked rajahs dwelt here? Come ye through the snakes, they leave them and take abode in other malignant forms. Ye be dead men!"

An intriguing but debatable superstition. Aldrich retorted cheerfully: "Thou too, Si Seluar! Get in the boat. No more grousing, now."

His look and tone caused the elderly monkey to hop. The *kalassies* splashed a free-for-all with the oars among the snakes and the sampan swept in like a leaf, drawing but nine inches of water. And the island *was* haunted; they found that out before she had hardly crashed into the mangroves and beached her keel on solid land.

They were inhuman, those low, quavering cries that resounded through the camphor groves beyond! Beings that had lost their reason—*lost souls*, the imagination leaped thus to identify them. The white men stopped, startled and listening. Si Seluar gibbered the one terrified word—"*Hantus!*" and bolted. But he was too late for the boat. The *kalassies* had backed off frantically. Not for their eternal salvation would they even beach their keel on this island of spirits!

At the slight scuffle in pinning Si Seluar fast, the cries redoubled. They came from everywhere in the timber—malignant, diabolical, a trace of animal snarl in them but so suggestively human that one got the impressions of maniacal ferocity such as is conceived by madmen.

Kellet forced a choked laugh as he held fast to the trembling Si Seluar. "Island's inhabited by lunatics, apparently! All we lack now is an earthquake!"

Aldrich pulled himself together in the demoniacal chorus of insane gibberings and venomous imprecations that followed their every move.

"It's an African species of lemur, of course," he said stoutly. "This island is all that remains of the naturalist's continent of Lemuria."

You could not tell that to Si Seluar! He knew every jungle noise, the whoop of three species of gibbons, the chatter of the pig-tailed ape, the little wailing lemurs of Malaya—and these cries were like none of those. They were *hantus*, the spirits of departed and fiendish rajahs buried here by their suffering subjects as far from home as possible! They had left the snakes and were now in the trees. A giant bole would crash down on them, presently, if they ventured farther!

Kellet lost his temper. "Come on with you, now!"

Slowly they moved on up into high ground, a vast gloomy forest where the sun never penetrated. Camphor was so intolerant as even to kill off the creepers and lianas. No orchids grew on the trunks; they were two-hundred-year-old trees, most of them.

FOREVER that diabolical chorus kept up with them, gibbering and wailing objurgations at every step. By no feat of peering into the branches could they discover one speck of fur that would betray the animal origin of the cries. Si Seluar shivered like a leaf and walked like a dead man. Nothing would convince him that they were not being spied upon by devils! He hung back, sweating profusely. Aldrich tried to thank his stars that this species of lemur unknown to Malaya had kept the island inviolate all through the centuries of their trading proas, but it was not a success. He would have given the world for those inhuman and lunatic noises to cease for just one moment! The Arabs, he reasoned, who visited Africa regularly, would make nothing of it as they were familiar with the supposed *djinns*.

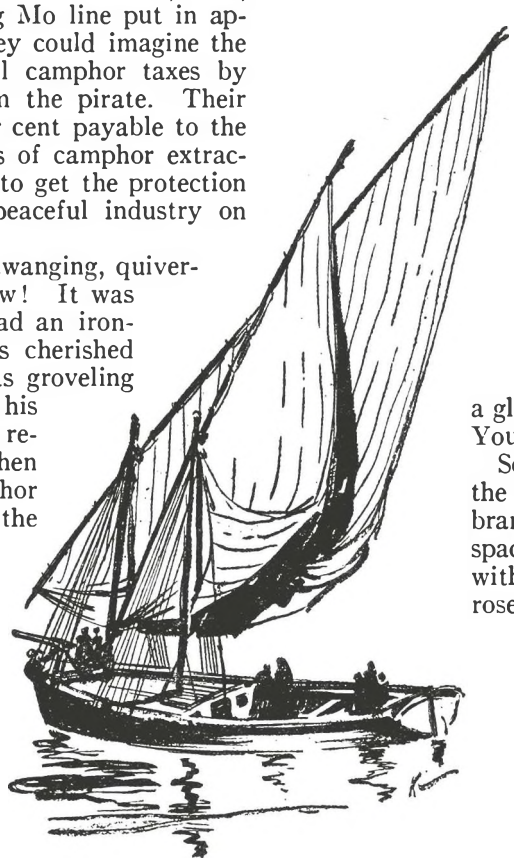
At length they came to something human, a giant stump cut across by a timber saw. The débris of a great trunk split up for the camphor gum that is found packed in the cleavages lay all about on the moldy forest floor. How long ago it had been cut down was not to be conjectured as rot sets in so swiftly in the tropics. Loathsome giant toadstools, of a sickly yellow green, grew abundantly on the spalls of wood.

But the saw-cut was significant. Arab work! The timber saw was unused in Malaya in spite of the efforts of the Dutch to introduce it. The native preferred his parang and *biliong*, or adze, and always cut down a tree by beginning at the top.

"My word!" ejaculated Kellet. "It would be a matter of interest, Chief, to know how long since our Arab friend has been here, what? A date on his last visit might give us his next."

Aldrich made no reply. His blue eyes were studying that saw-cut. He was a large, burly man and one of those really silent ones. His simple "yes" or "no" usually decided things. However, the lemurs had faded out of the picture before this evidence of the work of man's hand. Their incessant and obscene squalls had become a monotony of mere noise in the thoughts brought up by the evident presence here, once, of Sif-ed-Din. How long ago had the pirate dhow last visited the island? And, if so, had a rusty tramp of the Heap Eng Mo line put in appearance about the same time? They could imagine the astute Chinese plutocrat evading all camphor taxes by the simple device of buying it from the pirate. Their own concession involved a round per cent payable to the Dutch Government for the privileges of camphor extraction. In return they were supposed to get the protection of that Government, guaranteeing peaceful industry on their island.

*Thunggg!* It had landed with a twanging, quivering thud in the forest soil, that arrow! It was some four feet long, of cane, and had an ironwood head. It had torn Si Seluar's cherished pants in passage, and the native was groveling over a stream of blood flowing down his calf. The two white men drew their revolvers and looked all about hastily, then dived for cover in the writhing camphor roots that sprawled, ridged, all over the surface. And, as their eyes searched the forest, a long tail was seen to draw up gradually and disappear in a huge white fork about a hundred yards distant.



"Add monkeys who can shoot, Aldrich!" came a low laugh from Kellet. "Did you see the beggar?"

Aldrich was looking at the arrow. "Andaman," he pronounced it. "Ugly thing to let get in you! The head is studded with sting-ray bones. Neat idea!" he added with the cheerful enthusiasm of discovery. "To people the island with a colony of Andaman savages; quite Celestial, that! The Nicobars lie north of us but they are a peaceable lot. So he, or Sif-ed-Din, captures a few Andamaners and transports them here. Like putting a scorpion in your sleeping-bag!"

"The blighter!" Kellet snorted. "Can they shoot?"

"Some! Since childhood. Bow is over six feet long, and it takes a big white man to bend one, though they themselves are little black pygmies. They love trees. That tail you saw is much prized. It is all they wear, except two inches of bark around their middles."

The discussion ended with rather a blank perplexity as to their next move. They had been lucky the savage had missed one of them. He would not miss next time! And, being able to move at will through the great tops of the camphor trees. . . .

"I say! Jolly go, what?" came from Kellet. "We stay here and the swine circles our position. *Boppo!* One cannot lie on two sides of a root at once, can one?"

It seemed that one could not. Silence reigned through the camphor stand—unless you counted the lemurs. They were at it prodigiously. It brought one advantage; the Andamaner could not move either, without being the center of a moving orchestra of "lost souls."

"Attack's the story," Aldrich called out decisively. "We get this bird! Come on, Kellet!"

There was one thing to be said for camphor roots; they gave a passage along their knife-like ridges to the trunk itself. Once there you could choose another root and move out along it, concealed by a natural wood breastwork more than a foot high. A stalk now ensued on their friend with the tail and the bow. He was easily located; he had not left his tree and was being scolded by a ring of hyenalike cries. They crept up on him with revolvers in hand, as one would stalk a dangerous animal.

*Zing!* That second cane arrow missed Aldrich by inches. He had been creeping with his topee hanging down his back by its chin-strap. There was a violent contraction around his neck, an instantaneous release of breaking strap—and the topee lay pierced and pinned to the duff a yard from him. At the same moment Kellet's revolver boomed out and there was an instant cessation of all the lemur gibberings. Possibly they had never heard a noise like that before. The forest rang with it. A languid haze of powder-smoke drifted through the trunks. Then a glad cry came from Kellet: "Got him! Your side, old thing! *Mark!*"

Something was crashing down through the leaves overhead. It tumbled from branch to branch, fell swiftly through space, and struck a knife root near by with the crack of splitting bone. They rose cautiously and went over. There might be more of them, but this one was through anyhow. He lay, an ugly little black human of decidedly Papuan features, with nothing much on him save a string of bark having a long tail behind. His bow dropped a few seconds later, a flat dark piece of ironwood carved like an hour-glass with the waist of it the hand-grip. Aldrich picked it up. He was a strong man, but his best effort only drew the string a scant foot.

"Good work, Kellet," he said briefly. "Give me a nest of tigers sooner than these little devils! But we got to clean 'em out, as about our first job. I say get back to the ship and bring up Van Heusden and the crew."

"Quite," Kellet agreed. "No use looking for a *kongsie* site or a tank formation just now, is there? Get an arrow in us from this chap's relatives next!"

They were walking back warily, to collect Si Seluar, who had remained discreetly invisible, when—*Bang! Bang! Bang!* Up through the woods rang the sharp reports of a naval gun fired out over water. There was a

vicious punch to them, presently the distant pop of shells bursting. Kellet stamped his foot whimsically as they listened for more. "This concession's impossible, I tell you! That, old skin, is Van Heusden announcing Sif-ed-Din and his dhow! He might have given us a chance to clean up here first!"

They started running down through the forest, for the muttered spank of black-powder ordnance out on the sea warned them that Sif-ed-Din was starting right in with the tools of his trade. A Malay proa found at his island was a luscious morsel, for which he would give pious thanks to Allah!

The one-pounder was going rapid fire as they raced down to the mangroves. Smoke drifted up from her, ear-splitting noise. They could not hear the return fire from the dhow, but an ominous crash of splitting wood, the rattle of board planks, and the yell of twisted bamboo told that a solid round shot had raked the proa and it was open to doubt if she could survive. The naval gun stopped immediately after. Then came a second crash, like smashing a box with a hammer, and there were human cries, shouts in Van Heusden's voice calling to them urgently, a distant heavy boom out to sea following on the solid shot.

The sight that greeted them on reaching open sunlight was appalling. The proa was a mess, down by the stern and sinking, the *kalassies* crowding frantically into the sampan to make for shore, Van Heusden trying to stop them with stentorian shouts of command. The one-pounder rose crazily out of a nest of broken forecastle planks. Van Heusden was working at it with a wrench, unscrewing the stud bolts as fast as he could. This little naval duel had lasted just two shots, but the better gunners had won easily, even with their ancient cannon as a handicap. And out to sea to the north was swooping down a large Arab dhow with two forward-raking masts and huge white lateen sails, a typical dhow such as sails all over the Indian Ocean and may be seen in any Eastern port. This one bore a long brass cannon on her forecastle, surrounded by a group of tiny burnoused figures laboring with ramrod and tackle. Sif-ed-Din had arrived and he was about to fire the finishing shot. The dhow veered for it as they watched.

"Shoot — dem — *kalassies!* Shoot!" Van Heusden bawled. He tugged frenziedly at the wrench. Aldrich's revolver barked out. A native of the crew who was already casting loose the sampan's painter toppled and fell. The rest looked ashore anxiously. That one touch, the smite of a revolver, was what was needed.

*"Back!* Back to help the Tuan—all of you!" Aldrich ordered in stentorian tones. Kellet fired and there was a stampede. Van Heusden met them as they scampered back out of that boat; they soon were carrying the naval gun aft before his wrathful kicks and blows.

*Boom!* The third shot from the dhow. It came streaking over and crashed through the proa from side to side, a hull shot that showered up water, splinters. The proa was settling rapidly. Van Heusden urged them aboard the sampan, threw in a case of shells, and took command in the stern sheets. *"Dayong! Di pantai!* (To the beach)" he gave order.

THEY rowed with the desperation of frightened men. On the dhow that group of gunners were reloading with equal desperation. One lucky shot into that sampan would make matchwood of her. Aldrich, as manager of this little expedition, had to do some quick thinking now. Escape to Padang in the sampan? Or take the gun ashore and stand a siege, abandoning the boat? Either way was none too good. A two-hundred-mile row to Padang—and the dhow could sail them down with ease. Nor could the gun be used without its base bolts. Hopeless! But he could not part with that boat. Without it the snakes had command of the sea and no enterprise against the dhow could be attempted.

"Haul her up—all hands!" he greeted them as the sampan crashed headlong into the mangroves. "Everybody haul!"

She was a long, heavy construction of tapang wood and teak ribs, but she slid easily. They labored at her gunwales and foot by foot drew her deep into the mangroves. "That's well! Gun ashore, Van. We stay and fight right here."

*Whoom!* A solid shot crashed through the dense green tangle of the mangroves and hit nothing. It would be the last shot from the dhow for a time. Sif-ed-Din would anchor and put out a boat himself next—if they let him. The answer to that was to get the gun mounted as quickly as possible. Kellet was already calling to them. He had found a site on higher ground up in the camphor trees.

"I say! Topping place here, Chief! Jam the silly gun base between these roots and let 'em have it, what?" he was calling out cheerily.

HE had found the most peculiar fort on earth, a mere tree base—but what a tree! It was a giant camphor a hundred and fifty feet to its crown. They dragged the gun up there and found a pair of enormous knife-bladed roots meeting in a pocket where the conical base could be wedged in fast. The rim bit in as they smote it with oar hafts; then Aldrich took charge of it and aimed with care. Out there, not five hundred yards off, the dhow leaned on the port tack, already losing way as she came under the lee of the island. Aldrich caught the group of burnoused gunners over his sights and pulled trigger.

*Bang!* A spiteful bark, a jump of recoil springs that nearly tore the gun loose; then the distant bright flash of the shell.

*"Shoot-ing!"* Kellet crowed. "You Yanks! Born with a gun on your hip, what?"

That shell seemed to have done something to that brass cannon, for the thing had slewed around and was no longer pointing their way. The dhow let out sheets and hovered uncertainly, commotion aboard her.

*"Bei!"* exclaimed the Hollander with satisfaction. "That I had had some luck, firstly! What now, Chief?"

Aldrich laughed happily. "Another one wouldn't hurt. Can I risk it?"

Van Heusden rammed the base in farther with his oar. "She iss better than ever. Hass a groove now. Geev him one, Chief!"

"All right. Here's for his rudder." Aldrich aimed again. The one-pounder barked and its shell struck aft. Further commotion aboard the dhow—running about—the smoke of a fire starting. The three white men cheered exuberantly as they saw her fall off before the wind and turn tail.

"One more shot does it!" Kellet was urging tensely. "Go it, U. S.!"

Aldrich fired hastily. The shoulder pad recoiled with a violent and massive thrust; there was a crunch of broken bark, and he found himself dazed, stunned, and bewildered, lying in the duff with the gun all over him. The others had rushed to his help, a sudden silence in the yelling and cackling *kalassies*. None heeded the distant bark of the shell.

"Hurt, old man? . . . My word!" Kellet was helping him to his feet. The manager was rubbing an afflicted shoulder that did not cease to hurt.

*"Whoosh!* Too grabby!" Aldrich grinned ruefully at the dhow. "Collar-bone, I guess. . . . Knew it was coming to us with a naval gun!" They were picking it up and

cleaning off the mats of duff that choked up its breech mechanism. Van Heusden was feeling Aldrich for broken bones.

"Yiss. Collar-bone. She's broke," he announced.

"We'll have to do better, that's all," said Aldrich, brushing it aside.

"We're not done with the dhow. Look!"

She had gathered in sheets again and was heading across the north end of the island. Immediately the question whether there was a landing anywhere on that surf-bound west coast presented itself. Uneasiness replaced the feeling of triumph. To have her out of sight, to be taken in the rear by a landing-party coming through the trees—

Aldrich stamped his foot. "Now's the time for our boat, men!" he said. "Don't mind me. Van, get this gun mounted somehow in her foresheets. By golly, we'll have a warship of our own yet, if you can do it!"

He was weak and swaying with the pain, but he was still manager. The island was untenable. But if the dhow anchored and they went ashore for an attack—

Aldrich hobbled down leaning on Kellet. The *kalassies* were launching the sampan again under Van Heusden's vigorous driving. They hoisted the one-pounder aboard her bows and set it up in the fore sheets. Bolts! Anything to hold it down and the game was theirs! Never did Aldrich wish so ardently for just a few of those strong, simple fastenings of white man's manufacture as now when studying this problem helplessly. And just a few tools! This sampan, made of teak and tapang and rattan —there was absolutely nothing aboard her that would hold that gun for even one shot. It had a conical narrow base, with holes in it for lightness making four legs. The flange was bored for deck studs and it looked hopeless to white men thinking of bolts. The proa captain touched Van Heusden on the shoulder.

"Here is much good bamboo, Tuan. Thus, and so, may the gun be secured. Can do?"

Some explanation. Van Heusden turned with a relieved exclamation to Aldrich. *"Bei!* He hass it, Chief. Go ahead."

"All right. Steer north. *Oars!*"

They all gasped at that daring decision to follow the dhow. It might turn out unexpectedly in a dozen ways. But it was too long and too far the other way around the island. They should arrive pat, with Sif-ed-Din's war-party ashore, if at all. Within half an hour they had rounded the north point of the island and were cautiously scanning the sea. The dhow was far out on the western horizon. It looked as if she had left for good, but it was only her starboard leg, for, as they watched, she came about and was heading in again on the port tack.

And meanwhile Van Heusen and the proa captain had devised a contraption. Of bamboo and rattan it was, a pair of braces that crossed through the base of that little naval gun and were wedged under gunwales and breast-hooks of stout teak up in the sampan's bow. It had been rigged with much chopping of parangs and lashings of rattan, the holes for which had been drilled by bullets from Van Heusden's revolver. But it held the spiteful little one-pounder fast and made a respectable warship of the sampan.

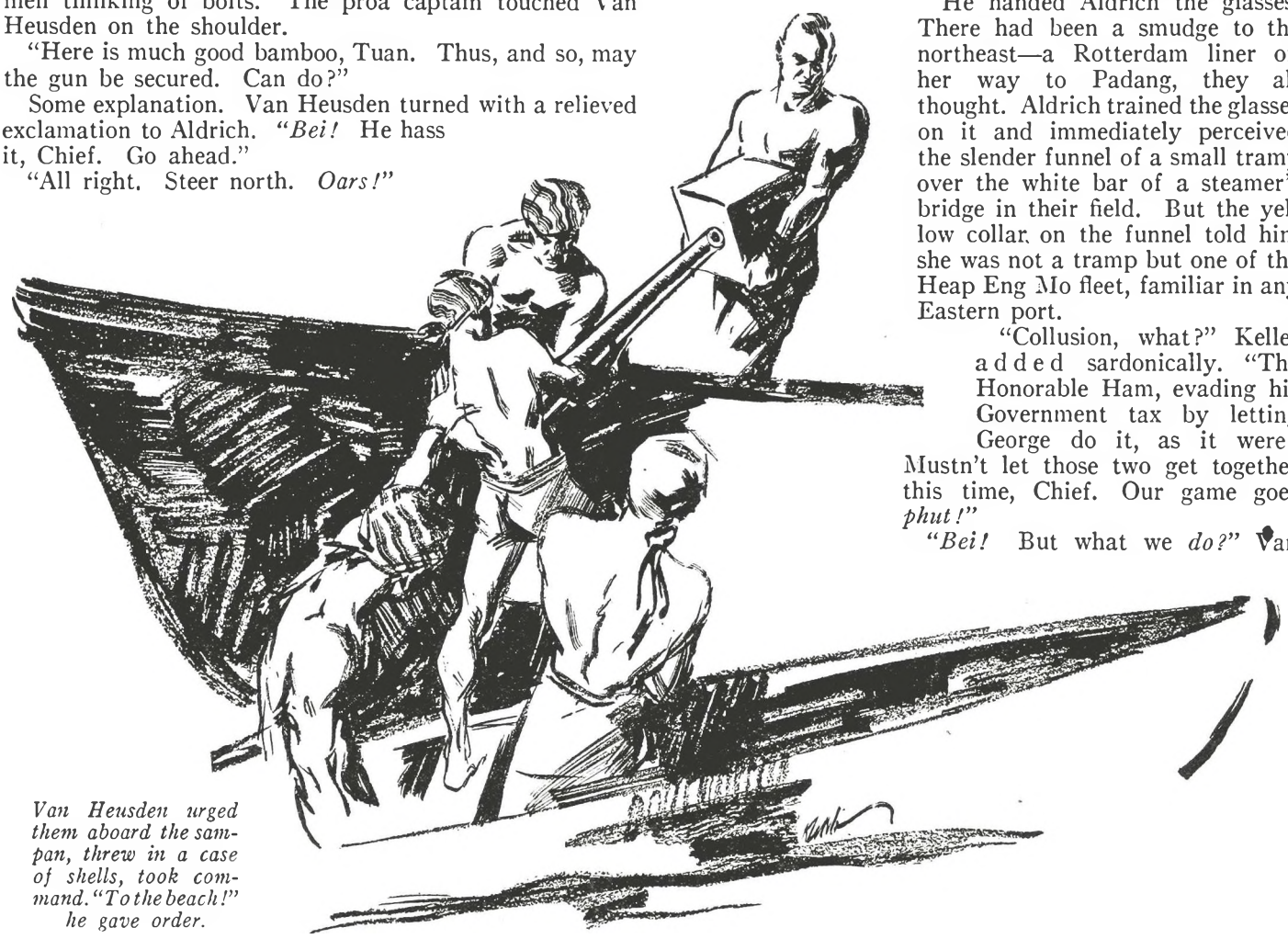
Aldrich laughed happily as they watched the dhow come soaring back with a white bone under her sloping bows. *"Sh-h-h!* Our meat if she anchors, boys!" gurgled Aldrich. "Cutting-out party! The Arabs are great on running surf. I'll bet there's a landing somewhere on the west shore. All they ask is a rock, or something, to get in behind. Most of 'em will be coming across the island to where they saw us last, and thirsting for our blood!"

Van Heusden laughed heavily and patted the gun. But Kellet had been searching with glasses all the round rim of the horizon to the north and now said: "Jolly scheme. But here comes Oei Tiong Ham himself, if you don't mind! Have a look, Chief."

He handed Aldrich the glasses. There had been a smudge to the northeast—a Rotterdam liner on her way to Padang, they all thought. Aldrich trained the glasses on it and immediately perceived the slender funnel of a small tramp over the white bar of a steamer's bridge in their field. But the yellow collar on the funnel told him she was not a tramp but one of the Heap Eng Mo fleet, familiar in any Eastern port.

"Collusion, what?" Kellet added sardonically. "The Honorable Ham, evading his Government tax by letting George do it, as it were! Mustn't let those two get together this time, Chief. Our game goes *phut!*"

*"Bei!* But what we *do?"* Van



*Van Heusden urged them aboard the sampan, threw in a case of shells, took command. "To the beach!" he gave order.*

Heusden broke out at this new complication. "She anchor by der dhow. Dere wass talk. It iss known that we are here. . . . *Ach, Gott!*" He eyed Aldrich helplessly.

The manager said nothing—there was nothing much to say! With the astute Oei Tiong Ham coming for his camphor, there was not much hope of any bull-headed landing of all hands to take the island. He would ask particularly about a boat, if any, left to the three concessionaires. And would take his own precautions. . . .

Meanwhile the steamer was coming in at a long slant that would bring her over to the west side of the island to meet the dhow tacking in. Aldrich did the one thing left him at present.

"Oars!" he barked suddenly. "Back her! We can't be seen here, that's a cinch!"

THE sampan backed hastily. Green, shallow water under keel, coral fans, spiny sea-urchins, moved beneath, seen clear as if floating on air. She backed over the reef and the fringe of the mangroves received her once more. That was better. They could see through the foliage that grew out indefatigably on the point in spite of the easterly monsoon seasons. A rock headland to the west shut off all view in that direction and presently hid the dhow as she passed behind it. The Heap Eng Mo boat was near enough now to study all details aboard her. Conical straw hats marked her crew moving along the rails. There was no gun in sight, but the bright flash of sunlight on rifle-barrels told that her crew was armed. A group of men in blue blouses on the bridge wearing visored caps were her officers. And among them a large individual, in shining satin blue mandarin robe, could be none other than the Celestial plutocrat.

Kellet cursed him with fervor. "Rotter! He doesn't trust Sif-ed-Din much, y'see. Not he! Comes armed, and comes himself to see that the Arab steals no camphor on his own. Now, how d'ye suppose they work it?"

It would be interesting to know! The concessionaires had their own procedure outlined, which was to establish a camp of coolies and cut in rotation the older trees sounded out as having gum crystallized in their fibers. All they needed was a tank to catch the abundant rainfall, a harbor blasted by dynamite in the reef, and a wharf. Evidently Sif-ed-Din went ashore with his people and cut where he pleased, establishing a lookout for patrol boats. Oei Tiong Ham remained anchored out near the dhow and tallied all gum brought out by the dhow's surfboat. He also had men ashore to see that no cache of camphor was made—for later, clandestine visits. This time they would first abolish these three annoying concessionaries who had arrived here with a gun and a patent issued by an exasperated Government. They would never be heard of again. . .

Aldrich said: "Gun—boat! Won't take long for Majoor Ham to make 'gunboat' of it! He'll be looking for us. Having a cannon and good gunners on the dhow"—he winked cheerfully at Van Heusden—"he holds Sif-ed-Din and the best of his men right aboard. Puts a strong party ashore, in case we stayed and built a fort or something. He wouldn't be fool enough to come looking for us in the steamer, either."

They puzzled gloomily for some idea out of it. To attack the two ships openly in the sampan was foolhardy. One shot from the dhow would sink her too quickly for contemplation, and they could not swim because of the snakes. If they went ashore there were Andaman savages in the trees and searching parties of Arabs looking for them; rather a handful for three men! The safe thing to do was to escape to Padang and come back in a wrathful gunboat, Van Heusden pointed out. They could make it in two days' row.

Aldrich laughed. "We've got to have a boat, that's certain," he retorted sardonically. "I wouldn't trust the Indian Ocean very far in this one. No—there are two sizable boats here. With an armed sampan we ought to manage one of them! Wonder if he has a searchlight?"

"No night attack, old thing!" Kellet objected. "Everybody would be home by then, and nobody asleep. Not a hope! I was thinking of our Andamaners. They must live somewhere. Straw huts. Most likely on this north coast. Now, a decent bonfire—"

"Golly, he's got it!" Aldrich yelped. "We have to clean them out, haven't we? Fire the huts. Night attack. Hell of a row! That brings all hands off the dhow to help their colony. Meanwhile Van takes the sampan and captures either the dhow or the steamer, preferably the dhow. Divide and win, this trip! One shot into his charthouse ought to settle Oei Tiong Ham, Van. And you're a magistrate of the second class, aren't you? Powers of arrest and all that? What say, men?"

Pulo Mokko Camphor, Ltd., agreed that there was something in it. They had the shank of the afternoon left to perfect their arrangements. The Heap Eng Mo steamer had passed beyond the headland by now to rejoin the dhow, but that conjecture of Kellet's that there might be an Andaman colony, in a circle of straw huts somewhere along this north shore, warned them not to follow her openly. There would be discovery by sharp eyes, messengers sent to the dhow, their game up. A scout to locate that village was their next step. Some of the bolder young bucks among the *kalassies* volunteered to go with Aldrich and Kellet. The rest were to remain with Van Heusden and assist in the boarding party.

ALDRICH turned for last orders. "So long, Van. We won't come back if we find this colony. Move when you see a big fire and hear the row. Right after dark, anyhow. We'll make for the east coast and fire three shots, so you can pick us up if possible before you attack. All ashore, Kellet!"

They stumbled through the mangrove mud and at some distance were in tall camphor timber again. A diabolic and guttural chatter found them out within five minutes and a stampede started among the young Malays, a retrograde jump, twitching features, rolling almond eyes, the dread word—*"Hantus!"*

Aldrich jumped to stop them. He had warned them again and again about these African lemurs, but it seemed no use.

*"Sermang!* Don't be afraid, ye weak-livered toads!" he stormed upon them. *"Sermang!"*

Kellet raged. "Ye buffaloes! Would ye flee before *monkeys?* Ye ticks! Come on, Aldrich, let's do it ourselves!"

The manager shook his head. They needed sharp native eyes with them or a cane arrow would find them first and it would be all over. But just then one of those same sharp eyes saved them, for a young fellow was pointing and crying out with glee: "Look, brothers! Lo, we be fools! *Lihat! Sermang!"*

They had spied the lemur, all of them, though Kellet and Aldrich could see nothing. They rocked with laughter, punched each other, jeered at those still faint-hearted. Aldrich seized the moment to elect that young fellow captain. "Come on with you, Mat Panku! Said I not they were but lemurs? And now find we the village of savages."

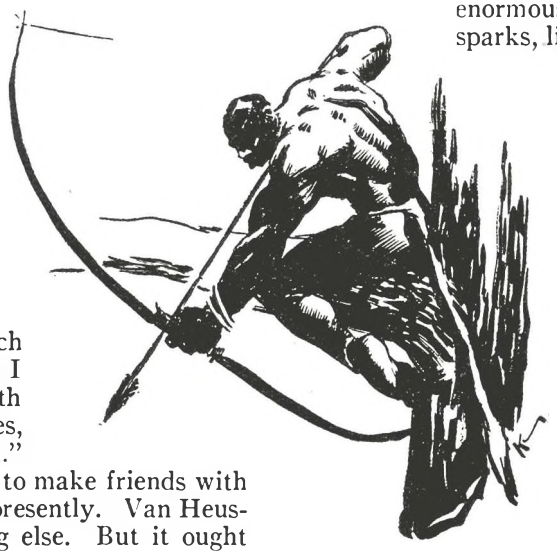
They were skirting along the tall timber, keeping always the sea and its fringe of coco palms on their right. The sun descended in the west behind striated banks of

black clouds, promising fine weather tomorrow. A peaceful and lovely scene, but it held Death in its heart.

So far not a disturbance or a discovery in the tree-tops. Aldrich guessed that the Andamaners had all gone to meet the party landing from the dhow, but he had not moved from tree to tree without a nod from young Mat that all was clear ahead. And then the Malay stopped and pointed. They were nearing that huge rock headland now and would see presently what had become of the dhow and the Chinese steamer, if nothing else. But there was a tiny white coral beach under that headland, guarded by reefs out to sea over which the surf rolled in white lines of foam. And, back of the beach under a grove of palms, was visible a group of attap huts like gray-green beehives.

"*Orang ulu!*" pronounced the young fellow with distaste. All wild men looked alike to him.

Aldrich and Kellet studied the huts. Nothing moved in them or around them save a few pigs wallowing in the dirt under the foundation posts. No women or children. No boat on the beach. These Andamaners were prisoners here as surely as if caged.



Kellet chuckled. "Not a bally squaw! Most inconsiderate of Sif-ed-Din—what? I fancy they live on the rice he brings them, and the issue of those pigs, and what lemurs they can shoot. There's nothing much else to live on here, is there? What I mean, they're none too friendly with the Arabs, Chief. Make us good allies, if we only knew how to go about it."

Aldrich shook his head. "Ever try to make friends with a wildcat? No, we'll fire these huts presently. Van Heusden's signal to come along if nothing else. But it ought to start something— *Psst!*"

That warning hiss bade everyone take cover among the camphor roots. Voices were coming through the timber, the bark of harsh Arabic, guttural grunts. Aldrich jumped to the realization that they had not much time left if they were going to fire those huts. It would be impossible to get near them in a few minutes more.

"Wait here for me, Kellet," he said. "Rush 'em if I get cornered anywhere. I'm starting our show *now!*"

He was off at a run, a hundred yards to go. He reached the beach, raced along under the coco palms, turned in to dash for the clearing of huts. Howls broke out in the forest, Arab yells. The swish of long cane arrows hurtled past him as he ran. There were loud reports, and the buzz of Arab slugs. They were coming pell-mell, with vindictive shouts of discovery, with barbaric whoops.

Aldrich jumped the ladder into a hut, hurriedly applied a match to the fiber bed on the floor and pulled it up in a pile to take the flames. *Crash!* A bullet tore through, filling the smoke with splinters and leaves. Arrows ripped through the thatch as he flung himself flat on the bamboo floor strips. The flames leaped up fiercely, caught the walls, covered the roof with a sea of quick fire. It grew ovenlike, stifling, in ten seconds. Outside was turmoil, yells, the Malay *sorak*, bellow of black-powder guns, the rapid pop of Kellet's revolver. Aldrich jabbed fiercely at the wall on the sea side with a wooden rice pestle he had picked up. It was sure death to venture out that door, but he was being roasted alive in here. A hole appeared; there was a terrific inrush of air as the rattan gave before his blows. Outside was dark by comparison with the lurid interior. The thatch wall of a hut rose opposite. A little black man passed him, drawing his great bow, and Aldrich left off slapping out sparks to whip out his revolver and get him on the run. He himself burst out with that shot, fell on the sand, was rushed by a tall Arab aiming down a long gun at him.

*Bang!* The air seemed all fire and flame and smoke. Aldrich rolled over, his injured right shoulder shooting with pains, his left hand swinging the revolver. The man was upon him, an Arab knife gleaming in his fist. *Whang!* His revolver shot seemed to have missed, for the big burnoused apparition was stooping over him, his gun gleaming in the firelight as Aldrich squirmed away, trying to dodge the knife. Then something knocked him flat and Kellet jumped in, followed by the Malays.

"Cheerio, Chief! Hot place, what? On with us!" Hastily he helped Aldrich to his feet and they swirled around the hut for the beach. Behind them enormous flames roared up in smoke and sparks, lighting up the twilight like day. A strong wind rushed toward the burning huts and tossed the green camphor boughs high above wildly. Black men with bows and Arabs with long guns were moving through the smoke, searching, looking for them. And then came a roar of shouts and a fresh party appeared coming through the timber—Arabs in flowing white burnouses, Chinese in conical hats, all armed to the teeth, a great bearded man leading them.

"Couldn't be better!" Aldrich cried out enthusiastically. "Only —guess we retreat, Kellet! We've started the show, all right—"

"Where to? You mayn't ask *me*," Kellet laughed. "There's the sea, if you like. Four million snakes! If Van would only come along, now—"

But it would take Van some time to find his way in through the reefs to this beach. Only the rock headland remained. And meanwhile that large war-party off the dhow and the steamer had barged on into the village. They could see a fringe of those venomous little Andamaners being thrown out as scouts to locate these concessionaires who had had the presumption to come and take the present made them by the Dutch Government. Aldrich and his party were crouched down under the bank of palm roots that made a stop to the waves of high tide. It was hard to keep the excited young Malays down. They would be discovered presently anyhow.

Barbaric howls, a shower of singing cane arrows that swished low overhead and plopped into the bay behind them. Stentorian orders being bawled in Arabic, squalls of Chinese. Then out they came.

"Keep 'em together, Mat! That rock! Kellet, you with me. *Run!*"

They dashed along under the bank at that order from Aldrich, were pursued by a volley of shots, more arrows. Aldrich and Kellet brought up the rear guard. They had reloaded during the respite and now fired back through the palm trunks at the more forward of the charging Arabs. The palms ended abruptly at a steep rocky talus that shut off also the beach. It was alive with pursuers behind them. But here was darkness, stars overhead, the light of that hut fire only glinting through the trees. They climbed up swiftly through a dense growth of pandanus whose spiky leaves dug the flesh like thorns and kept

them guarding their eyes. The pursuit below followed them. They could hear shouting and calling, an occasional bullet ripping upward through the foliage. Then came bare rock and they stopped.

"All here?" inquired Aldrich in low tones. "How is it with you, Mat?"

The young Malay held up three fingers. *"Tiga perlukat* (three wounded)," he said. "This here is no good! Litty black man, he come. Arrow make bad hell among de boys."

"Right as rain!" Kellet agreed. "Question—do we wait here for Van to crash into the jolly old row? Or do we push on for the west coast and let him pick us up there?"

Aldrich considered. Their position here was becoming more dangerous every minute. A silence below. That meant that Sid-ed-Din's force was worming up toward them through the bush. And, much worse, the Andaman bowmen would get above them, given any time at all. It wouldn't help much to bring Van into it now. He was probably out there beyond the reefs at this moment with the sampan.

"We'll climb the rock and build a signal-fire," he said. "Everybody bring some wood."

THEY started up the smooth limestone. It was steep as a tent roof but had crevices in it in which tough roots had lodged a foothold. The hill slope, the jungle, fell away below them. The rim of the sea, dark, shining under the stars, spread out in a vast uneasy plain. Too dim a light to see any sampan out there, but they were all like so many black spots on this white limestone. Yells of discovery floated up, shots booming in the bush below, the smash of lead spattering all around. A groan came from one of the *kalassies* and he lay still.

"My word! Potted like cats—but we'll have to take it," came a mutter from the irrepressible Kellet. Aldrich climbed on up grimly. He had a bundle of dry sticks in his belt and, once over the rim of the cliff, could see where best to use them for a signal-fire. The rim rose sharp and ragged not far above him now. What would be revealed with that first view of the west coast of their concession interested him more now than the Arab slugs flicking the rock all around them. It was stormy while it lasted, but they could defend the top with ease. A siege? Or could they get down off this thing on the other side?

Aldrich crept up the fissure in a last smooth slope of rock with eager haste. He had reached the summit of the headland, was on top of the world, the dark sea on three sides below him. It was smooth and bare, that summit, smooth as Adam Peak in Ceylon. They would have a fair chance up here, for no one could get near a group of defenders lying prone except by a rush in force. Aldrich grasped quickly the topography as heads appeared over the rim, Kellet's topee, the tight turbans of the Malay *kalassies*. Not a mile off and below to his left were lights on the sea, the cabin portholes of the Heap Eng Mo steamer, the glowing lantern on the poop of the dhow. They were anchored together a short distance off shore. And there were ragged capes of surf-bound rocks jutting out from the cliffs there, with two rock islets forming a natural breakwater, of sorts—enough for a surfboat. About a mile through the forest for the Arabs to get back to their boat. . . . Aldrich conjectured that they would not give it up just yet. It would be interesting to know if there was any way down off this promontory save the steep climb by which they had all come up. . . .

Kellet and Mat Panku had joined him. "Mat, you've got the best eyes," said Aldrich. "Go to the north front of this and see if you can make out the sampan and Tuan Van Heusden anywhere; also any way back down there. Kellet, you take the rest and post them across the south end, so we'll have warning when they come up. I'm making a search along the west rim to find us a route down. Get going, fellows!"

Alone he hurried over to the west rim and looked down. It did not look too hopeful down below! The surf gnashed on precipitous rock far below and the descent was practically a cliff. They could get down, but Van Heusden could not dare let the sampan get within any jumping distance. Without oars one could not hold her against the surf. And it was like that clear to the point.

He walked that way, worriedly. Was this a trap they had gotten themselves into? It was exasperating! There lay the two prizes, the pirate's ship and the plutocrat's, easy to take if they could only be prompt with it. And here they were, all treed on a bare rock, with the oldest enemy of man, the surf, barring all hopes of success!

A cry came from Mat Panku. "Come, Tuan! The sampan!"

Aldrich raced over to the north front. Mat was squatting on the rim, Malay fashion, and pointing. Down below, paddling against the backwash of a reef that ran out from the promontory, Aldrich made out a long, slender crescent of black on the white foam. The sampan—the white figure at the gun in her bows was Van Heusden, all set for whatever might develop beyond that point.

Aldrich jumped into swift action. He had to stop Van at any cost. There was no visible way of boarding her down below, but that would have to be managed somehow. "Quick, Mat, some tinder!" he ordered and dragged the sticks from his belt and began breaking them up. The native reached for a tuft of stunted casuarina near by and pulled away a handful of needles. "That ledge below, Mat. Right! Get more!"

Aldrich struck a match and flame leaped up. The native threw on more twigs, dead leaves. Aldrich waved his topee in front of the flames, making their signal-fire wink. And, at the same time, a racket of shots broke out back at the south end of the headland.

"Can do, Mat?" Aldrich asked tensely, pointing downward.

"Yiss. As does the fly, Tuan! Or the monkey. There will be broken bones."

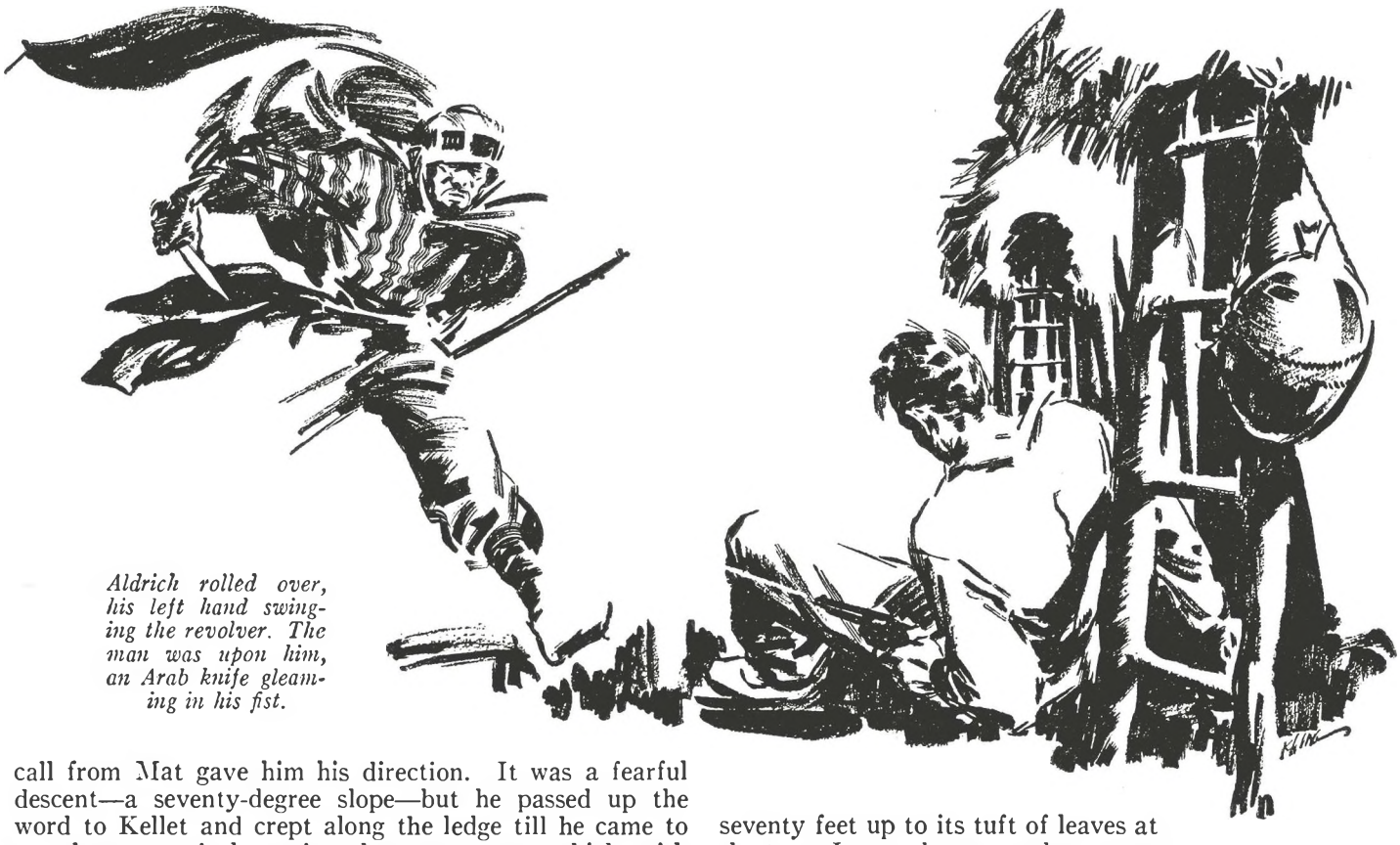
IT looked fearful to Aldrich, almost a sheer cliff. But vegetation grew all over it, every ledge and crevice occupied by something that grew—tough, tenacious rootholds. They could risk it; they'd have to! For the Arab fire was increasing in volume and slugs were howling by over their heads now, sweeping low over the bare rock.

Aldrich raised his voice in a shout. *"Oh, Kellet! Fall back! Quick as you can!* Lead thou down, Mat."

He could see the sampan turning for shore in under the lee of the reef as Mat's turban lowered into a nest of climbing vines. Van was waving his arms and shouting unintelligibly. His *kalassies* had seen the signal-fire and he had guessed the rest from the firing now going on. Aldrich lowered himself till his head was just below the rim, lest a spent bullet find him. He waited anxiously Stabs of red flame from musket and revolver showed that Kellet was retreating slowly—he and his crew worming snakewise over the bare top. He ducked hastily as a cane arrow struck a smooth swale near by and slithered rattling over the rock and out into the void below. Then they were running in a body and Aldrich had time for a brief word with Kellet.

"Sampan's below! We got to get down some how. Every man for himself. Ta-ta, Kellet!" He dropped hand over hand through the vine below and reached a ledge.

"This way, Tuan. Much-much bush *di-sini.*" That low



*Aldrich rolled over, his left hand swinging the revolver. The man was upon him, an Arab knife gleaming in his fist.*

call from Mat gave him his direction. It was a fearful descent—a seventy-degree slope—but he passed up the word to Kellet and crept along the ledge till he came to an almost vertical crevice that was grown thick with tough bushes. Down it one could drop by hand.

"Here a jump, Tuan. Must be." Mat was below and waiting. A precipice of twenty feet terminated that crevice. And below it was dense greenery. You could not but jump and trust in God. The native dropped, landing with a crash of tearing vegetation out of sight below. Then his voice. *"Baik!* No fear, Tuan!"

Aldrich dropped. He met yielding branches, the strong arms of creepers, came to rest giddily in the midst of the luxuriant, albeit thorny tropics. The rest was easy. They were in thick, dense growth where one just fell and crashed downward, rock talus making it all humps and hollows underfoot. Kellet and the rest began arriving. Presently they had all reached bare and broken boulders that marked the high point for storm waves of the northeast monsoon. And below was the sampan, rising and falling on an uneasy caldron of sea that would not let her get nearer than fifty feet from shore.

*"Bei!"* Van Heusden was hailing them. "Now iss der time, quick! But how I get you aboard? *Verdammt!"*

His tones had the helpless anxiety of the seaman much too close to entirely too many rocks. Aldrich and Kellet swore rabidly as they scratched their heads over it. A rope was the obvious thing, but no man could trust himself ten seconds in that water with its dense population of sea snakes.

"It's just a bit thick, our concession, that's what!" Kellet was relieving his feeling with humorous ire. "That blighter up there will be making back for his surfboat *ck dum,* now that we got away! They've seen everything from the beach—signal-fire, sampan, our whole show. And here we are, stymied! Well, here goes, snakes or no snakes! —Throw me a rope, Van!" he called out. "Stick at nothing does it!"

Aldrich grabbed him. Their concession had its difficulties, but getting snake-bitten was not one of them. "Easy, old-timer! Look!"

He was pointing at Mat Panku, who had said nothing but had possessed himself of a parang from one of the *kalassies.* He was chopping with it now at the trunk of a tall areca-nut palm that grew like a broom-handle for seventy feet up to its tuft of leaves at the top. Its trunk was nowhere more than two inches thick. These slender arecas were part of the scenery in every open space in the jungle—and had more uses than nuts for betel-chewing!

"Stand by, Van!" Aldrich called out happily. He could see the scheme at a glance, which was to fell that tree so its top would land swishing near the sampan. It was leaning out already and the natives were pushing on the trunk while Mat chopped industriously. And then it fell, with a whine of tough fibers, and its bushy top crashed into the caldron of boiling surf alongside the sampan. They gathered it aboard. Out along it Mat swarmed like a monkey on a stick. It dipped perilously. But it was made to withstand severe gales and he was presently safe across.

A cheer went up, cackles of laughter from the *kalassies.* One by one they all crossed and then the areca palm top was cast loose and paddles were dipped. Out to sea she swept, rounded the reef—then open water lay clear ahead between them and the anchored dhow and steamer.

"Now, den! Who say we are not der police force?" Van Heusden whooped triumphantly at sight of them. "Give way, boys!"

He hugged the recoil pad of the gun to his shoulder. Aldrich and Kellet crouched behind him with revolvers drawn. There was commotion alongshore, shots being fired out at them, but the full crew was driving her like a leaf and swiftly the distance closed up. At a thousand yards rifle-fire broke from the steamer. The sea was being combed with bullets all around them.

*"Now!"* barked Aldrich. "Give it to her, Van! Never mind the dhow. Put us aboard!"

*Bang!* The naval gun stabbed out a streak of fire in the night. The island echoed to its report, reechoed to the crash of the shell exploding on her decks. Van worked the lever and threw out the smoking cartridge. Aldrich shoved in a fresh one, a brass shrapnel this time.

"Careful! Don't wreck her, Van. We need that steamer!" he warned. They were sweeping in to short range. The dhow was anchored beyond her, so they could not see what was going on there, but to take the steamer was their first move.

*Bang!* Orange flare of shrapnel, clatter of iron pellets sweeping her rail, funnel, superstructure. The shooting aboard her had ceased. Aldrich guessed that the best of them were ashore and said: "Now! Put us alongside, Van! You go on and attend to the dhow."

In under the iron bulk of the steamer sheered the sampan.

"Come on, Kellet. Mat, you and your men," Aldrich ordered. They leaped up and swarmed over the rail. Shots, squalls of Cantonese, greeted them and a string of shots from some one up in the chart-house. Aldrich and Kellet charged him, leaving the deck to Mat. Up around the funnel superstructure there was cover, darkness. The chart-house rose with its bridge wings just beyond. Aldrich whispered: "Did you count those shots, Kellet? Six! I'll bet he's reloading. Come on, let's chance a rush!"

"Right-o! Crash the blighter, what? Get on with it!" Together they leaped for the bridge door and flung it open. An officer crouched by the wheel, fumbling at a revolver. He dropped it as Kellet covered him and up went his hands.

The steamer was theirs.

NOT so the dhow. They had hardly grabbed their man, when *whoom!* a great burst of orange smoke broke from her and the long stab of flame from that brass six-pounder.

For an instant the glare lit up all the surrounding waters. It showed spalls of plank flying from the sampan's bows amid a shower of white water under the crash of that solid shot. Van and his people were crowding back to the stern to raise her bow, lest she sink under them. The glare showed also a conical-hatted bosun and two men upon the steamer's forecastle working at the capstan wildcat. Instantly Aldrich grasped the situation. This Chinese captain was in the act of slipping his chain and getting away when they had captured him! A derisive cheer floated out from the dhow while yet the reverberations of their shot were echoing in the island. Once more they had beaten the white man, modern gun and all!

But their joy was short-lived. Aldrich shouted out in Melayu a sharp order: "Let go that wildcat brake! Quick, or I shoot!"

The bosun hesitated a moment, saw the gleam of a revolver bearing on him, then heaved at the lever. Chain rattled out. Aldrich grabbed the engine telegraph and set it full speed ahead. The Chinese captain groaned, chattered, cursed. But his engineers below had no clear idea of what was going on topside and immediately the thump of her engine responded, speeded up. Aldrich took the wheel. Straight for the dhow he steered. Yells of consternation broke from her, warning cries, shots, a frantic hacking at her cable with yataghans. She swung free. But she was broadside-to, and, in a few seconds more—*Cra-a-s-s-h-h!* The iron prow of the steamer was riding her down, shearing into her planks like a sword-blade. Her great masts careened wildly, her yards smote the steamer's bows like giant flails. Aldrich hung fast to the wheel-spokes in the shock that hurled men off their feet. Then he reached for the engine telegraph and set it at slow astern. "Guess that settles our concession, Kellet," he said quietly.

It did. They were busy saving life for the next half hour. The dhow went quickly awash and drifted off aimlessly. Van Heusden had backed the sampan alongside and his people were busy salvaging their gun. With it on the steamer they would be in shape to discourage any further attack from Sif-ed-Din in his surf boat. Swimming Arabs came alongside begging for a rope, were hauled up and made prisoners. And finally the surfboat came rowing out from shore. In it were both the pirate and the plutocrat—both full of peace. They hovered at a distance at Aldrich's warning shout. A colloquy ensued in the night. Van Heusden, as magistrate of the second class, heard the case, judged.

"Transportation for both to Batavia," he called out. "The Governor-general must decide. It's not for me. I cannot say even what will be done with this ship, Oei Tiong Ham! For you, Sif-ed-Din, you have peopled our island with savage Andamaners, you have stolen camphor year after year for Oei Tiong Ham, and both of you came here to drive us off with violence when that scheme to avoid taxes would no longer work. Those are our charges against you. You can come aboard, one by one, as prisoners, or you can remain in the boat and we will tow you to Padang, where I turn you over to the authorities."

There was a silence. Then a scuffle on board the surfboat. Sif-ed-Din, with the hot courage of his race, had gone to join his dhow under the waters, they learned, sooner than face the Dutch sentence. The Celestial, with a more patient philosophy, elected to come aboard. He would get off with a heavy fine—being a plutocrat, more's the pity.

Van Heusden and Kellet turned to the manager. "What now, Chief?" asked the latter. "Do we stay and finish up here? I'm game for a go at those little black devils. And let's get on with our census and the coolie camp. Let's order these blackamoors out of their surfboat and lock 'em up somewhere."

Aldrich shrugged his shoulders whimsically. "I'd say Padang first! It takes time to get anything done in the East. Bring back a gunboat and let her clean out the island for us. It's their work. We've done all we can for the first trip."

It looked that way; but at the first move of the steamer southward dismal howls broke out alongshore. Aldrich stopped the ship.

"By George, lets us out—that does!" he exclaimed with relief. "They want to go home! What say give 'em the surfboat?"

The Andamaners continued to howl. There was supplication, barbaric entreaty. They had been brought here by force; give them a boat and they would leave as quickly as they could jump into her.

"Done!" said Kellet. "Anchor, Chief! I'll take her." Persistent was the Englishman. He had a financial report to make to Peek, Frean, Ltd., bankers of the East, and it did not include an island infested by savages. There is nothing so timid as capital.

THE port anchor rattled down. They lowered the ship's boat and manned the surfboat with their Malays. A curious scene greeted them as they swept in on the surf ridges and made a little rocky cove in behind a guardian cape of bare limestone. One used to be met with arrows and defiance before the English took hold of the Andamans and made a penal colony of them. These little black men were of the same breed, but their bows lay on the ground before them and they were praying not to be marooned to starve here. Their foreheads were beating in dust. At Kellet's signals that the surfboat was theirs they howled and capered with joy; then leaped into her and were gone out to sea like wild animals given their freedom of the jungle.

Kellet stood up on the landing and cupped his hands to his lips.

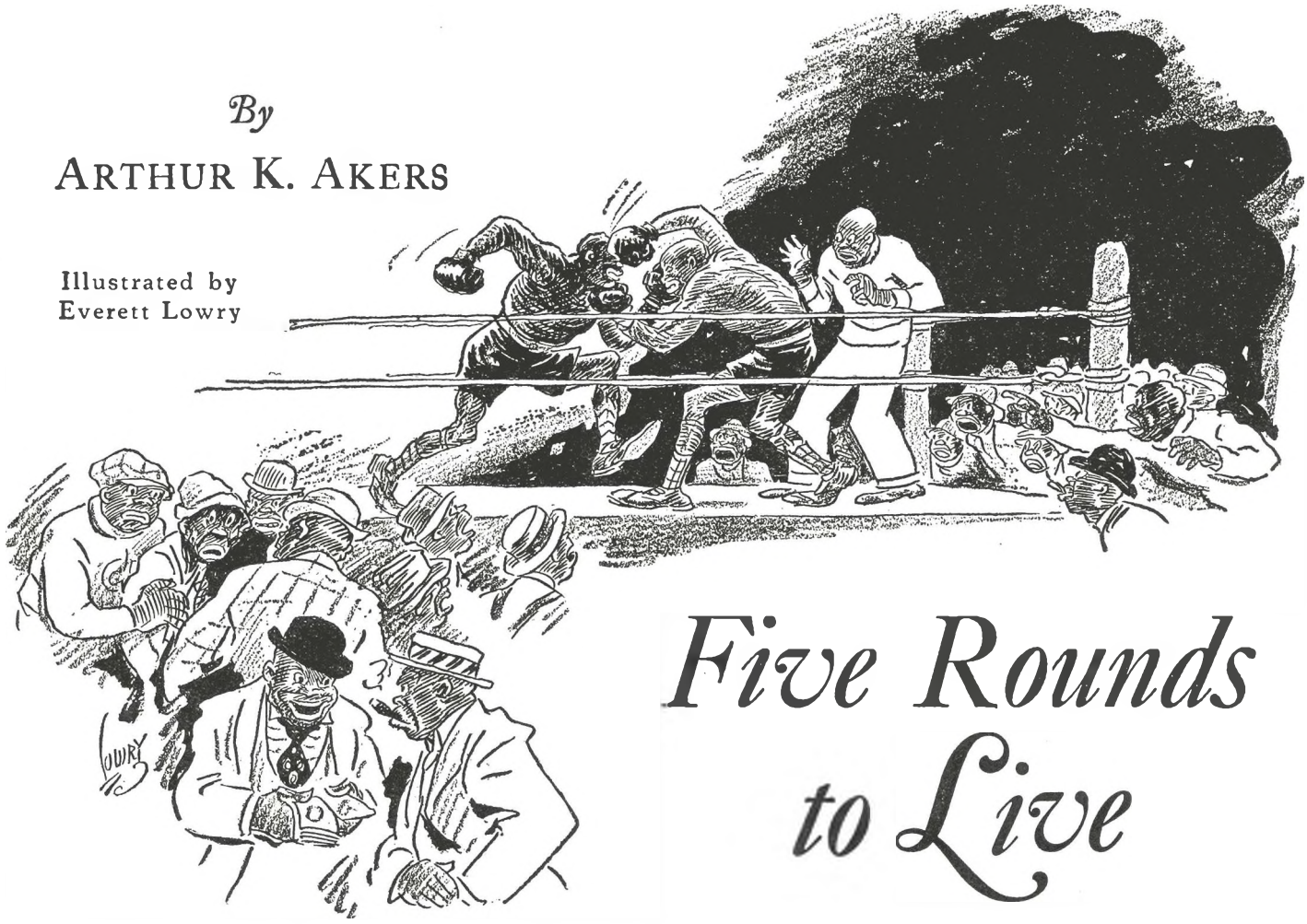
"All clear here, Chief! Quite!" he shouted over at Aldrich on the steamer. "We'll have a look tomorrow."

Camphor Island was ready at last for its camp of *kongsies*.

*By*

ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by
Everett Lowry



# *Five Rounds to Live*

A SHADOW about the size and color of the Liberian national debt fell across the floor of the porch where Gladstone Smith slept open-mouthed in the November sunshine.

"Le's see hit ag'in! And make hit snappy, long boy!" growled the creator of the shadow.

Groaning and blinking, the dusky Gladstone reached into his overalls pocket and brought forth a roll of soiled currency.

"—Fo'teem, fifteem, twenty—still all dar yit," totaled and verified the two-hundred-pound caller.

"Sho' is heap o' trouble, bein' honest!" complained the custodian of the cash, returning it to his pocket.

"Boy, you aint know nothin' *'bout trouble!*" retorted the counter. "A boy tried hold out on me in Bummin'ham once. . . . Dey been tryin' to git 'nough of dat nigger together in one place to hold de fun'ral over ever since!"

With which comforting comment, the oversized Mr. Willie Munroe, known in darker Alabama sporting circles as "the Memphis Buzzsaw," glowered down once more upon the gangling Gladstone and took his departure.

Yet scarcely had he gone when there was another shadow, and another request for verification of the cash balance on hand, this time by no less of a human mountain than one known in the same sporting circles as the Tampa Tiger.

"Tombstone agents follers right along behind me when I checks up—in case nobody done try to hold out on me," was the way the robust-looking Tiger summarized his attitude toward such moral lapses, as he took his departure.

Gladstone, his rest doubly ruined, propped himself against a porch pillar in order to be more comfortable while he regretted the spotlessness of his personal reputation. Unquestionably that was what had got him into this jam—the full and final flowering of Baptist Hill's opinion concerning him that, "dat Gladstone Smith so dumb he aint got sense 'nough to be crooked."

As a result he had been made purse-holder when the Hill's sporting element gathered and offered twenty dollars toward definite settlement of a difference in public opinion as to whether the Buzzsaw or the Tiger were the better man, fistically speaking—winner to take all.

Being experienced, these latter gentlemen's first concern was for the actual existence of the purse, followed by an equal interest in its continued existence. Hence their auditing system, in consequence of which Gladstone was being awakened at all hours of the day for a check-up.

Looking down upon the broad backs of the two retiring behemoths, Gladstone winced at even the thought of any red-ink entries in his accounts prior to the award of the troublesome twenty to one of them. Let anything happen to it, and the loser was liable to have to move over in the ambulance to make room for the late purse-holder, was all!

But, even as he dwelt upon such possibilities, a third caller hove into view—a new one. Preceded by an asthmatic wheezing, the Hill's own Wolf of Wall Street, the portly and saddle-colored Samson G. Bates, rounded the alley corner and puffed steadily upward toward where Gladstone uneasily awaited his coming.

"Mawnin'!" Mr. Bates addressed his prey between his struggles to get a full breath. "I come jes' as soon as I hears 'bout hit."

"I been 'specting you," admitted Gladstone gloomily.

"Idle brain is old devil's workshop," quoted Mr. Bates oilily.

"Sho' is," conceded Gladstone. So far the subject seemed safe, and purely academic.

"Idle money, now—hit's de same way," Samson spread a sound axiom out over more territory.

Gladstone put his hand over his pocket. "I aint got no money," he threw up the prospect's first defense.

"Trust funds,"— Samson seemed to ignore the remark, —"is mo' suscept'ble dan a monkey to gittin' froze to death. Millions in profits is lost annu'lly through de custodians havin' cold feet."

"Whut dat mean?" A mess of big words betrayed the under-brained Gladstone into interest.

"Mean when you jest *set* on money, hit aint hatch out nothin'. But put hit to work, an' hit earn int'rest ev'y day."

"Whose money?"

"Yo' money—my money—any money."

"Yeah, an' whut you gwine do when you craves git hit back from workin'?"

SAMSON leaned forward impressively. "Dat jest de p'int!" he seized on it. "But hit take smart boy like you to see dat."

"I's smarter'n dat," Gladstone ruined the call-money market. "I aint even put hit out—den I *know* I git hit back when I needs hit."

Forty minutes' further high-pressuring on Samson's part came out the same way. Gladstone still clung to the twenty. Wasn't anything Mr. Bates could say that overbalanced what the Buzzsaw boy and the Tampa Tiger had already said, it seemed, about the desirability of that twenty-dollar purse being right there in liquid and legal-tender form when the coming bout ended.

"You jest aint no *business-man,* big boy!" concluded Samson heatedly and hopelessly, in the end. Which was the worst thing he could think of saying about anyone. "Why, dey's a business side to ev'ything—but you so damn' dumb you caint see hit, look like!"

"All I sees is de size of dem two big black boys," muttered Gladstone stubbornly. "See you some mo'; I got go down he'p clean up de bank now."

"Dat all dey ever *is* let you do round a bank," Samson fired his parting shot. "—Clean hit up!"

In pursuit of what he had reduced to the exact science of doing the least sweeping and dusting for twenty cents an hour, in the white folks' bank, Gladstone heard a discussion between Cap'n Ed Rogerville and Major Ken Lee that vaguely smacked of Samson's statements shortly before.

"—Had it lying idle in the bank here, earning nothing," Cap'n Ed was reciting with some gusto, "until Jim talked me into buying Box common at forty. I sold it next week at ninety—cleaned up fifty in less than a week! I tell you there's no limit to this market!"

Gladstone shuffled outside with a wastebasket, and wished he could get the bank to keep the pugilistic purse for him. Only trouble was, that Buzzsaw boy and the Tiger would be all the time wanting to draw it out and look at it. Put it in a bank, and they'd worry the white folks to death. So the only thing to do with that money, after all, was keep it until they fought out whose it would be—which was a nuisance, but kept down any chances of the purse-holder not being able to enjoy his pot-liquor and cornpone for the next few days following.

With white paper costing what it did, Samson G. Bates had hated to do it. But with financial intelligence so totally lacking in a colored boy who was mulishly keeping twenty dollars in real money away from investment for a week, drastic measures were justified, Samson felt—no matter what the cost in white paper and yellow printing-ink, not to speak of physical exertion, as he puffed his way once more up the slight slope of Baptist Hill.

NOTHING — including Gladstone — seemed to have changed since his last visit. Again his purse-holding prospect slept with his mouth open on his sunny porch.

The rattling of bond paper aroused Gladstone as Samson went into action, and from force of habit he reached into his overalls for the fight purse. When he recognized his caller, he merely rammed the money deeper, and kept his hand on it.

"Aint ins'ted," he opened fire first.

"In whut?"

"Nothin'."

"Dat whut de matter wid you now," Samson was seemingly genial. "Hit's sho' sign of man whut got mo' sense dan most."

Gladstone opened both eyes in amazement at this. No one had ever accused him of having any sense before—especially Samson.

"When *dis* prop'sition come to a head," pursued Samson smoothly, "I says to myse'f: 'Gladstone is de boy fo' dis, beca'ze he need de profit, but he cain't run no risk—"

"N'r fast 'nough, neither, is nothin' happen to dat twenty," Gladstone clarified the main point.

"Ev'ybody know dey aint no limit to dis market," Samson seemed repeating Cap'n Ed's exact words. Oddly so! "Dat's de reason I done brung you de entire common stock issue, heah, of Tenn'ssee Snuffbox, preferred. Hit's dirt cheap at twenty—'bleeged to go to fawty befo' nex' week. And twenty's all you got to hand over to one dem big gorillas den, nohow. Keep de other twenty fo' yo'se'f: hit's more'n you makes cleanin' up fo' de white folks in a month. An' I can always sell a good stock fo' you fo' mo' while dis market so strawng."

"Lemme see hit," Gladstone weakened.

"I do mo' dan dat," purred Mr. Bates. "I reads hit to you. Says right heah in de big letters; 'De double 'demnity pervided independently from external vi'lent means is hereby made paht of dis pol'cy, an' waiver of de prem'um is ir-ir-irrecoverable widout remunderation to de stockholder.' Now dar—is you ever heah no stock befo' read lib'ral like dat?"

"Sho' aint!"

Gladstone's eyes shone until Samson felt repaid for having the printer copy all those paragraphs out of an old insurance policy.

FOR his part, Gladstone didn't get anything out of all those big words. But sure did sound noble—and like what Cap'n Ed had said to Major Lee. "Box, common," Cap'n had said.

"You sho' I can git de twenty bucks back by time de fight come off nex' week?" he craved reassurance once more on the main point.

"Wid a profit," chanted Samson avariciously. "Aint no limit to dis market. —Fo'teem, fifteem, twenty dollars—dat's right! An' heah yo' stock, big boy. Don't let nothin' happen to hit, in case you craves sell hit later."

"Elephants couldn't git hit loose from me," promised Gladstone. "Dem niggers too big to monkey wid. How 'bout readin' me some mo' whut hit say?"

"Aint got time. Sho' is heap of pressure on business-man dese days. Dey's a business side to ev'ything, an' I sho' got heap of sides to mine. Jest goes from profit to profit, like ol' bu'fly on de flowers!"

"Sho' is!" muttered Gladstone. Old stock took up plenty of room in a boy's pocket, but it still didn't fill up that empty place where a roll of somebody else's money had been.

"Got be gwine now," concluded Samson hurriedly. "To see a man an' frame up a li'l deal wid him."

He was five blocks away before Gladstone thought of something which he realized he should have thought of far sooner. What if those two big glove-and-gore boys didn't understand about stocks, next time they called to audit the purse?

This was a question that did not remain long dormant. Scarcely was Samson out of sight until the muscle-bound Buzzsaw was in it, and heading up the Hill. Gladstone had business ahead of him and in the same direction. Which was what threw him exactly in the middle as the Tampa Tiger and Memphis Buzzsaw approached each other, farther up the Hill. Absconding bank cashiers alone could appreciate how Gladstone felt. Over the fence beside him was a bed of lilies. And Gladstone kept seeing one of them next day—in his hand horizontally—while the lodge brothers marched back of him. . . . There would be a band, but he wouldn't hear it. Not after these two boys finished with him!

The Buzzsaw hailed him first. Not that it mattered which, however.

"Aint long now!" he voiced what was uppermost in his mind.

"Sho' aint!" Gladstone thought of the lily, and did the same thing quaveringly.

"An me an' de Tiger got so much else 'tend to," the gentleman from Memphis included the approaching opponent, "dat us 'cides not check you up no mo' now—"

Birds suddenly sang! Lilies were again merely flowers growing in a bed!

"—But, boy," the Tiger was talking now, "aint nothin' but yo' rep'tation keep us from hit. And, is you my own brother, I couldn't give you no better advice dan: *Have dat money wid you when de fight staht!*"

"Be dar lookin' jes' like a bank turned wrong-side out!" asseverated Gladstone huskily. . . .

Baptist Hill began to boil. The day of the fight neared, and the free play of public opinion concerning the probable winner began to be swerved and swayed by underground rumblings, fed and complicated by a mysterious appearance of out-of-town Buzzsaw money.

*"I got de twenty an' you got de stock. You done wipe' out, same as heap de white folks."*

To those who watched the mighty Tiger put successive sparring-partners to sleep without the aid of bedtime stories, there seemed to be but one conclusion possible—while to others, who had delved into the Buzzsaw's record for the cunning concealment of used hardware in both gloves, an opposite outcome seemed not only possible but logical. And to still another—and wiser—group, there came well-defined whisperings that there was a business side to everything. And this last group watched Samson G. Bates.

For his part, Gladstone Smith watched both ways every time he ventured forth from Kauffman's Alley. If either of those big boys changed his mind about checking up, some hospital was liable to be changing bandages on a good purse-holder every morning for a spell thereafter. All that Gladstone had to hang on to as he went fearfully to and fro was his memory of the heartening words of Cap'n Ed: "I bought it at forty and sold it next week for ninety."

Sure did listen good! And a boy sure did have to sit down and rest himself every time he thought about any other outcome.

Samson had gone to Linden. When he got back the first colored client he was going to see was Gladstone—who now was registering a pound less, from worry, every time he weighed himself on the scales in front of the grain and feed store. In fact, the day he had seen a huge sparring-partner carried from the Buzzsaw's camp and laid out on the grass to recuperate, he had lost *two* pounds.

Lust for profits was gone: all a boy craved now was to get out, at the market, or anything else that would put twenty bucks in real money back in his pocket where he could look at it. Also a couple of oversized fighters, if and whenever they cared to.

Somebody kept on betting on the Buzzsaw—for an out-of-town sport, the rumor ran—and no names called.

Samson G. Bates got back from Linden at ten o'clock of a famous and fatal November morning.

At eleven-five, Gladstone Smith was shuffling nervously within the Samsonian gate, to the spot where Mr. Bates sat in a porch rocker, reading a newspaper with big headlines. Reading them happily, for all was grist that came to the mill of Mr. Bates. And he needed just this! There being a business side to everything—

"Come in, Gladstone!" There was real joviality in his tone. "Come right on up! You looks jes' like a profit in long pants! How's de business-man? You *look* sick."

"Is sick. Caint sleep," admitted Gladstone mournfully. "An' cain't eat—fo' studyin' 'bout my business."

"Dat's right!" approved Samson heartily. Everything appeared to suit him this morning. A weight seemed off his mind. "Has to pay close 'tention to business dese days or you'll miss somep'n." His gaze strayed to the screaming headlines of the paper in his hand—happily, one might say. "Dey's a business side to ev'ything, jes like I says. Dat huccome you got so much to watch out fo' when you buys stocks. Whar at you itch de most?"

"Dat stock whut you sells me!" burst out Gladstone in a higher key. "Ev'y time I *sees* one dem big rough boys, I gits to thinkin' 'bout whut one of 'em liable do to me, is I aint got dat twenty dollars winner's purse fo' him after de amb'lance finish drivin' off wid de other one. Done lost my taste fo' dem profits; jes' craves—"

Samson's look was so sympathetic it stopped him. "Dat *last* whut you says sho' is a good thing!" he murmured enigmatically, his eyes on the headline again.

"—So I craves sell dat stock an' git me de money back," continued Gladstone agitatedly. "Heah 'tis. Sell hit cheap, fo' twenty dollars."

"Well, now," Samson spoke with a reluctance that concealed much, "*dat's* jest too bad! In fact, hit's jest awful."

"Huh?" Gladstone sensed a fresh cloud on his future.

" 'Bout de stock-market, I means," elaborated Mr. Bates sympathetically. "Dey aint none—"

"Aint no whut?" Gladstone's face was getting lavender beneath its brown.

"Jes' readin' 'bout hit in de paper heah when you comes up de alley. Says old market done bust right spang in yo' face—"

"Whut bust in whose face?"

"De market fo' stock. You done wipe' out. Hit say so right heah on de front page, in dem big letters; so I cain't give you nothin' on no stock. See?"

"Whut all dat got do wid dis heah yaller-printed stock paper you done sell me for dat twenty dollars?"

Samson Bates smiled cheerfully.

"Means I got de twenty an' you got de stock. You done wipe' out, same as heap de white folks."

"You means when de big fight over de winner aint git nothin'—not even when he come axin' me fo' hit?"

"Dat whut. Sho' is too bad."

Gladstone watched the Morning Star Baptist Church wheel giddily before him on its foundations. The Frisco depot was doing gymnastics too. Beyond them he saw in his mind's eye the finish of a big fight and the beginning of a big race—the winner trying to overtake him in the interests of mayhem when he checked up short on the value of the purse!

WITH Wall Street's latest victim dragging his personal wreckage dismally toward Bees' Knees barbecue-stand, Samson wrote down a well-stolen twenty dollars on the *Profit* side of his profit-and-loss account, and bestirred himself to make the daily round of his business interests. What happened to Gladstone henceforth came under the head of vital statistics rather than business transactions, so far as Mr. Bates was concerned.

His first call now was at the grove above the cement mills, where the Tampa Tiger had his work-outs. He had already made his morning call at the camp of the redoubtable Buzzsaw, with documents brought from Linden, ready for immediate execution.

At the grove now it was his good fortune to arrive just as Mingo, the Tiger's newest sparring-partner, went down for a count that lasted until the referee quit counting all the numbers he knew.

Samson pushed forward to where the Tiger leaned nonchalantly against the ropes above the flattened Mingo.

"Jes' put another five-spot on you, boy!" Mr. Bates whispered hoarsely. "Odds done clumb up to twenty to one on you. Dis"—indicating the yet prostrate Mingo—"bleeged to he'p hold 'em dar."

The sulky Tiger seemed neither impressed nor depressed by this. "How much you say I gits fo' fightin'?" he betrayed the total trend of his mind.

"You aint git nothin' fo' *fightin'*," pointed out Samson meticulously, "but you gits twenty bucks fo' *winnin'*. Gladstone holdin' de purse."

"Whut de Buzzsaw say?"

Samson moved closer, and spoke more guardedly. Even a knocked-out sparring partner might recover the use of his ears first.

"Den I gits de purse den, eh?" The Tiger again seemed unable to get his mind into the upper and nobler levels of sportdom after listening to Samson.

"From Gladstone," confirmed Mr. Bates patiently. "*After* you wins."

The Tiger's lips made motions indicative of mathematical calculations. "Jes' de way I figured hit out de las' time—keeps on comin' out de same way," he delivered himself of a conclusion that he did not pause to elaborate as the flattened Mingo began stirring in his stupor.

IN Bees' Knees barbecue-stand the final day before the battle, the wretched Gladstone parked himself on a rickety stool and sought surcease from stock-market sorrow in a double helping of fried catfish. All about him was big-mouthed conversation on one sole exciting topic, colored with speculation as to the mysterious source of outside betting money.

"Got to watch ol' Samson," was the prevailing conclusion in respect to that. "When somep'n lookin' fishy, Samson G. Bates got a hand in hit."

Gladstone wasn't interested. Whichever way it came out, he was doomed. All that was left to be determined was which battler hospitalized him after the call came in for the purse at the close of the bout.

Even the discovery of an unaccounted-for and unexpected dollar-bill in an unused pocket neither cheered nor changed him. Yet it might have, for let a boy have money in his pocket, ran Baptist Hill observation, and it wasn't any time before he met up with Samson G. Bates, day or night—as now, as Gladstone slid disspiritedly out of the barbecue-stand door.

"Well, well, well, Gladstone!" that portly porch-climber fell into confidential and friendly step alongside him. "How de world servin' you, nohow?"

Gladstone sighed dolefully.

"Jes' draggin' about. All you got do after dis is look on my tombstone to see whut day de big fight wuz."

"You sho' is need some way to git even, dat's a fact," condoled Samson thoughtfully. "Let's see now—"

"I aint need no way to git even—I needs way to git twenty dollars," interposed Gladstone succinctly, "between now an' de time de ref'ree hold up dat winnin' boy's arm!"

"You sho' said somep'n den!" agreed Samson altogether too pleasantly. "How much you lack of havin' twenty dollars?"

"Nineteen dollars."

Samson's ears stiffened. There had been some oversight in his operations.

"You mean you still *got* a dollar?" he queried solicitously.

"Finds hit after I buys de stock off of you," Gladstone's reply absolved him of negligence.

"Well now, aint dat fort'nate!" Samson fell into his favorite formula for initiating the further clean-up of a prospect. "You still got twel tomorrer befo' de fight; and wid de right investment—"

He was already pawing rapidly through the papers in his inner coat pocket.

"—Aint invest nothin'!" demurred Gladstone sharply. "Look whut happen de las' time!"

SAMSON shifted his attack. There was always more than one way to skin a cat—or a client.

"Either one dem big fighters liable git rough, is you aint got no twenty dollars fo' him when he wins, dat's a fact." Samson seemed to be talking to himself.

Gladstone shivered noticeably. He felt exactly the same way about it.

"And jes' one dollar," pursued Samson thoughtfully, "aint even enough to buy all de lin'ment dat you gwine need—afterwards."

A further ague testified to Gladstone's further concurrence.

"—So," continued Mr. Bates in fine frank heartiness of manner, "why not—jes' fo' luck—bet yo' buck wid me on de fight an' git some action to keep yo' mind off yo' mis'ry fo' while?"

"Aint know who to bet on."

"De Buzzsaw, now," suggested Mr. Bates suavely, "might win. An' den, ag'in, hit might be de Tampa Tiger dat'll wrop hisse'f round yo' neck at de end."

Gladstone hated such accuracy of metaphor. "Which one give me de most money is he win?" he drove for the important feature as he saw it.

Samson's lids lowered. Getting this last dollar from Gladstone was going to be easy too!

"At twenty to one," he considered aloud carefully, "you gits yo' dollar back—as well as a nickel mo' if de Tiger win."

"Nickel aint 'nough—"

"—While de Buzzsaw now, *could* pay twenty dollars fo' one."

Gladstone's mouth fell open and interfered with his hearing. Twenty dollars the Buzzsaw could win him! Twenty dollars was exactly what he needed! He got in his own way in his haste to push a greenback on the receptive Samson.

"Bet dis dollar wid you on de Buzzsaw!" he registered his decision.

Gladstone salvaged a used cigarette from the sidewalk and took stock. He was broke, but feeling better. Minute ago his chances had been a million to nothing in favor of his being an ambulance-case, no matter who won the fight. Now the odds had shrunk to a mere twenty to one against him. Even the arithmetic was coming his way! A boy never could tell—

*The Hill's own Wolf of Wall Street, the portly Samson G. Bates, rounded the alley corner and puffed steadily upward.*

At least not until he met up with Frisco. Frisco Johnson was a small, shrewd, crap-shooting darky who specialized on inside information. Big trouble with Frisco was not only the quantity but the quality of his data. As now:

"Look like you jes' found somep'n, Gladstone," Mr. Johnson hailed him.

"Sho' is. Jes' found out *one* way of keepin' from gittin' kilt."

"Huccome?"

Gladstone told him, with effective embellishments and emphases.

The effect on Frisco was peculiar: a sort of pitying expression that gave its object that familiar feeling in the pit of the stomach.

"Whut de matter wid dat?" Gladstone feared rather than welcomed any new facts.

"You say you done bet yo' last dollar on de Buzzsaw?" Frisco repeated. "At twenty to one?"

"Dat only chance I got to pay off de winner now—win twenty wid de one."

"And is you give no mind to huccome dem odds *gits* be twenty to one?" Frisco looked down from cold heights on the intellectual inferiority of Gladstone Smith.

"S-S-Samson Bates, he say—" essayed Gladstone uncertainly.

"'Xactly! Samson. Samson de boy whut do all de manip'latin'. 'Ev'ything got a business side to hit', *dat* whut Samson say. And he done manip'late dis too. He de one whut *git yo' Buzzsaw friend to sign a contract to lay down an' go to sleep in de fifth round!* Dat why Samson's anxious give you dat twenty-to-one shot! —Beca'ze hit *aint* no twenty-to-one, even: hit's a *sure* shot—fo' Samson! Wid dat contract he cain't lose—an' you cain't win!"

Gladstone's knees sagged suddenly, and his eyes glazed. Again Samson had sunk him! Again the deck was stacked against him! And if one uncertainty had been replaced by utter certainty—that the Tampa Tiger rather than the Memphis Buzzsaw would win, and want, the purse twenty dollars, there was no comfort in the knowledge! For he didn't have twenty dollars—and wouldn't have—Samson had seen to that!

From Frog Bottom and Lick Skillet, from Baptist Hill and Rock Cut, streaming up the Hill toward the cement-plant grove, came the customers of the bout. In one corner of the roped arena there, the Memphis Buzzsaw licked his lips and glowered professionally at the Tampa Tiger.

Attended by six seconds and two stretcher-bearers—the latter a fine courtesy toward his opponent—the Tiger glowered back.

Attended by three muscular representatives from each pugilist, purse-holder Gladstone Smith was also there. But not the purse. There was where the difficulty lay, a difficulty the mere thought of which sent gooseflesh shuddering over the sweating and frog-eyed Gladstone.

For the customers, it was an open and interesting question of how many rounds the fight would last. For Gladstone it was different: he *knew* he had but five rounds left to live! His grim custodians pressed closer. Even if they relaxed their grip on his belt now, he could never get through the crowd in time. The crowd might even take a hand themselves when they heard. . .

For the yelling onlookers it was the main bout: for Gladstone it was but the preliminary! The main one would come when one of those ferocious battlers started after him for the lost purse! Long would he be remembered around Demopolis—as the boy who bet on the loser in a framed fight!

Then the gong sounded.

"Stretcher-b'arers dis way!" roared the Tampa Tiger awesomely as he issued from his corner, flailing the air with mighty fists. "Buzzsaw boy fixin' to ride wid you!"

"Gangway fo' de doctuhs down dar!" announced Mr. Munroe, with equal ferocity, from his. "Aint aim to hit dat Tampa Tiger twel somebody git heah whut knows how to put him together ag'in!"

The Tampan's retort caught the Buzzsaw on the nose, and the battle was on—while afar off, the ground quivered as the Marquis of Queensberry turned helplessly in his grave!

Round One—prolonged by the referee for personal reasons—ended with both belligerents in a combined clinch and argument.

"Kick me in de shin jes' once mo', nigger, an' I slaps yo' gizzard out of you!" rumbled the Memphis Buzzsaw heatedly.

"Aint kick nobody twel you bit me in de laig dat last time!" protested the Tiger fiercely. "I aint no free lunch, aint keer how hongry you is!"

Panting and scowling, they separated to their corners and the ministrations of their seconds.

"Keep count de rounds fo' me, Highwater," the Buzzsaw urged a towel-wielder. "Dat Tampa boy liable make me fo'git myse'f."

Round Two was no better. At its climax a reluctant referee, yielding to popular clamor, pried the Tiger from his clinch with the Memphian with a length of scantling, kept handy for the purpose. The Buzzsaw was breathing hard.

"Quit sluggin' below de garters or I'll fo'git my contract an' he'p de und'takin' business to pick up round Tampa!" threatened the befouled Buzzsaw hoarsely, as he rubbed fresh shin contusions.

"You an' how many mo'?" growled the Tiger with biting sarcasm.

IT was in the third round that the odds began to be justified. The Tiger was all over the Buzzsaw, outclassing him until thrice Mr. Munroe hung loosely over the ropes, like a drapery.

A fourth time, under the impetus of the Tiger's terrible right, he went through the ropes entirely, and endeavored to keep on going—with the Tiger close behind him.

Madly cheering spectators surrounded a mourning Gladstone as, just as the gong sounded, they saw the victor

*"Le's see hit ag'in—and make hit snappy, long boy!"*

overtake and round up the vanquished, to drag him struggling back for the knockout that loomed inevitably now in the fourth round.

Then again the gong, for Round Four—the fatal round, but one, Gladstone realized. A few more minutes now—in the fifth—and the victorious Tiger's arm would be held aloft above a prostrate and defeated Buzzsaw.

After which Gladstone's imagination shudderingly resumed the job of picturing himself trying to keep ahead of a two-hundred-pound pugilist and a mob of skeptical spectators, while he tried to explain the stock-market crash to them!

Under stress of it, Gladstone's eyes were protruding like a crab's. Cold perspiration poured off him, while his knees vibrated beneath a mounting agony of fear. It was going to be murder: that big Tiger boy never would understand what the stock market had done to the fight purse! And a boy couldn't get loose. . . .

Gladstone's heart leaped wildly before it almost stood still. A great shout arose about him from bloodthirsty spectators:

"Come *on* dar, big boy! Git up from dar an' *fight!* Sleep at home, you big hound!"—a shout that was shot through with the reluctant drone of the nonplused referee: *"Fo'—five—six—"* Then, in a stage whisper, "Git up from dar, quick! I cain't count no slower! Seven—*sevum*, I says! Git up an' stretch! Eight—*eight,* you big fo'-flusher! N-n-nine—dawggone you, *ten*—an' you done lost de fight an' my fo' bucks!"

Thus the referee, while the wretched Gladstone's gaze strayed glassily toward his doom—and his eyes widened in amazement at unbelievable things! Either they or the referee had made a mistake! The hand being held aloft to signify victory was not the Tiger's. The Tiger—all contracts to the contrary—still lay sleeping sweetly upon the canvas. It was the Buzzsaw to whom Gladstone would have to explain so shortly about the absence of his hard-won twenty dollars!

And then another revelation and realization that rocked him! There would not need to be explanations! The *Buzzsaw* had won—with twenty to one against him. Gladstone's winnings equaled the purse. And the purse-holder could pay off after all!

NIGHT fell soothingly upon yet-unsolved mysteries and upon Baptist Hill. Wassail and whoopee distinguished Bees' Knees barbecue-establishment wherein Gladstone, the late purse-holder, and the mighty Buzzsaw the purse-winner, buddied amicably amid new admirers.

"Have li'l mo' de ba'becue, Gladstone—dey's plenty of dat twenty bucks lef' yet!" the Buzzsaw pressed nourishment upon his friend.

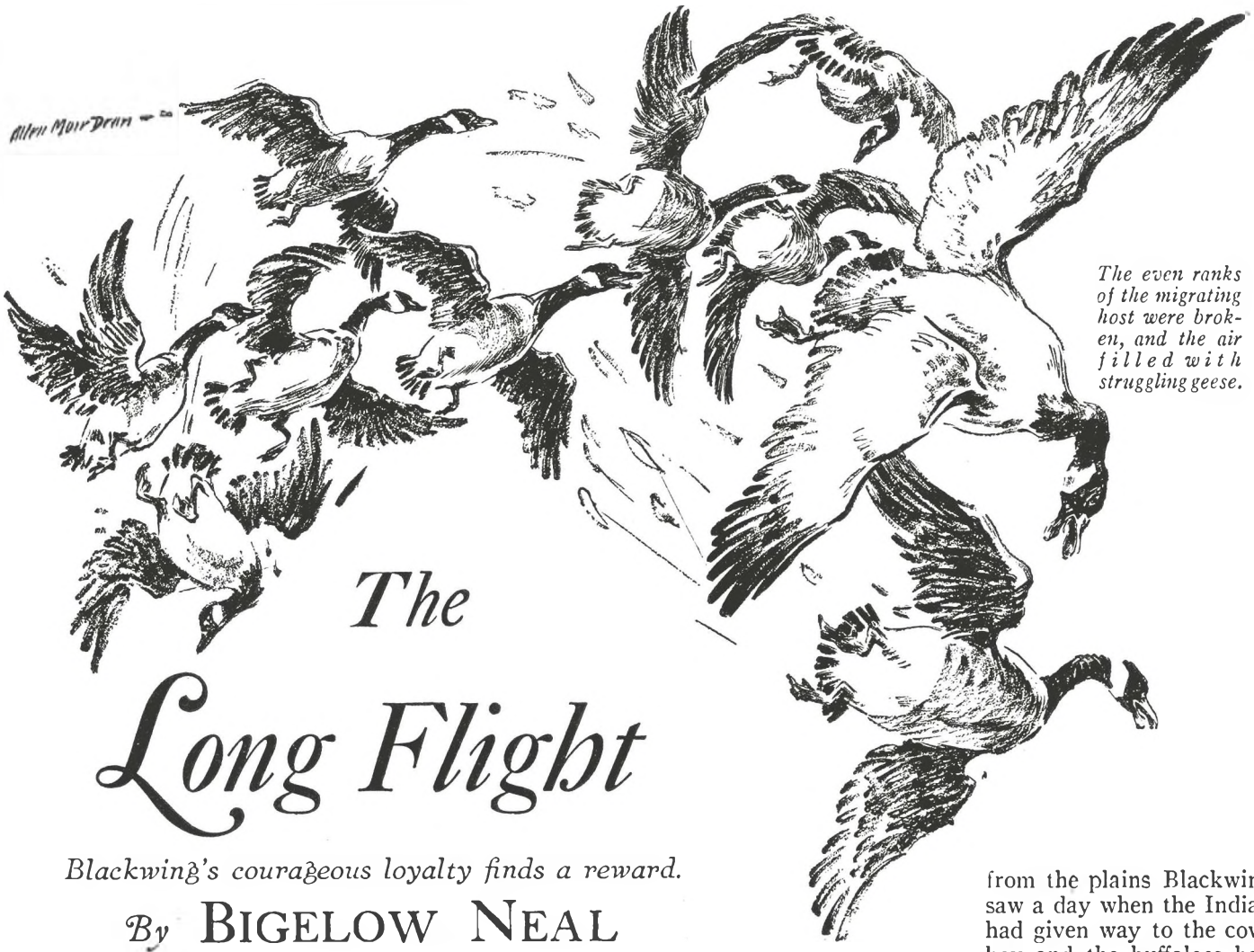
"Got dollar lef' my ownse'f!" boasted Gladstone, magnificent in victory. "Huccome dat Tiger boy fall down so hard, Buzzsaw, when you soaks him in de *fo'th* round? I thought de fight wuz framed fo' *him* to win—in de fifth!"

"Hit wuz," admitted the Buzzsaw above his barbecue, "but look like dey's a business side to ev'ything. I's honest to de fifth round my ownse'f, but dat Tiger boy had got to studyin' round an' addin' up twel he done figure out dey wuz mo' money fo' him in gittin' some strange niggers to bet his money on me—an' den him not lastin' quite so long. He had five dollars up on me, dat way, at twenty to one—and old purse wa'n't but twenty if he win it."

"Yeah—an' hit come dawggone' near not bein' *dat!*" breathed Gladstone inadvertently.

"Huh?"

"Says let's go see if Samson calm down yit an' quit stompin' on he hat!"



*The even ranks of the migrating host were broken, and the air filled with struggling geese.*

# The Long Flight

*Blackwing's courageous loyalty finds a reward.*

By BIGELOW NEAL

Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean

NEARLY two thousand feet above the plains of Kansas, a winged host moved steadily toward the North. It was the spring flight of the geese, and they swept across the starlit sky in great inverted, interlocking Vs, and in some the wavering lines stretched half a mile or more from the apex to either side.

At the head of the leading formation a white gander led the flight. Among all the countless thousands, where gray goose followed gray goose from the leaders to the last in line, he alone was clothed in spotless white; the whiteness of his breast and back and throat was accented and made to stand out in bold relief by the fact that the tips of his wings, his slender neck and his head were of an unbroken and glossy black. So many times had he crossed and recrossed the prairies of the West, always following the same line of migration, that men had come to call him Blackwing from the markings of his wings.

During the seventy-odd years when, with the first balmy day of spring and the first snowflight of autumn, he had led the seasonal migrations of his kind, the black-and-white leader had become known from Texas to Dakota, and some said, even as far north as the shores of Hudson Bay. He had crossed and recrossed the prairies of the Northwest when herds of bellowing buffaloes plodded in his wake and the only signs of men came from the glow of campfires or the rhythmic beating of tom-toms far below. Then came a spring when strange white birds moved on the rivers of the West and towering columns of smoke from their stacks stung the eyes and nostrils of the feathered folk. With them too came days and nights when the peace of the prairies was broken by the echo of rifle-shots, and the serenity of centuries gave way to warfare between red men and white. Later, when the smoke of conflict had drifted from the plains Blackwing saw a day when the Indian had given way to the cowboy and the buffaloes had been replaced by herds of cattle. Lastly he had led the great flocks of his kind on their northward flight, on a day when the cowboy in turn had gone and the green and gold of the prairies had given way before the moldboard of the breaking-plow.

In his time the black-winged gander had dodged the lances of the Sioux and had heard the hiss of arrows in the land of the Gros-Ventre and Arickarah. He had learned to climb high above the cowboy to avoid the threat of the rifle, and of late his days had become one long period of watchfulness in a game where the automatic shotgun made the stakes a ceaseless question of life or death.

Tonight, as the powerful wings of the bird drove him farther and farther into the North, it was not danger in the abstract which he feared; rather it was a specific and living threat which he knew all too well awaited him. Unlike most of his kind he had a definite and unavoidable destination.

The rest might go wherever they willed; he, because of what had once been loyalty to the living, was impelled by an instinctive yearning greater than he could control directly to the place where he had last seen his mate. If he thought of the many times in the past when nothing but the craft developed by nearly eighty years of experience had saved his life from the man who lived on the crescent-shaped shores of the Lake of the Painted Woods and who had tried again and again to take the life of the black and white gander, for no better reason than the beauty of his coloring alone, the thought was purely secondary and did not influence his flight in the least. Even had he known that the hunter of oddities had a plan for the coming season which if carried to maturity would add the great bird to his ever-growing collection of mounted specimens, yet that loyalty which appears to set geese apart from others

of the feathered folk would have driven the gander directly to his death.

To him the proposition was simple indeed: There he had seen her last—and because he knew nothing of the mystery of death, there she must still be.

The plains of Kansas had slipped beneath and lay behind. They were over Nebraska now, nearly five hundred miles from their starting-point and still those thousands of untiring wings cut through the air with a low, ceaseless roar. There were other tones too, a high-pitched whistle, shrill and clear, from flight feathers vibrating in the rushing air and occasionally here and there the mellow call of mate to mate.

Once the old leader turned his head and glanced behind. He had felt the feathery touch of a wing-tip against his tail. He could remember when *she* had done that too, and many times, for often when danger threatened or when fogs or blizzards shut down about them she would crowd so closely to him that he could feel the rush of air from her wings.

But now, as he turned his head, he saw only another gander and he uttered a single warning note.

Dawn came. Nebraska and South Dakota had slipped behind. It was colder too and, far below, delicate lines of snow still penciled the hills like hoary eyebrows along their crests.

With the first flare of crimson from the eastern horizon, the great flight reached an area of low-hanging fogs. For a time the leader held his altitude passing from thick clouds, where moisture gathered on his feathers in glistening beads, to reaches of golden light where the beads glided from his feathers to fall like glittering diamonds toward the earth.

Presently they were out of the fogs and below them for mile after mile stretched the endless yellow and brown of the stubble. Over a field which had evidently been too thin to cut the fall before and where the unmistakable odor of grain rose on the morning air, Blackwing stopped the beat of his wings for the first time in nearly a thousand miles; they were held partly curved and rigid now, and as the multitude in the ranks behind imitated his example the roar died away and the whine of air on swiftly moving feathers took its place.

FOR a thousand feet the white gander glided in a great spiral—then he leveled off and studied the field below. An automobile stood ahead and beneath and he changed his course to avoid it. Next a strawstack attracted his attention and he veered again. As he did so, something moved beneath the straw.

At the warning of the leader every bird in the flock took up the labored struggle for altitude and the whine once more became a roar. Already the strawstack had become as a thing alive. The figure of a man sprang into view and puffs of blue-white smoke appeared around the stack. After the smoke came the sharp report of guns, repeated again and again as the sound waves reverberated between the surface of the earth and the wings of the flock above.

In a moment, all was confusion. The long, even ranks of the migrating host were broken and the air was literally filled with flapping, struggling geese. The puffs of smoke around the stack united to form a shifting blue haze, cut through by leaping tongues of flame. Here a bird crumpled and sagged in its flight to become no more than a shapeless mass of feathers hurtling earthward; there a broken wing sent another into a deadly spiral. Everywhere appeared tiny clusters of feathers floating downward like the mists of bursting shrapnel.

Around the black-and-white gander the air was seemingly filled with shot. One after another his immediate neighbors swerved or fell away until the leader was all but alone.

So far he had appeared to bear a charmed life, but now they were changing to buckshot and his turn had really just begun. He was struggling heroically both for altitude and distance when a shot passed so close to his head that the blast of air caused him to stagger in his flight. Another, striking fairly against his breast, although lacking power to penetrate turned him end-over-end, and a new burst of snow-white feathers floated out upon the air behind him.

But the old leader was neither seriously hurt nor spent, and he rallied, to struggle on. And then, just as he was passing from range a chance shot struck near the tip of his wing and the tireless muscles became momentarily numb. He was falling now. He too had become no more than a mass of rumpled feathers; but the cords of memory were taut, his loyalty to his lost mate was strong and true. He had not finished his flight; the Lake of the Painted Woods still lay ahead. A gallant recovery checked his fall and when nearly to the ground and safely beyond range of the guns, he leveled off to take up a staggering, wavering flight toward his goal.

ONE man among the group at the stack, stood a little apart from his neighbors. It was he who had fired the last shot; it was he who had started to run forward as the gander fell. But he had checked himself when the bird regained control and then set out across the field running toward a horse tied to the fence.

This man knew well the direction the flight had taken. Blackwing would go directly to the Lake of the Painted Woods. Because the man was not cruel by nature he did not want the black-and-white beauty to die by inches in some rice thicket on the lake—and he did want above all things to add this rare bird to his collection. But the fact that the great bird was wanted for semi-scientific purposes did not mitigate the menace of the future. From then on, it must be a continual struggle, with the great old gander crippled and nearly helpless.

From the stubble-field the old gander struggled out over the maze of coulees and ravines leading down to the valley of the Missouri. Slowly but surely he dropped lower and lower. The fight against the odds of numbness was slowly sapping his strength. A fog-bank lay along the surface of the river but had drifted clear of the timber and the struggling bird could see the crescent-shaped body of water nestling in the dense growth of cottonwoods.

The sight gave him renewed strength. For the time being he forgot the torture of overworked and tiring muscles. Again it was the never-forgotten call of his lost mate. The cords of memory were drawing taut once more, pulling him on and on in spite of his rapidly waning strength.

Presently there came into view a wide expanse of wild rice in the middle of the lake, and beyond it another larger one. It was to this larger one that he wished to go, for there was the tiny island on which the nest had been made so many years ago and where it was on that night he had come home to find the eggs deserted and cold, his mate forever gone.

THE deep shadows of the timber slipped from beneath him and he was out over the water. It was fortunate too, for in spite of his efforts he had brushed the tops of some of the taller trees as he swept out over the beach. He had reached the lake which had been his summer home for more than half a century, but that was all—when over the first patch of wild rice, still a mile or more from his goal, the wounded wing gave out, and he fell. With a rasping,

crackling crash, he broke through the dry growth of rice and cat-tails, and with a surge of foam and a churning of water, he struck the surface of the lake. He had done all that he could do and now he lay exhausted, an inert mass of feathers.

Had the old gander struck on open water it is probable that he would have drowned as he lay, but fate had decreed that he should strike with his head and neck resting on a tangle of bent and broken rice stems. These served to keep his bill clear of the water until his head began to clear and he opened his eyes to take some stock of his surroundings. But even with the return of consciousness the old fellow did not have the strength to move. His big brown eyes were open and he could feel his body gently swaying on the smooth-topped waves which rose and fell even within the protection of the rice and cat-tail growth, but as yet no muscle would obey an impulse from his brain.

Thus he lay when a splashing of water and a crackling of dead reeds heralded the advent of a boat. He could hear voices too and it seemed that they were coming directly toward him. Through an opening between the waving reeds he saw the head and shoulders of a man who had evidently stood in the bow of a boat while some one as yet unseen poled the boat from the stern. It was the same man who had stood in the field that morning with the smoking shotgun in his hands.

Again a terrible fear clutched at the feebly beating heart of the old gander. With all his might he sought to summon his muscles back to a sense of duty, but it was of no use. The boat was almost upon him and he could not so much as move a foot. Then something happened to change the color of the entire situation. A jar came from under water and with a sudden grunt of surprise the hunter disappeared. There followed a violent splash, a series of gurgling exclamations and the grating of the boat's keel on a partly submerged drift log. When the upper part of the hunter returned to view he was very wet. After that the sounds of the boat's progress grew less and less until they finally died away.


*When still a mile or more from his goal the wounded wing gave out, and he fell. With a crash he broke through the dry growth of rice and cat-tails.*

Throughout the rest of that day and the long hours of the following night, the old gander did not move. So still was he, that once a snapping turtle came up out of the green depth to investigate, but the gentle undulations of water kept the gander's body in motion, and the turtle was not sure; after a while he returned to the bottom of the lake for a further period of watchfulness.

Morning came at last and when the blue shadows of dawn retreated before the full light of day and the sun swung clear of the hills and timber to send slanting warm rays down through the rice stems, a band of sunlight struck full upon the wounded bird. In time the warmth had its effect. From a state of unconsciousness, probably mixed with sleep, the old fellow came slowly back to the world of reality. His wound had ceased to bleed and the fatigue of his long flight with its culminating struggle for life had to some extent passed away. With a great effort he lifted his head from its pillow of reeds.

As the day wore on and the warmth became greater, his attempts served to take away some of the stiffness and at last he reached the partly submerged log upon which the hunter's boat had come to grief the day before. The log formed a natural incline leading from the water to a tangle of roots and vegetation. Up this incline the bird dragged himself until finally he came to rest on the butt, protected from the wind and perhaps even from the vision of man, by the gnarled and twisted laterals of the dead cottonwood.

That day the boat came again. Evidently the hunter did not intend to give up until he had searched out every inch of the lake and its shores. From his hiding-place among the roots the wounded gander watched, with a fear of death in his eyes, as the boat passed almost within reach and glided over the identical spot where he had lain helpless for so long. But the man in the boat took care to avoid the submerged drift log. So again it seemed that the big bird's time had not come, for the boat moved steadily on and the sounds died away in the distance. And yet the persistence of the hunter boded ill indeed for the future; it meant that from then on, life for the great black-and-white beauty—granting that he should survive his wounds—would become a battle of wits between the man and the bird, with the advantage resting heavily on the side of the man.

All that day and throughout the night which followed Blackwing made no attempt to change his position. From his hiding-place he could see deep into the waters below him.

He could see here hosts of shadowy forms, sometimes moving slowly and awkwardly, as turtles went about their daily affairs, or as great lumbering yellow carp sucked and chewed at the new-sprouting growth of wild rice; again it was the blue and white of the channel cat, the yellow flash of a perch or the lightning charge of a whitefish from beneath the log. Occasionally there would come a hurrying

and a scurrying which would make the rice stalks quiver and the water boil. When the ripples had died away a long silvery form would appear, a monster wall-eyed pike moving with the majesty and the steadiness of a dirigible balloon in flight. Before him every living thing gave way; even the snapping turtle withdrew his triangular head beneath his shell and crouched low among the water weeds that lined the bottom of the lake.

Another dawn, and the gander came down from his hiding-place to float for a moment on the cooling water. He did not stay long, however, for the motion of the waves wrenched painfully at his wing.

The next day it was better. The wind had died away, the water was smooth, and some of the soreness seemed to have gone. He ate then too, nibbling some of the tender shoots of wild rice that the spring growth was forcing above the surface. Once in a shallow place he thrust his head beneath the water for some gravel and the tender leaves of a plant that grew beside the log. And so from day to day he made progress. The fever in his veins was slowly leaving; the throbbing of his wound grew less and less, and as the days wore on the soreness finally left.

IN two weeks the gander was making short voyages of exploration which took him farther and farther away from the log. Finally the time came when he slept by the simple process of tucking his head beneath one wing wherever he chanced to be. He could swim now as well as ever and an unexpected collision with a blood-thirsty mink taught him that at least one of his wings was as powerful as of old—but when a few days later in the long open spaces among the reeds, he tried to lift himself into the air he found that the injured wing was still all but helpless.

With the partial return of his strength the urge for his long-lost mate had come again.

One night the hunter heard the plaintive notes of a lonely goose coming from the wild rice thicket, and decided on a tour of investigation with the coming of another day. But that night Blackwing left the protection of the wild rice to strike out, swimming in the open water, toward the other end of the lake.

All night long the old gander paddled steadily toward the upper end of the lake. The wind came through open spaces in the timber in variable gusts, whipping the surface of the lake into regular waves and then veering suddenly to set up a choppy cross sea that made progress almost impossible, but he never thought of turning back. He must go on, not only because of the call he felt, but because to be caught on the open lake at daylight without the use of his wings, would be to risk almost certain death. The first tinge of dawn found him still on the open water, but now a long low shadow ahead marked the beginning of wild rice, that friendly and almost impenetrable fastness which had hidden and protected the former home of the bird for more than half a century. In spite of his long fight with the waves and a great weariness, his pace quickened as he realized he was almost home.

And then just when it seemed that he was to reach the haven of safety a new and smaller shadow, gray and menacing, appeared from the deeper gloom ahead, between him and his goal.

This thing of mystery was approaching rapidly too; above the whine of the wind he could hear the chug of a motor and the crash of waves cut cleanly in two and hurled into foaming heaps on either side.

It was almost upon him and the figure of the man had taken form standing in the stern of the boat. Simultaneously there came a long dripping stream of fire, a burst of blue-gray smoke and gas—and a charge of heavy shot tore the top from a wave by the gander's side. Again it came and again and once again. Then the boat heeled over, swung up into the wind and stopped. But when the man leaned down expecting to grasp the object of his many efforts, there was nothing there, nothing but the angry gray waters and the waves surging on and on toward the western shore.

Looking up toward a point almost halfway to the edge of the rice bed, the hunter saw a V-shaped ripple spreading across the waves. Again the automatic spoke and once again. The ripple died away but when the bow of the launch cut by the place, there was nothing there either—nothing but a tangle of water weeds floating slowly across the lake.

For almost an hour the powerful motor chugged back and forth across the line of the gander's retreat, but nothing appeared. At last the boat turned and disappeared in a bank of fog. If the gander were dead sooner or later he would float ashore; if not, the hunter would know that somewhere within the rice thicket there must be a black-and-white gander crippled and alone.

Far within the fastness of rice and cat-tail stocks a miniature island rose several feet above the surface of the water.

Once it had been the home of a beaver, a dwelling-place built of sticks and mud. For some reason—possibly the traps of a hunter, or a charge of dynamite, or perhaps merely because the beaver had become dissatisfied with its location—it had been abandoned and years had covered it with a growth of heavy grass. Since time before the memory of living man it had been a nesting-place for geese, and here Blackwing had brought his bride on that day so many years before. Here they had come season after season and from here they had taken off on those many fall flights to the Southland. And it was from here that she had gone forth on that errand from which she was never to return.

On the morning when the motor-boat searched the lake for the body of Blackwing, there was a new nest on the little island. It was in exactly the same place that the old one had been and indeed its foundation was built upon the remains of the old. It was of exactly the same material, grasses and reeds and sticks. It was shaped exactly as the original and the lining was of the same softest down plucked from the breast of a prospective mother goose.

Within the nest were seven eggs; once they had been cream-colored and clean, but now they were stained a dingy white. Apparently the old home had been re-established.

THE present occupant of the nest was a dreamy-eyed young goose with nothing unusual about her, unless perhaps it was the fact that she was going about the business of hatching and brooding her kind without the help of a mate.

The gander of this goose's choice had been a ne'er-do-well sort of fellow interested in everybody's business but his own. Hardly had they become established in their new home when one night he flew away to a grain-field in search of supper. Whatever his fate he never returned, and for some time the heroic young mother had seen little of either food or sleep. The only grasses that she could reach without leaving the island were tough and wiry and there were mink and otter to watch and fear throughout the hours of the night.

This morning she had come to the end of her endurance. Either she must eat or starve. Coming to this conclusion after many hours of suffering, she suddenly stepped from the nest, waddled down to the edge of the water and swam away in search of food. She had no more than passed

from sight when the reeds parted from another direction and Blackwing came upon the scene.

Thus after many trials the old gander's loyalty to the mate that was gone brought him unerringly back to the scene of their parting. Year after year he had done this and—granting that the Creator did not reserve all of the finer and truer emotions for those whom, we have been told, He made in the image of Himself—the mind and the heart of the great bird, as he paddled the last stretch of water and climbed the slope to his old home must have been crowded with memories of happiness and of sorrow and with the surge of an undying hope. Probably his thoughts were very simple and likely they were liberally mixed with the primary urge of instinct, but they must have been all-powerful from his viewpoint, or he would not have returned in the face of unceasing danger and repeated disappointment.

Today he was very tired. The long fight with the wind and the waves, the terrific effort required to face and hold himself beneath the water and then the long struggle to force his way through the tangle of rice stalks, had all taken their toll. As he climbed the trail which led from the water's edge to the nest, his gait was even more erratic than usual and he was so weary that his head sagged forward until it barely cleared the round. Thus it happened that the old gander did not see the nest until he was almost upon it. When he did see it, several things happened almost simultaneously.

The big brown eyes dilated in wonder and his breath escaped as from a long-drawn sigh. Sitting in the path, he thrust his long neck over the edge of the nest and fixed a fascinated gaze on its contents. There it was—just as he had hoped to find it for so many years—the nest with its shimmering lining of down and the eggs exactly as he had seen them last! This, then, was the reward of loyalty and faith.

In the moment which followed a decided and all but weird change came over the gander. The eyes which had registered hate for so many of his enemies became misty and soft; his heart, which was that of a warrior by nature, began to thump out a strange new pulse and the brain which carried the guile and craft of nearly a century's experience, suddenly became filled with all-engulfing sentiment. In an instant his very nature changed and the new order of things influenced his actions to suit.

His first thought, if it attained the dignity of thought, unquestionably dealt with the eggs. If they had been there all through the years since he had seen them last, it seemed reasonable to think that they might be cold. If they were cold it was clearly some one's duty to warm them—and this rejuvenated parental instinct caused him to do something almost wholly out of his normal character, but nevertheless not unusual to his kind. He climbed over the edge of the nest, worked his feet in among the eggs without breaking more than one, and sat down as gently as could be expected from a bird of his awkwardness and weight.

For a time quiet reigned on the little island. The sun had broken through the mist and its rays streamed down to bring warmth where fog and chill had been before. The island appeared spangled with myriads of glistening diamonds where the sunlight sparkled on drops of moisture clinging to the reeds. A muskrat circled the island twice before he happened to think of more important business, and soon the sunny shore was lined with mud-turtles, who appeared to have no business at all.

The first disturbing noise to reach the ears of the gander came from the dry reeds. The real owner of the nest was coming toward the island and her evident desire to reach it seemed to increase when she looked up to see the black-and-white gander on her nest.

After a cursory glance at her first appearance, Blackwing regarded her approach with little interest. He was very tired, the warm sunshine had made him drowsy, and he was deeply impressed with a new-found sense of dignity. It would take something considerably more exciting than the advent of a common goose to arouse his interest. But here he was due for another surprise, for the female climbed


*She closed in for another attack, only to collide with the powerful wing of the thoroughly exasperated gander.*

the path and confronted him, crouching low and holding her wings out straight from her body. These actions alone would not have assumed serious significance, but in addition she pointed her neck at the old gander, turned her head on one side, and opened her mouth to emit a sound halfway between the hiss of a bull-snake and the battle-cry of a badger.

To the mind of the old fellow on the nest, her attitude was distinctly unfriendly. But after all her opinion of him was of secondary importance; he was not afraid of her and what she did made but little difference to him.

The gander calmly turned his eyes the other way. A moment later a blow from her bill glanced along the side of his head, and another from her wing pushed the middle of his neck considerably out of line with the other end, and rocked him on the nest. At this point Blackwing lost his temper and threw away whatever dignity a gander sitting on goose eggs may be said to retain. Although he never for one instant wavered in his determination to sit tight, he lowered his head until he met his female antagonist eye to eye and in the matter of noise he returned all she had to offer and with interest. Good judgment dictated her immediate retreat, but good judgment comes only with bitter experience and hers was not fully developed until after she had closed in for another attack, only to collide with the powerful wing of the thoroughly exasperated gander.

The goose stopped rolling just short of the water's edge

and when she came back up the path her method of attack had suffered a decided reverse. At a safe distance on the path she fixed pleading eyes on the big fellow and made soft and friendly noises in her throat. The supreme test came when she slowly approached and sat down beside and above him, on the edge of the nest. The period of suspense passed when the gander indifferently tucked his head beneath his wing and went to sleep.

FOR a day or so conditions remained about the same. The goose held fast to her conception of duty and the gander seemed equally attached to his own. It was evident that the battle for the possession of the nest had settled down to a question of which one could go without food or water for the longer period. Except for one event, the time passed quietly. That was one evening when the report of a shotgun shattered the calm of the rice thicket, proving that the hunter was once again abroad and that the menace of death still hung over the black-and-white gander.

Then in the still hours of night a strange thing happened. It heralded its coming with a sound that awoke both the goose and the gander and set them to peering about with eyes that were opened wide in wonder. At first it was merely a tapping sound, repeated at irregular intervals, but later modified in form until somewhere between a squeak and a soft whistle. Coincident with the change in tone, Blackwing made a discovery. Beyond the shadow of a doubt one of the eggs beneath him was becoming restless. Arching his long neck and running an exploring bill beneath his breast he found, among other things, something that offered no more resistance than a soft sponge soaked in warm water. It moved at his touch and the whistle became louder than ever.

At that point the old gander found that he could speak a language he didn't understand himself. He suddenly developed an aptitude for sounds which, until that time, had never been heard in that or any other locality. But even so, the best he could do was as nothing to the vocal efforts of the goose at his side. She too had heard, and she fully understood the meaning of the squeaks and whistles.

By daylight the eggs, as such, were mostly a matter of history while the peeping and whistling had increased several-fold. Again and again the gander felt his feathers bulging and looked down to see a very small, orange-colored head thrust out into the light of day. All the forenoon he pushed them back one at a time until finally no more came. At first this was a relief. Later it aroused his suspicions—but now it was too late. While he had been busy pushing the youngsters under one end of him, treachery had been done at the other. The goose had thrust her head beneath the gander and with so much going on he had not noticed it. While he made noises that no one could understand, she had made sounds to an effective purpose. In a language perfectly clear to the young ones, she called them one by one, and they answered. From her head, they followed along her neck to a new and much softer home and when the gander's suspicion became so acute that he stood up to investigate, he found she had kidnaped everything but the eggshells! His labors had been in vain.

From that hour Blackwing became an humble suppliant to the goose. By every means in his power he tried to coax the young ones away from her. He made all the noises he knew how to make, but with no visible effect. He made short excursions, returning time after time with offerings of the finest and tenderest green sprouts. For her they would eat even the tough wire-grass, but for him they would eat nothing. Finally he gave over the attempt and took up the business of chasing away turtles and minks.

Although the orange-colored youngsters could swim and dive from the moment they were hatched, the mother goose kept them in shallow water near the island for several days. Here they learned to stand on their heads and reach the sandy bottom for newly sprouted rice seeds and small pieces of gravel. They chased water skippers and picked at flies, and on the stems of the aquatic plants they found myriads of tiny bugs which they scraped off and ate with relish. Occasionally they found worms along the shore, and on windy days grasshoppers blew out from the mainland.

At the end of two weeks the youngsters were nearly three times their original size and their demand for food had increased so rapidly that the family excursions became longer and longer. And now the gander came into his own. His many years of experience had taught him the best places in which to find food and how to go and return with the minimum of danger. He was the leader now, and the youngsters were learning to obey his voice. Bloodthirsty magpies flew near and a single note sufficed to call the youngsters to the protection of his wings. When they were more widely scattered and a hawk swooped down, another note would send them beneath the water and when they were out of breath and were obliged to come to the surface, they came up slowly and silently beneath lily-pads or in tangled reeds where they remained hidden until the mother or the gander called them together again.

At the end of a month they began their first molt. Six weeks later the body-down was gone and the new feathers were more after the pattern of their mother's. Their final plumage would not come, however, until later in the fall or early winter.

ALTHOUGH Blackwing never forgot the menace of the hunter, the summer days passed in comparative peace. Occasionally they saw the boat coming or going but evidently the man was biding his time until the frosts of fall should shrivel the leaves of the wild rice and cat-tails. Then the great bird would fall an easy victim.

The first warning of danger came to the gander one evening when he led his charges to a feed-bed which had become a favorite with the little flock. Noticing unusual activity among the youngsters, he went to investigate and found they were gathering grains of wheat and corn from the bottom of the lake. Blackwing was very fond of grain but he knew full well that wheat and corn do not grow on the bottoms of lakes. His suspicions were instantly aroused, but when on the following night he tried to guide his charges to other, safer feeding-grounds, he found that he was exceeding his authority. Even the mother refused

to heed his warnings and in spite of all he could do they returned to the magically renewed grain night after night. Of course his duty was plain. There was nothing to do but to follow them. The chances were that he could save them by the use of his sharp ears and eyes, and now that the little fellows were beginning to fly, they might escape; though for himself, still water-bound by his crippled wing, it would likely mean the end.

It was late in the fall when the trouble finally came to a head. Indian summer had come and gone; now the skies were overcast and a cold wind whipped the lake into long, white-capped waves. That morning the wild rice stems were sheathed in ice and that night, if the wind went down, the lake would be frozen from shore to shore. Snow came during the afternoon, first in long slanting lines, then in squalls and blinding, foglike clouds. Toward evening the wild folk from the North began to come in, butterballs and teals, dropping down out of the sky to strike the water with the pattering sound of hail. Later great flocks of mallards arrived, thousands and thousands at a time, and lastly, as evening came, the skies opened to the roar of great wings and in places the waves were actually stilled by the close-packed bodies of wild geese.

THE stage was set for the last great flight of the season. A shot or any other sound to alarm the flocks, even the dropping of the wind, might send them into the air and the lake would be given over entirely to the ice and the drifting snow.

Blackwing and his charges reached the feed-bed as the afternoon light began to fade. The old gander was more than usually nervous, partly because he felt the presence of unknown danger, and partly because the call of the Southland had come, and he had not been off from the water for months. Of late the mother goose and the youngsters had taken much to the air. Many times he had been left desolate and alone while they were away in the grain-fields. Tonight they remained with him largely because of the storm, but the old fellow felt that the hour of parting was at hand.

Perhaps a hundred yards from the feed-bed, the white gander stopped. At his low note of warning the others gathered about while the old bird peered ahead and listened. He caught the sound again and he could not be mistaken. It was the lapping of waves on wood. Somewhere not far ahead lay the dreaded boat.

Another word of warning from the gander and they were moving away, silently and in single file. But in some way the damage had been done. Perhaps the warning note had been carried to other ears, or maybe sharp eyes had seen the brightly colored bird. At any rate, the motor was running again and, judging from the sound, it was moving to cut off the little file of geese from their line of retreat.

Immediately Blackwing changed his course, thus throwing the boat astern—but now he was headed for open water exactly as the hunter had intended and in that direction lay apparent certainty of annihilation. Alone, the old bird would never have left the shelter of the reeds and rushes. He would have turned toward the heart of the shelter-belt and so have won through even had he been forced to do so under water; but the mother goose had taken the lead and the young ones were following in her wake. True to his almost century-old code of loyalty, there was nothing for the gander to do but follow.

Presently they had left the shelter of the rice and were out upon the open water. Sluggish, dull-crested waves rolled and tossed them on their way, for the thickly falling snow had turned the surface of the lake to a golden slush. In another moment they might be safe, for the shadows were gathering rapidly and the snow was falling faster and faster, but now the boat had evidently been poled clear of the rushes for the roar of the motor broke out again while almost simultaneously a dull report preceded the tossing of yellow spray from a wave near the rapidly vanishing flock.

They were in the air then, all but Blackwing, and as the mother and young ones climbed upward into the storm, all over the lake great flocks of ducks and geese followed their example—until the thunder of their wings rose high above the roar of the wind. Meanwhile the old gander was making one last desperate struggle for life. When a second charge of shot grazed his side, he was half running, half flying, just tipping the crests of the tallest waves. When the third came so close as to lash the water all about him, the fear of it caused him to leap high in the air. And then he found that which perhaps he might have known long before—the wounded wing was strong enough to bear his weight.

Slowly the great bird climbed above the water. His control was poor; he wabbled a bit and the stronger wing swung him in a half-circle so that looking down he saw the boat and the man directly beneath him. Now he was a fair target; apparently nothing could save him from the marksman. But in that final moment when death seemed certain, no flash came from the smoking automatic. To kill a wounded bird was one thing—to strike down the great beauty after so long and so gallant a fight for life, was quite another. Now the spirit of the sportsman came uppermost and the man put aside the weapon and stood gazing upward until the gander had vanished in the hurrying fog.

UP and up the great bird labored, up where the north wind became a hurricane, the snow like driving sleet. And now from somewhere above sounded the voice of the mother goose. It seemed she too felt the loyalty of her kind—she had not deserted him but had circled over the spot where she had seen him last, calling again and again.

Once more Blackwing became the leader of the great southbound flock; once again long lines were forming on either flank. It was good to be in the air again. It was good to battle the elements with powerful and never-failing wings—and too, it was good to feel the tips of other powerful wings brush against his side. But best of all, when he turned his head and called to her, the answer seemed to span the long years of loneliness. It came soft and clear and strong—the call of mate to mate.

# The Black

*A powerful tale of adventure and mishap in the desert, by the well-known writer who gave us "Spears in the Sun" and "The Lair of the Leopard."*

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

*The Story So Far:*

DESPERATION had driven Henry Lovering into the African jungle. It was not hard for his chance companion Allan Redick to surmise the cause back of the young Englishman's gloom; Redick was a veteran explorer and big-game hunter and he had had ample experience with reckless young men fleeing civilization. He did not want his own small *safari* burdened by a novice, who sought to destroy with a bottle of whisky memories which the blackness of the jungle could not efface.

But Lovering would not be denied. He simply attached himself to the American, and Redick reluctantly formed a liking, based on respect, for his companion. Lovering possessed his own kind of courage, and under the young man's bantering exterior was a depth of genuine feeling.

Redick gathered, during the lonely nights around a camp-fire, something of the story that had twisted the threads of life for this exceedingly amiable young person. It concerned a girl, as Redick had imagined. The old hunter became so convinced that she was an extraordinary young woman, that he wrote to her while young Lovering lay ill. Courtney Collingwood was her name. Redick could imagine the lovely English girl, and trusted she would not misunderstand his well-meant letter, though he felt bitter toward her for the way he thought she had treated Henry.

Meanwhile they had entered the Darfur country, ruled by the Sheik Gezzar. The Darfur Arabs are part Bantu negro, and are a dangerous tribe. They were involved with the lawless Tuaregs in carrying on a slave traffic. Henry Lovering's accidental encounter with a Tuareg caused inevitable conflict, and young Lovering engaged in a duel on horses with the fierce son of the desert. After being wounded by his opponent, Lovering deliberately fired in the air, thereby winning the friendship and gratitude of his enemy. Availing himself of this gratitude, Henry decided to join the Tuareg tribe and live among them, as one of them. Finding that none of his arguments could change this decision, Allen Redick resignedly bade the young man farewell and pushed on alone toward Khartoum. *(The story continues in detail:)*

NOW that Henry had gone my first thought was to cut down the size of the caravan and send half the men and camels back to Malakal. Then it occurred to me that extra camels would bring a good price at one of the French posts along the Shari River. Also, I might lose more camels than I expected in the fly belt. So I kept all the camels, but dismissed and sent back Henry's interpreter, his gun-bearer and the cook he had brought with him from Khartoum. I was careful to procure a guarantee of immunity for those men from old Gezzar. I have had men of mine traveling alone seized by unscrupulous chiefs before, and I did not intend to have those faithful followers picked up on the trail, and traded to some distant tribe to spend their lives in slavery.

When I left Gezzar I remarked carelessly that the District Commissioner would expect those men sometime that month, "according to arrangements made with him before leaving Malakal." That remark alone was enough to insure their safety.

The remainder of the trek to the headwaters of the Shari was uneventful. We lost only one camel on the way—the fault of a camel-man whose turn it was that night to sit up and tend the guard fires. Two lions came in when the neglected fires had burned low, seized the camel and dragged him two hundred yards into the bush; we found his bones in the morning. However, I got the two lions later in the day; their skins could be traded to some native chief farther on for a new camel. So everybody was happy, except the fire-tender, who had to be disciplined.

Elephants were fairly numerous along the Shari but I was disappointed in the size of the ivory; only four tusks of the lot weighed over a hundred pounds. There were plenty of bulls, however, carrying eighty- and ninety-pound teeth. In three months I had enough of these to make the trip well worth while.

But somehow, after Henry had gone, a strange feeling took hold of me and could not be shaken off. I could not believe it was plain lonesomeness—I had spent too much of my time alone in the bush to believe that now, at my age, I should fall victim to that senseless urge for companionship that seizes upon young or inexperienced men almost exclusively. I was restless, unsatisfied, and at times as morose and sullen as an old lion whose teeth have become worn and incapable of killing large game. My men gave no trouble—indeed, if they had, during some of my moods there would have been hell to pay. The Shari is a bad fever country, but I took good care of myself, crawled under the net on my cot early—for the fever mosquito works only after sundown—took ten grains of quinine each day regularly and so avoided a bout with malaria, that most discouraging of tropical diseases.

Of course, the fever had been in my system for years; the quinine kept it dormant. But I thought entirely too much about my health—a thing I had not done since my first year in Africa. I examined the skin of my ankles and wrists a dozen times each day for a sign of guinea-worm

# *Stone of Tibesti*

By JAMES EDWIN BAUM

—an unreasonable thing to do, for you know it soon enough when they start to work on you. Tsetse flies in the timber along the river bothered me more than they should. This fly is the carrier of sleeping-sickness, but before he can infect a person he must first have bitten some one with the disease; not one fly in hundreds, therefore, is dangerous. But I saw in every tsetse that struck me a slow, lingering death. I have been through fly country many times and while careful to stay away from any body of water during the hours of sunlight—for the fly is seldom seen more than two hundred yards from water, and only in the hours of sunshine—I had always taken my chances without thinking much about it.

I took myself in hand a dozen times as I sat with an unopened book after supper, and reasoned it out in a logical way.

"This thing will grow on you," I said to myself, half muttering and half thinking, in the way of men who have been much alone. "You act like a nervous old woman in the bush for the first time in her life. You'll die some day, of course. What's the odds whether it's from fever, sleeping-sickness, black-water, or a faulty cartridge? It's all in a lifetime!" And then, perhaps, I would think back over the past twenty years of my life and blame myself for wasting those years in this thornbush wilderness. In my present depression anything seemed better than to be where I was. And then, always, my thoughts turned to Henry Lovering. . . . There was just one thing the matter with me; resentment and bitterness at the tooth-and-claw ways of the civilized world as applied to one young man of my acquaintance. Many a night I lay awake beneath the mosquito net and cursed that woman in England.

"No," I muttered, "she won't even trouble herself to answer that letter. No woman likes to be told in so many words that she is the cause of a man's death. She'll read it, out of curiosity, and if she has the least particle of humanity left—which is doubtful—she'll hate herself for a day or two. But she won't forget to burn that letter to prevent some one else from knowing what a female cad she is. Then she'll promptly forget all about Henry Lovering and everything connected with him."

At other times I thought she might answer, and I would say to myself:

"If she should write, it would be a formal note, one that would do more harm than good, if Henry should ever receive it. But now, of course, he is beyond any further harm she can do him." How I hated that woman! And then I would suddenly remember that I knew nothing at all about her. In fact, I had no real reason to think that any woman was the cause of Henry's determination. And then perhaps I would get up and throw more wood on the fire and listen to the hyenas and jackals, or the deep-throated vibrations of a lion roaring away off in the bush.

Three months went by. I hunted savagely and with unusual recklessness, collecting a valuable weight of ivory. But not even the thrills, the tenseness and occasional close work that always before had acted upon me like wine, served to break the dismal melancholy that seemed to have settled on me permanently. At last, disgusted with Africa and elephants, but most of all with our modern civilization that caters so exclusively to women, I gave the order to pack up and hit for Fort Bornu. There we could rest and purchase supplies for the return trek to Malakal. After Malakal I would go on to Khartoum and down the Nile to Cairo.

"You must get out, see people, hotels, theaters," I told myself sternly. "Perhaps you'll feel like going on to Europe, or even home to America for a time. You need a change—anything to snap yourself out of this eternal sullenness."

That was my plan—but like a great many plans, it was never carried out.

Fort Bornu stands, or rather it did stand, upon an eminence in the midst of a sandy plain. We came in sight of its thick mud walls one afternoon about two o'clock. We usually rested in the heat of the day but I wished to get there and have the day's march over as quickly as possible. After we arrived we could rest as long as we pleased.

The fort itself was built like most forts upon the edge of the desert; a square enclosure with the main building of the post forming one side and the thick walls the other three sides. It was brown, drab and superlatively ugly. From a raised bastion at one corner floated the tricolor of France. There was no wind as we drew near and the flag hung limply against the pole. A sentry paced slowly back and forth on the wall beneath the flagstaff. No other sign of life was apparent; it was the hottest hour of an unusually hot day even for that part of the world.

The caravan shuffled forward, and the spreading feet

of the camels kicked up little clouds of sand with each step. The men did not show their usual enthusiasm upon approaching a settlement; the powerful sun had taken the last ounce of resilience from their panting bodies. The sentry leaned over the wall and challenged formally. He was a Frenchman and at my reply in English, called the captain of the guard. After the usual short delay the gates opened and our camels slunk, rather than marched, inside. The gates closed behind us and I was just glancing about for the well when a white girl about twenty years of age appeared in a doorway. She donned a sun helmet and hurried across the hard-baked ground of the drill yard.

A puzzled look was on her face as she came nearer but I could see beneath the brim of the helmet that she was an unusually beautiful girl—a type that would have been considered so in any part of the world. But here, in a mud fort at the ends of the earth, and to a man who had not seen a white woman for months—well, I remember thinking, "She could double for any angel that ever flicked a wing in God Almighty's firmament. Must be the wife of a French officer."

The captain of the guard returned just at that moment with some one in authority—officer of the day, perhaps. He spoke fair English and told me where to unpack.

The young lady was standing beside my camel by this time, observing me intently. She heard the officer speaking to me in English and her face lighted. When he was through, she spoke in a rich voice, filled with the *timbre* of reed instruments. I was so pleasantly surprised—for I had expected high, nasal French—that I paid no attention to what she said. I only knew that she had spoken in English and that her voice was marvelous to hear. She repeated her question:

"I say, are you Allan Redick, by any chance?"

"I am," I replied, greatly surprised. Even then I did not know who she was—she was so utterly different from the girl I had pictured in my imagination that I felt a distinct shock go through me when she continued with apprehension in her voice, as if she dreaded the answer:

"Then—where is Henry? Can you tell me anything—anything at all—of—of Henry?"

THEN I knew who she was and I was on the point of snapping out savagely: "Henry Lovering is dead!" But something in her eyes told me that this girl, if she was the cause of Henry's black determination, was innocent of blame. She couldn't have done the things to Henry that I had pictured her doing, yet look the way she did. I can tell a straight-shooter when I see one—man or woman. So I answered quietly:

"Henry has gone off on trek into the desert."

"Thank God!" she said, so low that I could hardly catch the words, and then, "When I saw you alone,"—and she fingered the seam of her riding-breeches as if slightly embarrassed—"I thought—that is, I didn't know quite *what* to think!" She broke into a radiant smile. "It sort of upset me—seeing you arrive alone, you know." There was not the slightest trace of affectation about her. The one thing that impressed me besides her clean-cut beauty of feature and her thrilling, musical voice, was her sincerity. Contrasted with what I had heard of the young women of these days and from my own rancorous mental picture of this one, that sincerity gave me a stiff jolt.

"But you must be tired, simply exhausted, trekking in the heat of the day. The officers here say you never should do that. Give your camel to one of these boys and come to my rooms. Please hurry. There are so many things I simply must ask you!"

I waited long enough to see that my men were well taken care of and that suitable provision had been made for the camels. Then I started across the parade-ground to her quarters, thinking hard as I walked.

"It would never do to let her know that Henry has gone into the Tuareg country," I reflected. "He is unquestionably dead—if, by any chance, he is still alive, he will not be alive long. Lie to her—get her out of the country!"

The first thing she said to me when I crossed the threshold of her quarters was: "Allan Redick, if you never do another good deed you have atoned for every jolly old sin, large or small, that you may have committed in your whole life! I could have hugged you the moment I finished reading the postscript to your letter. Do you remember what you said in that postscript? It was meant to be an insult—and I loved you for it! You said:

"'*P. S. You will pardon me if I remark in passing that I, personally, have never met the woman whom I would consider worthy to clean Henry Lovering's guns.*'

"And I quite agreed with you—for I too do not know the woman who is worthy of Henry Lovering! And now, tell me of Henry. His wound, what of that? When will he come to Bornu? Tell me all about him, *everything!*"

FOR once in my life I did not know just what to say. "Henry's wound is completely healed," I began uncertainly. "It was not dangerous. He went north somewhere, with two trusted men. I can't tell just when to expect him, but not for many months—you see, he—" Then I knew that I was in deep water under her searching, hungry eyes. I took refuge unconsciously in the bantering style that Henry had used so often to conceal his thoughts, and began:

"Callow youth must spread its wings and soar; Henry chose to indite a few deathless verses on youth's sweet-scented manuscript before creeping age trailed him to his lair, before he became a tottering old wreck like me. He's off in the thornbush rummaging around to see what he can see. Just where his wandering feet—or rather those of his horse—have carried him by now, I can't say. At any rate, this post is a hell-hole—and you must about-face, hitch up your riding-breeches and hit for the Congo, Boma, steamboat, Southampton, Paddington Station and home—and so to bed. There you can rest, ruminate and relax, while I get busy, kick up these camels of mine and find Henry. Once I find him—and it may take three or four months, or longer—I shall deliver the following message:

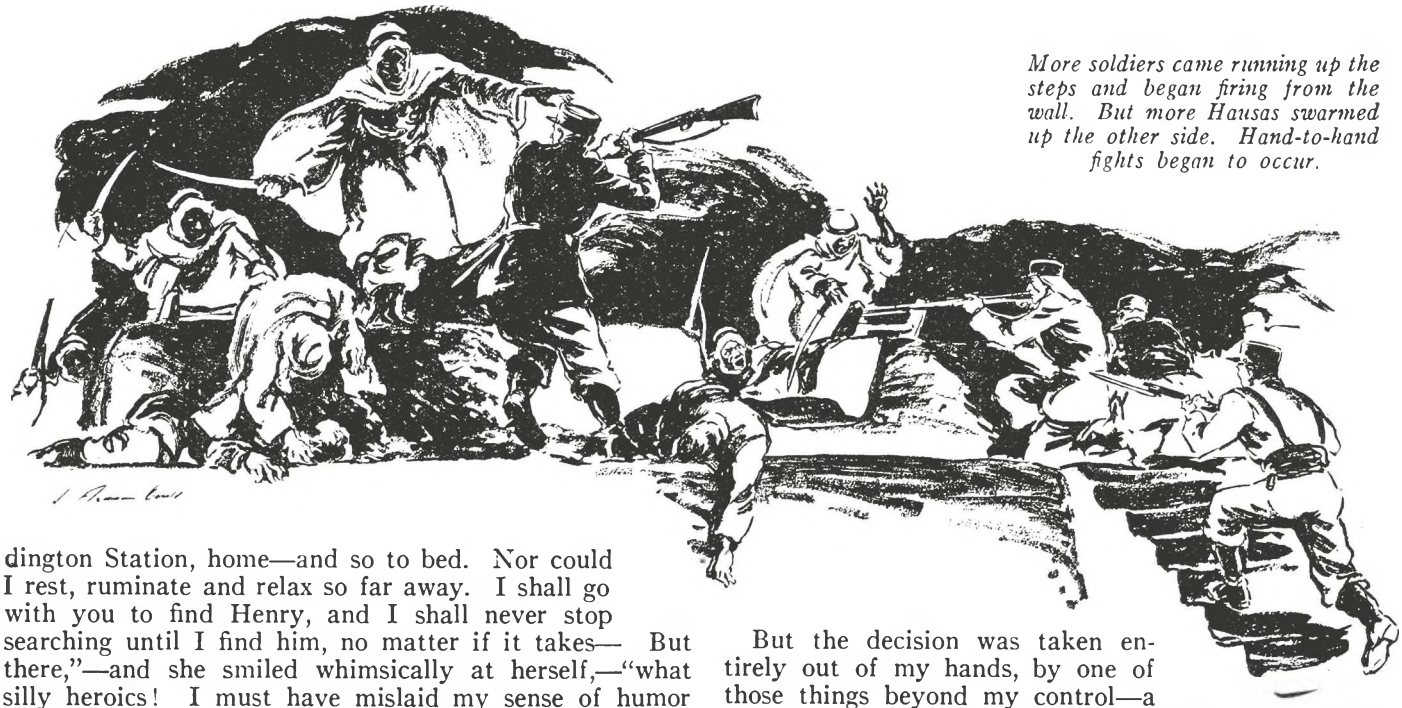
"'Young man! There is a lady in England who, with the usual inconsistency of woman, admits she is not good enough to clean your guns but who has made up her mind to forgive all and marry you. Having seen the woman, my advice to you, son, is to drop everything but your sun helmet and break all records from here to Harrington Heath!'

"By that time he should be three hundred yards down the trail. I'll call after him:

"'I'll bring along your outfit, sell it and blow the money in. And don't forget to remind her that she once said she could hug me for every sin, large or small, I ever committed in my life; she allowed as how that would atone for everything!' Isn't that what you said, Miss Collingwood?"

She smiled, but apprehension still lay in her eyes.

"You could hardly have made more mistakes, Allan,—and my name is Courtney,—in such a short speech, if you had tried your hardest," she replied in her rich voice. "In the first place, my riding-breeches are very well hitched up, thank you. And I have no intention of going back down the Congo to Boma, steamboat, Southampton, Pad-



*More soldiers came running up the steps and began firing from the wall. But more Hausas swarmed up the other side. Hand-to-hand fights began to occur.*

dington Station, home—and so to bed. Nor could I rest, ruminate and relax so far away. I shall go with you to find Henry, and I shall never stop searching until I find him, no matter if it takes— But there,"—and she smiled whimsically at herself,—"what silly heroics! I must have mislaid my sense of humor for a moment. Of course, I shall go with you—and that is all there will be to it. You were right, Allan, in one thing: I am not worthy to clean Henry's guns, and I am inconsistent enough to marry him. There you have it—" She broke off suddenly.

"Allan, you look very miserable. Have you told me the truth—all the truth? You wouldn't—no, you *couldn't* try to smooth things over! That would be—"

I took myself in hand. She was the hardest person to lie to that I have ever seen. But I did it and I did it in words that I hoped carried conviction.

"You're all upset over nothing. You must have been worrying more than is good for you. Henry Lovering is alive and well and no doubt is sitting down just now to a good supper of antelope steak. I shall find him—perhaps sooner than I expect—"

She dropped her hand from my arm, and turned her face away for an instant. Then she turned back again to face me. "Now I believe you, Allan Redick." She laid both hands upon my shoulders and stood squarely in front of me.

"What in this blessed world would have happened—to Henry and me—if it had not been for you?" Her eyes were swimming but the lips were smiling with a tenderness I do not know how to describe. I hated myself for that lie—but it had to be done and I stuck to it.

The blazing sun swung toward the west and still we sat in her quarters making our plans. She would not be put off. Try as I would there was no way but pretend to agree to take her with me on my search for Henry. We went into details of preparation and to my infinite surprise I found that she did not want—in fact, would not permit—me to increase the loads one pound on her account. She said she could use Henry's tent, which I had with me. I explained to her that it never rained where he had gone and therefore he had chosen to leave his tent with me.

I wondered with a feeling of dread many times during our conversation that hot afternoon, if I should be forced to tell her, here at Bornu, the truth about Henry; for, of course, I could never take her even as far as El Muluk.

"I may have to stand flat-footed and refuse to budge," I thought, "until she agrees to return down the Congo and home. But if it can possibly be avoided I must not break the news to her here. That must come in the protection and comfort of her home with the members of her family at hand."

But the decision was taken entirely out of my hands, by one of those things beyond my control—a thing that in legal phraseology would be called "an act of God"—though to me it was much more like the veritable handiwork of the devil.

## CHAPTER VIII

IT was dark when I left Courtney Collingwood's quarters and walked across the parade-ground to the small fire where I knew my men would be preparing their dinner. In a strange place it is well to see that your men are provided for. The sky was ablaze with stars—none of the pale, washed-out, flickering points of light that you see in Northern latitudes, but big, bold, round beacons, blazing in the sky like lanterns hung at the mastheads of ships in a crowded harbor. There was no moon, but the stars threw dim shadows upon mud wall and bastion. The shadow of the naked flagpole was like a thick anchor-chain flung across the parade-ground.

A sentry called out something in French in a bored singsong from the corner lookout-station; his star-flung shadow moved across the compound in grotesque, giant strides, as if the sentry paced the wall in seven-league boots. The large enclosure was fairly populous with the horses of the small garrison, a few donkeys and my own camels. But the place was as silent as a lonesome clearing in the deep thornbush. Hyenas and jackals had not yet set up their evening orchestration upon the sandy plains and the steady grind of munching teeth as horses nosed the little piles of hay thrown upon the hard-baked ground, was the only continuous sound. Occasionally an iron halter-ring rattled with a sharp metallic clink as an animal swung his head to brush an insect from his flank.

The officer of the day, who spoke fair English, was crossing the parade-ground. We met near the center, and I observed that it was a fine, large evening. It seemed good again, I remarked, to be able to talk with white people.

"Nice peaceful little fort you have here," I said, by way of saying the expected thing.

"*Oui,* it has been peaceful for some time, m'sieur. But —one never knows. The Hausas—they are not so veree nice to depend upon, those Hausas. It would be a thing the most deplorable if they should know of our ammunition. A large, what you say, sheepment—shipment—was lost overboard in the transfer from the *bateau*-of-the-ocean to the canoe-for-landing on the Congo. It was veree much too bad—that great splash. And now we have not

the sufficient *cartouche*. But," with an eloquent shrug of the shoulders, "the night, it is a fine one. You dine with us, you and the beautiful Miss Collingwood of whom I see you are the old friend, is it not? At eight o'clock in the quarters of the Commandante. Until then—*au revoir!*"

I left the men's fire and reached the rooms assigned to me. My bath was ready in the folding canvas tub and my tent-boy unpacked a towel and soap from one of the leather panniers. I undressed leisurely, thinking all the while of the unpleasant task before me in the morning. How in the world could I persuade this girl to return to England without brutally speaking the three words: *"He is dead!"*—words that would crush like the blow of a sledgehammer. I was as sure that neither of us would ever again see Henry alive as I was of my own identity. Postpone the cruel stroke as I would, I should have to say it, and say it just that way in the end. A feeling of such misery and weakness came over me that, for a moment, I thought I must be coming down with an attack of fever. To break the news to that girl would be the hardest thing I had ever been called upon to do in my life! But as it happened, I was not to be compelled to tell her in the morning. . . .

I finished the bath and took out a pair of hair-cutting scissors from my kit-bag. My rusty beard looked like the reddish-brown nest of a *jârâdin*, a mountain-rat. I hung up a small camp mirror and proceeded to trim that beard. The door was open and the warm air from the compound with its varied smells, blew gently through the room. The fire of my men across the open space twinkled cheerily and their low voices came to me in a gentle murmur. The faint rustling of hay as the animals fed, the low tones of the men outside and the occasional rattle of the sentry's rifle as he changed it from one shoulder to the other on his endless march along the mud wall, were sounds so faint and subdued that I heard them only subconsciously. A French soldier laughed loudly in one of the near-by rooms and the resounding *plunk* of his open hand upon a board table struck my ears as almost an insult to the great god of Silence.

*Soldiers of the guard rushed to the wall. We fired again and again at a yelling mob below. Already they were placing ladders against the wall.*

And then—a rifle-shot rang across the little parade-ground so unexpectedly that it transformed the place instantly into a bedlam. Donkeys brayed. Camels grunted. Nervous horses jumped and whinnied. The quick *thud-thud-thud* of running feet passed along the wall. An officer shouted orders. He must have been a young officer, for intense excitement was in his staccato tones and his voice cracked ludicrously in the middle of a word. Three more shots roared upon the wall and the flashes momentarily lighted up the scene. A chorus of ululating yells burst from the other side of the wall.

Selim—God rest his faithful bones—sprang through the doorway into my room as I tightened the belt of my shorts and seized the heavy elephant-gun from a corner. He dived for a leather pannier on the floor against the wall, scattered the contents, snatched a handful of cartridges, thrust them into my hand, seized the light rifle from the foot of the cot, picked up another box of cartridges from the litter on the floor and stood at attention.

*"Khâlas, yâ Sidi!* (Ready, sir!)" His thin Arab lips hardly moved with the words and his black eyes gleamed in the lamplight. Good old Selim—he deserved his reputation of best gun-bearer in the length and breadth of the Sudan!

"Hausas?" I inquired curtly.

*"Aiwah, Sidi!* (Yes, sir!)"

With Selim at my heels I jumped through the doorway and ran across the parade-ground to the steps that led to the top of the mud wall. Perhaps a half-dozen soldiers of the guard, fully dressed and armed, rushed from the guard-room to the wall ahead of me. We fired again and again at a yelling mob below. But already they were placing short ladders against the wall. I emptied my gun into that closely packed mass of men, reloaded and emptied it again. No one could have missed a single shot at that distance. I heard Selim firing on my left and then, I became conscious, between flashes, of a bulky black mass, shimmering like a lake in the starlight, a quarter of a mile across the plain. I thought:

"That will be the Hausa camels held by a small detail and the shimmer is starlight upon worn and polished saddles." Such small, inconsequential things impress themselves upon one in moments like these.

A rickety ladder was slammed against the wall just below my feet and immediately three men, one behind the other, started up in a wild scramble. The first I could see in the starlight, was a *hadji*. He had made the pilgrimage to Mecca and wore the green turban as proof. I remember muttering as I swung the barrel of the elephant-gun to the center of his chest:

"You are about to go on another pilgrimage, son!" I shot, and was momentarily amazed to see all three men on that ladder crumple and fall sideways to the ground. Then I remembered which gun I was shooting.

A burning sensation—like the sting of a giant wasp—

went through my left shoulder and spun me around like a top. I stumbled and would have fallen from the wall if Selim had not thrown both arms around me. I still held the gun but when I attempted to raise it, something was wrong. The gun would not come to my shoulder. I glanced down to see what was holding it and realized that my left arm was numb and powerless. My knees felt weak and Selim eased me to a sitting posture on the wall.

A big Hausa sheik got both hands on the wall about fifteen yards to the left and was in the act of swinging up a leg. Selim gave a piercing cry and fell backward into the compound—finished. The Hausa now had both knees on the wall. I tried again to raise the heavy elephant-rifle. I raised it to my shoulder with the right arm, but could not hold it there and pull the trigger. Then an inspiration came to me. I flopped backward upon the wide wall, lying on my back with head slightly raised. With my right hand I threw the gun-muzzle across my ankles, raised one foot an inch or two, maneuvered the butt against my shoulder, sighted, and shot the Hausa through the head not a second before he would have leaped to his feet upon the wall.

More soldiers came running up the steps and began firing from the wall. But more Hausas swarmed up the other side. Hand-to-hand fights began to occur. Soldiers and Hausas shrieked and plunged to the ground, toppling like limp sacks of meal. I aimed again at a turbaned Hausa with a curved knife in hand coming over the wall. But the firing-pin fell upon an empty chamber. My cartridges were exhausted. Shaking off the dizziness, I got to my feet. I was helpless with that heavy, empty gun and but one good arm to swing it.

The Hausa gained his feet on the wall and with knife in hand came running. A shot rang out behind me. It was so close it almost deafened me, but the Hausa crumpled and fell headforemost upon his friends below.

I turned to see who had fired that shot. There stood Courtney Collingwood in a filmy dressing-gown affair that shimmered in the starlight, holding a French musket.

"Allan! Allan!" she cried with a sob in her throat. "Is that you? Thank God!" She raised her gun again and shot hastily at a second Hausa beyond. But before she could take the gun from her shoulder two black arms were thrown around her from behind and she was pulled to her knees, struggling and biting at the thick wrists like a trapped lioness. I tottered forward, dropping my useless gun and throwing myself upon the man. I clung to him with my good arm but could do him no damage without knife or weapon. Before he could drag us more than a few feet a crowd of Hausas fell upon us. We were too closely tangled for them to shoot or stab in the starlight without danger to each other. I felt my arms wrenched behind my back and hastily bound with a turban. But the pain in my wounded left shoulder was too much. I knew nothing after that for perhaps two hours. When I came to, I was lying across a camel, my hands and feet tied to the high wooden peak of the cantel.

A CROWD of men on camels were around me; the entire force was traveling at a long shuffling trot—the easiest gait of camels—but every sway and lurch of my awkward beast sent cruel pains shooting through my shoulder. I saw, far in the distance behind us, a faint red glare upon the sky, and I knew that this would be the reflection from the smoldering ruins of a place that had once been called Fort Bornu.

"It is all over," I thought. "They have taken the fort and burned it to the ground. Every soul in Fort Bornu has been massacred."

The shooting pains in my left shoulder were agonizing and I must have fainted again. That ride is a nightmare that shall remain fresh in my mind to my dying day. I alternately awoke and fainted with the pain and loss of blood. I was out of my head part of the waking time, I know, for I remember thinking that I was on a ship at sea and that somebody pulled, without ceasing, a red-hot steel cable through a hole in my left shoulder.

"When they come to the end of the cable," I thought, hazily, "then it won't hurt any more." But they seemed never to come to the end. Then a terrible thought came to me: "What if the ends of the cable have been spliced together!"

I must have become unconscious again for a long time. The next thing I remember was some one pouring warm and muddy water between my clenched teeth. I swore weakly. All I wanted in the world was to have that burning cable removed from the hole in my shoulder. If they wouldn't do that then I wouldn't drink. But the taste of the water partially revived me and after the first swallow I gulped it down eagerly. For a moment I recognized Courtney Collingwood kneeling on the sand with a water-gourd in her hand. A crowd of men, tall blacks with turbans on their heads, curved knives in wide sashes and long-barreled Arab guns were grouped around her. Some were wounded, and dried blood discolored many burnouses and white robes.

I KNEW nothing more until I awoke days later and saw above me the black roof of a goat-hair Bedouin tent.

I opened my eyes and lay for a time without stirring. My mind at last was clear and the bewilderment at my situation soon passed; there had been an attack on the fort. Fort Bornu was no more. I was a captive in the camp of the attacking force; they were Hausas. I remembered there had been an interminable journey through hell and I had been dragged along with a red-hot cable. No, it was merely a gunshot wound in the left shoulder and I had taken it to be a red-hot cable, that was all. I had been unconscious for days, but now I was on the road to recovery. There had been a woman, a girl. . . . Courtney Collingwood! She had been dragged through that red-hot hell with me. Where was she now? I turned my head with a great effort. A human figure in Arab robes sat upon the sandy floor by my left side. The figure was clasping its knees and the head was bent forward in an attitude of dejection.

"I must find her and escape from this place," was the first thought that ran through my mind. I attempted to raise my head but it was too heavy. I could not do it. I turned on my side—and the Arab figure looked up quickly.

"Allan!" It was more a murmur of hope than an exclamation.

"Is it you, Courtney?" I thought the words were pronounced clearly and loudly but evidently they hardly carried to the figure at my side, for she bent closer to catch them. She was on her feet in an instant; she threw back the white burnous and a mass of tumbled yellow hair fell about her face.

"You must not talk, Allan." She laid a cool hand softly on my forehead. "Now, thank the good God—you will get well!" In the subdued light of that black tent her face, radiant with relief, was the most beautiful picture I have ever looked upon.

"You don't happen to have a water-bag handy, do you Courtney?"

She gave me a drink and I went off to sleep again.

I was much stronger when I awoke. Courtney was still seated upon the sand and the sun was almost upon the horizon. The desert had begun to cool and a faint breeze blew through the low tent door. I could hear the metallic

tinkle of camel bells and the bleating of many goats in the distance. I raised my head with an effort and looked through the tent door. An endless expanse of yellow sand with dunes and hollows and long shadows spread out as far as my eye could reach. Date palms rustled faintly in the light breeze and the shouts of boys and girls driving herds of goats came from a long way off. This was evidently an oasis somewhere in the Sahara.

I wondered for a moment why there were no guards stationed in the tent and then I remembered that guards would not be needed to prevent two white prisoners from escaping. The camels would be well guarded and without camels a prisoner would have no more chance of escape than a fish out of water. Even with camels and a supply of water a man would have no chance unless he knew the locations of the oases and these, of course, would be surrounded by nomad encampments. Escape from the Sahara would be as impossible as escape from the penal colony of Devil's Island. There an escaping prisoner must pass through a sea of salt water swarming with sharks; here, through a sea of burning sand swarming with hostile Arabs. The thing could not be done.

Courtney bent over me. "How much stronger you look, Allan! The color is fighting its way back into your face. Ah, that cruel wound and the rough handling! I did my very best; I fought to make them camp and give your wound a chance to heal. But they pushed on, day after day. I was sure that each day would be your last. Allan Redick, you must have the constitution of a horse!" And she added with a touch of pride, smiling down upon me:

"I have found that I too am not the weak flower you might think me. I stood up under the strain of their forced marches as well as the Hausas themselves. You see, all my life I have ridden to hounds. It was seldom that my brothers could shake me off in the hunting-field. And—Allan—I'll tell you a secret. I am not afraid of these people! No Hausa has dared to come into the little tent they have given me. Early the first morning a repulsive sheik struck me with a camel-whip. I snatched the whip from his hands and cut him with all my strength. It made the others laugh—and not one of the filthy beasts has dared to lay hands on me since."

"Good for you!" I answered, in the most relieved tone I could manage. But my heart was heavy. "You have taught them respect for a white woman." I knew only too well why they had not entered her tent, why they did not beat her cruelly and why she was not at this moment carrying heavy earthen jars of water and performing the most arduous manual labor in the camp! She was a blonde beauty and to those dark, sinister desert men she must have appeared as a paragon of houris from another and infinitely better world. What a weight of gold, what numbers of fine mehari racing-camels she would bring in the slave market when they reached some large and rich Arab city in the heart of the desert! What a heaven-sent addition to a rich man's harem—provided she had no disfiguring marks of abuse upon her fair skin—and provided she had not been made the toy of her captors! All this was as clear to me as sunlight but, "Thank God," I thought, "she has not suspected the truth."

SHE continued, wonderingly, "But the women of the oases we have passed through. They scream at me and a few days ago one old hag with stumps of yellow teeth and fingers like the claws of an unclean bird rushed upon me and I believe would have scratched my eyes out if the same sheik that struck me had not knocked her down with the butt of his camel-whip. She was like a wild beast—I was really frightened. Other women, at every oasis, have jabbered and spat and followed me in a howling mob. I believe they would tear me to pieces if the men did not whip them off. That's curious, don't you think?"

She had seen raw jealousy, hideous in all its nakedness.

"Oh, that's only their way. The female of the species, you know." How well I knew that these desert women were aware that this beautiful creature was carefully preserved for the harem of some rich sheik in the North—an envied position that every last one of them had looked forward to in vain all her life as the summit of female attainment, an honored position they would have sold their very souls to reach. No wonder they spat and screeched, and no wonder the men guarded the blonde beauty so carefully against the disfiguring claws of those shriveled harpies! She was a priceless chattel and her beauty must be preserved until a sale was made. "Poor child," I thought, "she actually ascribes her immunity to her spirit and self-respect and to the fact that she is a woman! Feminine self-respect—to these cutthroats!"

She continued to describe the long and painful journey, but I was only half listening. In the back of my head all the time was the one thought; I had been spared the necessity of telling her of Henry Lovering's death, but now I should be forced to see her placed upon the slave-block, stripped, and pawed by the dirty hands of lustful prospective buyers. And I should be there, bound and helpless, forced to look on! The thought left me weak; I turned my face away and pretended to sleep.

## CHAPTER IX

THE Hausas allowed Courtney to come and go as she pleased within the circle of black tents that formed the nightly camps. It would have been clear to a child that she could not escape, even if she had chosen to leave me in my helplessness. And I think our captors were keen enough to know also that she would never have done this, even if escape had been easy.

She had cared for my wound with a degree of skill that astonished me in a girl of her age and inexperience. The dead flesh about the edges of the wound had been trimmed off with a sharp and clean knife each day; she had boiled the water used in bathing the wound and she had done one thing that I should never have thought of; having no disinfectants, she had laid me in the sun and exposed the wound to its direct rays, at first for a few moments only and then for a longer period each day. The antiseptic and healing rays had prevented gangrene. Without question I owed my life to her intelligent care.

I thought of these things as I lay in the black tent with my mind clear at last. And I wondered if there was any possible chance of my repaying her; of somehow managing an escape that would save her, to use a trite phrase, from a fate worse than death. To be in condition to do anything for her I must first of all gain strength. And then it occurred to me that I was liable to be left behind to the tender ministrations of the hyenas any day. If our captors encountered a superior force of enemies—and all tribes in the desert are enemies—and were compelled to seek safety in speed, I should be the first burden they would throw aside. I was of slight value to them. An old man is not worth much in the slave market; he cannot stand up under hard labor in the desert sun. They might easily leave me to die of thirst to avoid the trouble of lashing me to a camel each morning. But Courtney, because of her great value from a harem standpoint, would be the very last of their possessions to be left behind.

I must gain strength and I must find a way to impress the Hausas—to make them think I was worth keeping.

*The next thing I remember was some one pouring warm and muddy water between my clenched teeth. . . . For a moment I recognized Courtney Collingwood.*

We talked of this in the black tent that evening, but I was careful to give Courtney no inkling of the fate I knew was in store for her. I led her to believe ransom money was what they were after.

"You know, Courtney," I remarked, "they expect a big ransom for you. As for me—they know that my value in cash is almost nothing. I must find a way to make them think that I can be of service to them. If I can't do this, they'll soon rid themselves of the burden of a wounded old man."

"Allan, you are jolly well right!" she answered quickly. "I've known it for some days but I didn't know you knew it and I didn't intend to mention it. Why, three times they began to untie you from the camel! They would have thrown your poor wounded body aside for hyenas and jackals to fight over if I had not— But let's not talk of it! Promises of ransom money will not convince them that you are worth saving. I know—for I made them understand that my people would pay as much for you as they would for me. How I stormed at them! Knowing no Arabic, it was terribly hard. I made signs; I drew pictures in the sand with the butt of a camel-whip; I touched a coin hanging from the neck of a Hausa, pointed to you, counted—oh, thousands, on my fingers. I made great piles of sand to represent the money they would receive as ransom for you. In the end they must have understood perfectly. And when they did—what do you think? They laughed, actually laughed!"

It was plain to me that the Hausas had construed all her signs about money as referring to my value in the slave market. No wonder they had laughed. I knew perfectly well that they had never once considered holding either of us for ransom. That course would be far too dangerous.

"No," I said, rather unconvincingly, "these people cannot picture anyone willing to part with a large sum of money merely to secure the release of an old man. In the case of a woman—in your case, that is—they can understand. I must show them some other value in this old carcass of mine."

We considered the problem for an hour. It was Courtney who received the flash of inspiration.

"I have it! Powder!" She was as excited as a child. "Don't you see? Powder! You are an expert at making gunpowder! Think how valuable you will be to the Arabs in the center of the Sahara. There must be only a few of them who know the secret—"

"But I can't make gunpowder. I have never even tried it!"

"Don't be silly!" Her eyes were sparkling. "You won't be called upon to put that alleged knowledge to the test until we arrive at the end of our journey—at that large city in the desert—what do you call it—Tibesti? They have none of the ingredients here."

She was right. This ruse was the one thing!

A black slave brought my supper of flat, unleavened bread, a punklike stuff of little nourishment. An evil-looking Hausa sheik followed the slave into the tent. Judging from the richness of his clothing, the gold and silver thread bordering his burnous and *khila,* or voluminous robe, and the air of command that somehow seemed to surround him, the old robber was a sheik of standing in the tribe. Here was a chance to try her suggestion. I spoke in the most high-flown and complimentary terms:

"Salaam, O wise one, selected by Allah to receive his greatest blessings! I have information of importance for your ears alone. If you will send away the slave, I will speak."

"*Idhar, wuhush!* (Get out, animal!)" the old cutthroat grunted, waving carelessly toward the door. The black man backed out, bowing and salaaming, and stepping very softly and quickly. He knew his master.

"It has pleased Allah, O Scourge of the Desert, to present you with a valuable chattel. I have received great kindness at your hands while lying in the lap of death. The *sabiyi Englizi* (English girl) has told me of your kindness." This was a rank lie, of course, but I thought best to have a reason for the revelation I was about to make. "The secret of making powder—the strong and deadly gunpowder used by the *Franzawi,* more powerful than any Arab powder, is known to me. I shall be pleased to use this secret knowledge for your benefit."

The black eyes gleamed. The sheik darted a swift glance through the tent door. No one was within hearing. He advanced a step and hissed:

"Speak of this to no one else. Keep this information to yourself, and you shall be well treated. Speak of it to another, and you shall be beaten each day—as long as you can stand the lash without dying." The old fox planned to secure me in the division of spoils; if none of the others knew of my supposed knowledge, he could trade for me at a nominal price. The sheik picked up the coarse bread that had been brought for my supper. With one sweep of his arm he threw it through the tent door

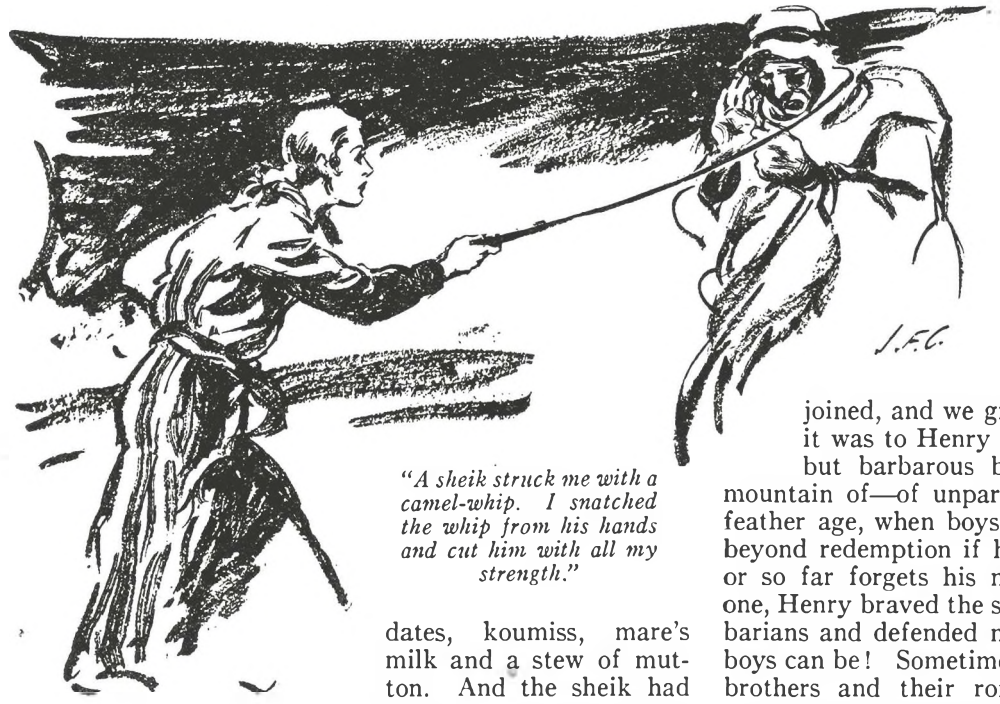
and stalked out. We heard him order the slave to bring me a decent meal. I knew then that I should thereafter be given the best of strengthening food and that this sheik would see to it that I was not left behind for the hyenas.

I turned to Courtney.

"The old crook would double-cross his friends when they divide the loot. He believes that yarn, and now he'll feed and nourish the snake at his breast until perhaps the wounded reptile gets a chance to bite. I'll give you three guesses," I added, smiling broadly, "what is the handiest natural gift a person can have in this part of the world?"

She smiled. "One guess will do, thank you. A lying tongue, O Keeper of the Mysteries! Yes, a forked and twisted tongue is better than fine gold." She did not know how truly she spoke!

The slave soon returned and placed beside my rug,



*"A sheik struck me with a camel-whip. I snatched the whip from his hands and cut him with all my strength."*

dates, koumiss, mare's milk and a stew of mutton. And the sheik had had gumption enough to send Courtney's dinner along with my own. I was at first amazed at the large assortment and the amount of food laid before her. It was enough for a brace of harvest hands; a gourd of milk, almost three quarts, with huge lumps of ghee, or butter, floating about on its surface. There were two large chunks of meat—fat meat—and no end of the heavy native bread. It was enough for three people. The slave repeated instructions of his master in a clicking, Arabic patois that I found hard to understand:

"The sheik, he say, you are to tell the *Franzawi sitt* (the foreign woman) she must eat all—everything."

I started to protest. It was absurd. The idea of expecting a person to stuff herself like that! Then the reason flashed across my mind: Courtney, with her lithe, slim grace, would not be quite so beautiful from the Oriental standpoint and consequently not so desirable to an Arab purchaser as she would if rolls of fat encircled that slender waist! The Hausas, with an eye to the sale value of their property, considered such outlays of food a good investment.

"Why, Allan," Courtney exclaimed, "take a look at this pile of food. They must think an Englishwoman eats like a drove of hungry pigs! Silly asses!"

"They're taking no chances on your fading away before they get that ransom," I lied genially. Lying was becoming a habit with me.

The smell of food brought a hungry village dog nosing about the rear of the tent. I sent the slave for more dates and Courtney thereupon thrust a heaped wooden platter under the tent wall. Gulping sounds followed and in much less time than it takes to write it down, the plate was empty. The slave returned and took away the wooden bowls. We were alone again, Courtney seated upon the sand floor and I lying with head propped up on my rug. She became serious almost at once.

"Do you mind if I bore you, Allan, for a while this evening?" she asked with more than a hint of wistfulness in her voice. "I haven't been able to talk with anyone for so long—that is, about things that really matter—about Henry, to be honest. Silly of me, perhaps, but I should dearly love to tell you about Henry and me. Would you mind so awfully?"

"Of course not, child. Get it off your chest." I dreaded the recital. Having in mind always the fate in store for her and being positive that Henry Lovering was by this time dead at the hands of savage Tuaregs, it would not be easy for me to recline quietly on my rug and listen to this gently reared girl speak of Henry and herself and her expectation that they would be reunited in a few short months.

"I have always been in love with Henry. You see, our fathers' estates in the country joined, and we grew up together. In pinafore days it was to Henry that I ran when one of my beloved but barbarous brothers heaped upon my head a mountain of—of unparliamentary language. At the pinfeather age, when boys consider one of their number lost beyond redemption if he so much as notices a little girl, or so far forgets his masculinity as to speak kindly to one, Henry braved the scorn of a rabble of countryside barbarians and defended me. You know what cruel savages boys can be! Sometimes I used to follow along behind my brothers and their roistering crew when they set out upon secret expeditions after rooks and badgers. I dogged the footsteps of those great explorers like a wistful puppy. When they found me out and drove me away like a pariah, with contumely and abuse, to say the least, Henry would often leave the crowd and lead me home. Out of sight around a turn in the lane or behind a hedgerow, he would dry my cheeks, laugh away the tears, and make the most awful and delightful faces to cheer me up. It wasn't that he liked me any better than the rest did. He was just as bored as they. But there was something in Henry that was not in the others; he could not bear to see anything suffer, even a snubby-nosed little girl in a torn and muddy frock. His watchword upon those tearful occasions was:

*"'A Locksley! A Locksley to the rescue!'*

"That rallying cry he had gleaned from constant reading of Robin Hood. He was about the Robin Hood age then and one time, I remember, he swore me to secrecy with strange and terrible oaths and a cabalistic mark in blood that had to be made upon the hilt of his wooden sword—and I had to furnish the blood! I went through with it too, in the end, but I could not watch when he pricked my finger with a penknife 'dagger.' Then he divulged his secret. He was organizing a band of boys—he called them 'lusty yeomen'—to ravage the countryside. His band would be more terrible than Robin Hood's because they would be mounted—on their Shetland ponies! 'Lovering's Looters' he intended to call them.

I, of course, could not join, for alas, I was only a girl! But I bore up bravely under that trying disappointment. I was comforted by being told the secret sign of the Looters—both arms held above the head and crossed. That was the signal to be given by a member when in dire need of assistance. At that signal of the crossed arms every Looter within miles was to rush in, regardless of danger, and rescue the comrade in distress with terrifying cries of, *'A Locksley! A Locksley to the rescue!'*

"THE Looters was duly organized. It had a short but nefarious existence. One day a sheepfold was raided; the Looters chivvied the sheep about the meadow with terrifying whoops. But the farmer's collie took a hand and bit one of the Looters in the leg. The poor child stood in a fence-corner guarded by the barking collie until the farmer came. The invincible Looters took to their heels. Poor Henry was the only one who rallied to the rescue. He rushed in to help at the signal of distress. Henry was captured too and I think both boys were soundly spanked by their fathers. Henry was somewhat reticent about that part of it. But—I am boring you fearfully with all this childish reminiscence."

"Go ahead, Courtney, I was once a boy too, you know."

"No, I won't bore you any more, but I will tell you how Henry and I came to be separated. And—let me say first, old friend,"—and she laid a hand gently over mine. She was terribly in earnest. "You were mistaken when you thought that Henry was deliberately going out of his way to meet death. He was not—he was desperately trying to prove something. You'll see it in a moment.

"We grew up together doing the things that most young people at home do, I suppose. Then we became engaged. It was a perfectly natural thing—one of those things ordained almost from the cradle; Henry had never taken any other girl seriously and I had never looked at another man. We were to have been married four months ago—I wonder if it could have been the exact day that he fought the Tuareg and received the bullet in his leg." She hesitated, and tears that she was not the least ashamed of stood in her dark eyes.

"I don't see how you can understand the rest. I doubt if anyone who doesn't know my father could understand. We have always been such a strenuous hunting family; my father, his father before him, my brothers, before they entered the army—we all took our hounds and horses and foxes too seriously. Henry was right about that.

"Well, one afternoon, my father and Henry and I were riding home after a particularly good run. The fox had been an unusually keen old fellow, cool, crafty—almost human in his intelligent tricks to throw the hounds off the scent—and game to the very end. We were jogging along through the dusk, dead tired, when Henry remarked:

"'General Collingwood, I wonder if we don't—all of us—take our hunting too seriously.' I saw Father straighten in the saddle. I tried to signal Henry not to go on in that sacrilegious vein—but he did not notice.

"'Sometimes when I ride up before the hounds have killed, especially after the fox has made a brave and heady fight as he did today, and see him cornered and about to be torn to pieces by that baying rabble—fifty to one—I feel a distinct nausea. A cool-headed and clever fox is a gentleman; he deserves a better fate. Fox-hunting is beastly unfair.'

"Father looked at Henry—looked daggers. You cannot know what blasphemy those words were to an old man who had lived and talked almost nothing but fox-hunting for twenty years. It was the one pleasure left to him after his retirement from the army. How many times have I heard him say that England's battles were won on her hunting-fields! And to hear what he would have called 'a young whippersnapper' malign his precious mania was too much. With the unreasonableness of age, he exploded:

"'Young man, hold your tongue until you have something more intelligent to say!' It was the first time my father had ever spoken so to Henry, who was hurt and also very much annoyed. He had meant what he said and I know now he had thought about it a great deal.

"'All the same,' he answered quietly, 'I think I shall give it up just for that reason—its damnable unfairness.'

"My father looked at him keenly. 'You were thrown today, sir, were you not?' he said in a tone that sent cold chills up my back.

"'My horse fell with me, sir, at Covington Mill gate.'

"'I thought so,' said Father with a scathing and accusing twist to his lips. 'You have had several severe falls lately, have you not?' You would have thought Father was accusing one of his troupers of cowardice in the face of the enemy. It was terrible. Henry saw the import and a look of astonishment and wonder passed over his face. I wanted to jump from my horse and run to him, but Father spoke again, brusquely, as if he had made up his mind and the thing was now settled once for all. He gave Henry no chance to reply and I don't think Henry would have deigned to reply anyway.

"'You may repeat your drivel about unfairness if you choose, young man, to others. Never again to me. It takes a man—or a woman—to ride straight with the Harrington hounds.' And with that beastly insult my father—who is really a dear old person when his beloved army and his darling sport are not questioned—ignored Henry and turned to me to point out a path through the woods. Henry wheeled his horse without a word and rode away. That night he left home. I have not seen him since—and until I received your letter, I did not know where he was.

"I know just what you are thinking, Allan. But you must not blame Henry for leaving without one word to me. I, too, thought at first that he should not have done this. But now I see he could have done nothing else. A man is a strange creature, Allan, especially a brave man. You may accuse him of any crime in the world and he will fight you—to the bitter end. But his courage must not be questioned. Brought up as Henry was, to have pride in the courage and achievements of his race and of his lineage, that unjust insinuation of cowardice was the one blow he could not take. And when it came from an old man—the father of the girl he was to marry, the one person he could not fight—it was too much. He must have known that my father knew differently, but under the circumstances, what could he do? He knew I would marry him no matter what my father said, or thought or did. But in his pride he could not take me with that damnable insinuation hanging over his head, no matter how fantastically untrue it might be. I respect him for doing as he did—and, oh, Allan—" She almost broke down. But she took herself firmly in hand again.

"POOR Father! When he found that Henry had left England, the dear old soul was beside himself—he was all for sending a corps of detectives from Scotland Yard to find Henry and to bring him back, just so Father could apologize. But I would not hear of it. It wasn't apologies Henry wanted. I knew just what Henry would do. I knew he would feel that he had to prove his courage. Young men, some young men, are like that. And nothing that any of us could do would stop him. There was nothing for it but to sit at home and wait for a message—a message announcing his death, perhaps—or a letter

like that heavenly note you sent. . . . My father tried to come to Bornu with me, but his age—he is over seventy—prevented. He got as far as the Congo and there I put him back on the ship we came out in and sent him home again to England. If his rheumatism had not forced him to take to his bed the last week, nothing would have kept him behind. Even then he insisted on being carried along in a litter. He was very difficult to manage, but I finally made him leave me. What awful damage a few hasty words may do! And how nearly tragic! What if that Tuareg bullet had struck somewhere else, a vital place, what a tragic thing! But it was only a flesh wound, and not serious." She smiled bravely. "Soon we shall be ransomed and out of all this bally mess and then it will not take us long to find him." She stopped. The tent had been growing darker. Dogs were barking in the oasis village and the bleating of goats that was to be heard throughout the day, had ceased. The native herds had been driven into the little stone pens that protected them from hyenas during the night.

Courtney sat watching the twilight fade through the low tent door.

"How peaceful it all seems!" she remarked. "One day is exactly like another here in the desert. The natives are living, thinking, doing, just as they have for a thousand years. There is no change. Sand dunes shift with the wind. A date palm grows old, falls and gradually sinks into the sand; a young tree takes its place. Over and over the cycle moves. The same—always the same. And I suppose, we in our way, are like these trees and these people; my father rides to hounds as his father did. My brothers have followed my father's footsteps in the army. I suppose my son will do the same—I shall have many sons, Allan, and they shall all be like their father, with his courage, his tenderness to little snubby-nosed girls, his uncompromising sense of fair play and just a little more pride than is good for them."

She stepped abruptly through the low tent door, flung back a bravely cheerful "Good night" and hurried away to her own tent. But I knew that her eyes were streaming.

## CHAPTER X

MY wound was doing nicely. In a few days I was able to sit my camel without too much discomfort. All danger of infection had now passed and it was only a question of weeks until I should be as good as new.

We were far from Hausa country, traveling through a part of the Sahara where we might expect any day to meet roving bands of the dreaded Tuaregs. From talk among our captors I learned that we were, as I had suspected, on the way to that mysterious stronghold, Tibesti. The Hausas were willing to risk plundering at the hands of the Tuaregs for the great price they expected to obtain there for the loot from Fort Bornu. The English girl was, of course, by far the most valuable single item of this loot.

Guards around our nightly camps were doubled and during the long hot days scouts on fleet mehari camels were thrown miles ahead of the main party. Upon three or four occasions one of these had come racing back, his burnous flying in the wind while his camel, with long neck outstretched, covered ground at an astonishing pace. At those times the line of march had been hastily changed and we went off with all speed at right angles. The Hausas knew their business and each time the menace ahead was avoided.

The thought that Henry Lovering might still be alive through some strange quirk of Fate, kept recurring to me. And sometimes, as I sat my swaying camel half-dozing in the great heat, I indulged in day-dreams induced, perhaps, by my weakness, wherein Henry would swoop down upon our party with a band of Tuaregs which he called "Lovering's Looters," rout the Hausas in a magnificent charge, and carry Courtney and me safely to the British Sudan. It is the unfailing habit of the mind to hope, even though Reason has long ago closed the door on Hope. That optimism is one of the things that raises man above the lower animals.

BUT as the days passed and illimitable leagues of sun and sand fell behind, even that unreasonable hope died away. In a few days we would arrive at Tibesti, that almost inaccessible and to Europeans, totally unknown stronghold of the Saharan Arabs. The Romans in their time had heard of it vaguely. The French, to their cost, have tried to penetrate those waterless wastes, for they know that if once a powerful military expedition could reach Tibesti and leave that greatest of all Arab cities in ashes, the problem of the Sahara would be solved. But of late years, even the French, with all their modern arms and caterpillar armored cars, have given up the idea as impossible. The water situation is one they cannot solve. The Italian army operating in Tripoli once had ambitions but were driven back by those savage desert fighters, the Tuaregs, before the inhabitants of Tibesti even knew that the Italian force had started.

Tibesti was, and is today, the most difficult city on the face of the globe for a European to reach. I was intensely curious to see it and sometimes, in the early mornings, when my blood tingled from the chill of night—that strange but icy chill that so soon yields to almost unbearable heat in the desert, I looked forward with keen anticipation to our entrance into that stronghold. But in a few moments that early-morning stimulation would die. The sight of Courtney sitting her camel, swaying to its lurch with the grace of a desert-born rider, would bring me back to earth with a dull thud. At Tibesti the ancient slave market would be in full swing—the sinister mart that has flourished unchanged for a thousand years—and I knew what that would mean for her.

The hardened frequenters of that desert exchange, where human flesh and blood is bought and sold like cattle on the hoof, would be treated to a spectacle more pitiful than perhaps even they had ever witnessed before. It is bad enough to see an animal-like, half-savage black from the dark forests of Central Africa, strong and capable of heavy work in the fields, stood upon a block and auctioned off to the highest bidder. But this girl, the product of a thousand years of civilization, endowed with the highest type of mind and with the sensitive nerves of a thoroughbred, was an entirely different creature. For such a one to be stood upon that same well-worn block of stone and sold for the paltry price of a few camels to some lousy and unwashed barbarian—not for work in the fields but for the harem—was a thought that at times, in my weakened condition, almost unhinged my reason.

One afternoon I overheard two of the leading sheiks speculating upon the price she would bring.

"Some one," said the first, in a cold and businesslike tone, "is sure to bid one hundred camels for the *jâmal Franzawi* (the foreign beauty)."

"*Râli ktir* (too much)," replied the other doubtfully. "This is no tame mare. She will fight. She is like the desert colt that has not been broken to the saddle."

"*Tawâshi—Kharbaj!* (eunuchs—the whip!)," the other answered laconically. They entered into a long discussion. And one finally satisfied the other that a hundred racing meharis was not too much to expect. He pointed

out that many men enjoy the sport of breaking young colts to saddle and went on in the most cold-blooded way to enumerate Courtney's good points.

Then and there I made up my mind; by hook or crook I would get hold of a weapon and while she slept, I would liberate that brave and gentle spirit. I was sure that Courtney would wish it so if she knew what was in store for her. On this point my judgment was confirmed in a surprisingly short time.

That same afternoon Courtney and I, as usual, had been riding side by side. The Hausas put no restrictions upon us during the day but allowed us to converse freely as we rode. We had been talking of Henry most of the time—she could never hear enough of him—and I was remarking:

"In two or three days, so the Hausas say, we shall arrive at Tibesti. I wonder how they will go about the ransom matter. It will be a ticklish business—to keep their identity hidden and at the same time—"

She guided her camel closer to mine, leaned over and dropped a hand ever so gently upon my forearm. Her eyes met mine with the sincerity and steadiness that was part of her nature.

"Allan," she began,—and the ghost of a smile, sad, but infinitely brave, moved her lips,—"Allan, I want you to do something for me."

I saw that she was speaking straight from the heart. Remembering the lie I had been acting all along, I was on the defensive instantly. I took refuge, sparred for time, in a jocular tone:

"What now, my proud Castilian? Would you have me hand over the Sultan's jewels, the wealth of Ind, the perfumes of Araby or merely navigate a battleship through the Sahara and blow yon thieves' den, Tibesti, plumb off the map? Say it—and consider the thing done!"

"Not now, Allan," she answered, dampening my forced joviality. "The time is too short, old friend." She spoke very slowly and I knew that her words were carefully weighed.

"Will you promise me—if it lies in your power—that you will"—she hesitated, then began again: "Will you promise—if you can possibly get hold of a weapon—that you will remove me from—from this none too delightful world—tonight?"

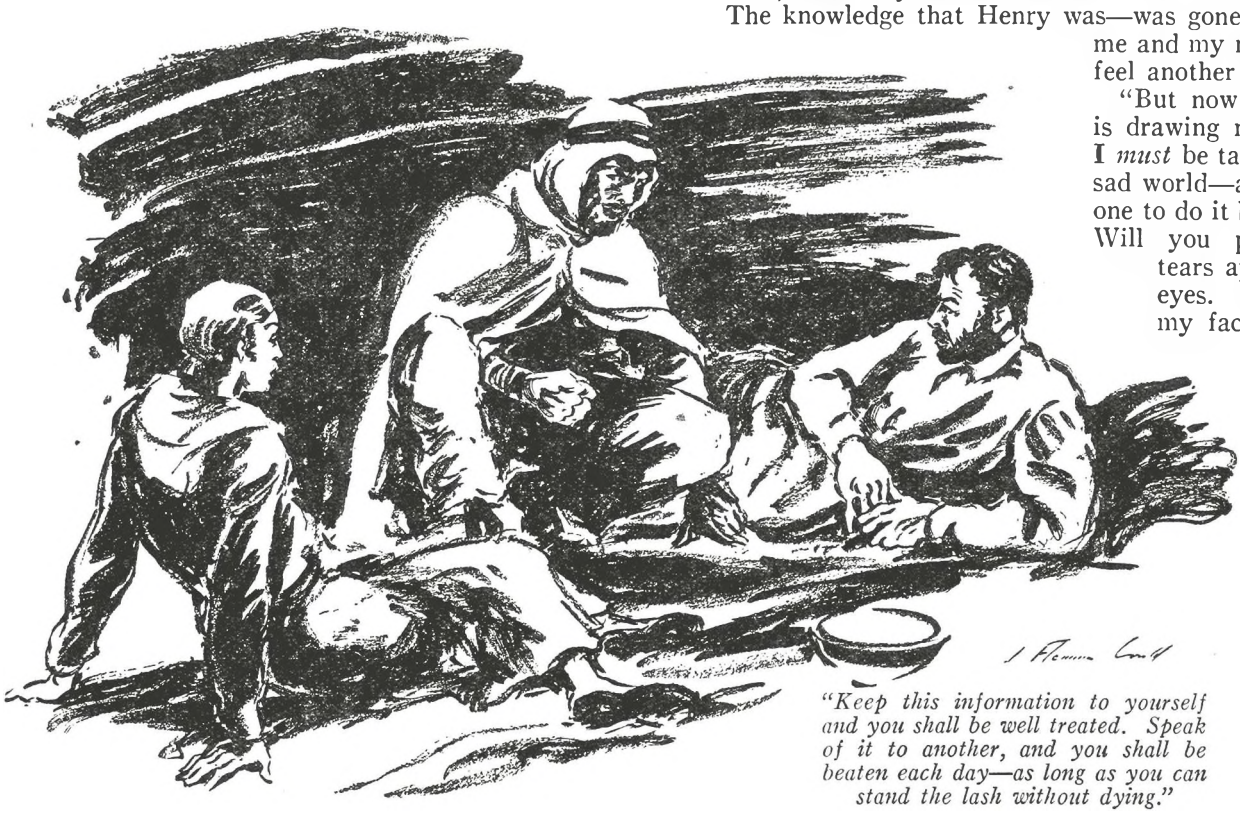
I was so taken by surprise that I jerked my camel-rope and brought the beast to a halt. But I kicked him forward again before our conversation should be interrupted. Courtney's hand had fallen as the camel stopped, but she laid it again on my arm. Searching my face, she continued:

"I know you will do this for me, just as Henry would do it if he could have been here. Allan, dearest of friends—you tried so nobly to spare me the blow that you thought might kill! But I *knew*—the moment I saw the pain in your eyes that first afternoon as we talked at Fort Bornu. You could not bear to tell me that I should never see Henry again! The very thought of speaking the truth almost finished you. How well I knew it! Your expression was so pitiful—that—well, I could not bring myself to make it any harder for you. So I let you think that I believed what you said about Henry being safe. It almost killed me, Allan, to bear up and not to let you see that I understood. But I did it—I did it! Henry would have been proud of me if he could have known. Oh, how I prayed, that day after you left my rooms, that I too might die! I was the one who sought death that night upon the wall. But death was not for me then. And I saw through your kindly effort to send me back to England where I might receive the blow in the comfort and protection of my family. I saw it all so clearly. You should never lie to a woman in love, Allan, about her lover. It cannot be done successfully.

"And it has been kind and gentle of you, also, to try so hard to spare me with your optimistic talk of ransom. But, dear friend, I understand why they do not beat me and why no man has been allowed near my tent. I knew from the very first that it would be slavery for me in some filthy harem—if I am alive when we reach Tibesti. It is plain to me, as it is to you, that ransom is out of the question. But I have hardly given it a thought. When I knew that I should never again see Henry in this world—then, what they chose to do to me was of no consequence. The knowledge that Henry was—was gone—had stunned me and my mind could not feel another blow.

"But now that the time is drawing near, I must—I *must* be taken out of this sad world—and there is no one to do it but you, Allan. Will you promise?" No tears appeared in her eyes. She searched my face with an unwavering, indomitable gaze. The honest bravery in those eyes told me that I had been foolish to be afraid to tell this girl the whole truth. She was in every fiber a general's daughter.

"I had al-



*"Keep this information to yourself and you shall be well treated. Speak of it to another, and you shall be beaten each day—as long as you can stand the lash without dying."*

ready made up my mind to that, Courtney," I answered slowly.

At the words, which I had been able only to whisper, her hand tightened on my arm in a reassuring grip. That firm pressure of the fingers proved to me that this slim girl with her charm and tenderness, her exquisite beauty and refinement had, beneath it all, a heart of tempered steel.

"*Inshallah*—it is Kismet," I muttered and booted my camel forward so she could not see my drawn and haggard features. My one object in the time left to me would be to secure a weapon. And then—when it came right down to the actual deed—would I have iron enough in my blood to force myself to do it? My camel trotted ahead in the blazing sun. A mist was before my eyes and my mind was in a condition of torture no man should be called upon to endure this side of hell.

"Yes," I repeated over and over to myself, "it must be done. There is no one else—and therefore I can and must do it!"

In the past few days I had learned something of what one might call the "politics" of this Hausa raiding party. It was an aggregation of fighters composed of men from several Hausa clans, each under its own sheik. When not on a raid, these small bands separate and follow the pasturage and water, sometimes far from each other, in the desert. Upon expeditions of war or plunder, such as the assault on Fort Bornu, they join, and the most trusted sheik is temporarily placed in charge of the combined force. But there is always, upon those occasions, a great deal of friction and misunderstanding. One band will consider itself cheated in the division of spoils, another will take exception to some small occurrence, as trifling a thing as precedence at a feast, and the thinly welded war-party is in constant danger of breaking up. The supreme chieftain must be a man of infinite tact to control those highly independent forces and to hold them together until the object of the combination has been achieved.

IN the present instance, the touchy and temperamental bands had been working together with surprising forbearance. I suppose success in the attack on the French fort had left them comparatively amenable to the orders of the high commander. Fort Bornu had fallen, however, some weeks ago, and the time was coming when a flare-up might be expected. The Arab temperament cannot long remain satisfied under the routine of peaceful daily marches. I had thought much about the possibility of arousing jealousy among those desert clans. And I had worked along those lines by dropping a word or two here and there—veiled insinuations in Arabic that I hoped would set off their explosive pride and jealousy. But so far I had obtained no results worth mentioning.

I think, however, if we had not been traveling through a dangerous country and the menace of the Tuaregs had not been on everyone's mind, I might have caused serious friction, and our chance would perhaps have come in the turmoil and excitement. Certainly our condition could have been no more hopeless under any sort of change than it now was. But the almost daily alarms, the necessity of keeping together in this sinister part of the Sahara, were too much for my poor efforts and when I overheard several Hausas remark that Tibesti was but two days' journey, I knew that I had failed; they could not be set against each other with the goal almost in sight. Internal dissension was the last straw I had clung to and now even that must be given up. There was nothing left. From then on I should bend every effort to secure a weapon of some sort. Courtney must never be placed upon that hideous stone in the *suk*, the market-place, of the great desert city before us! My one job in the time left to me on earth was to prevent that grim travesty.

About noon the next morning one of the far-flung scouts came racing back. The Hausas drew together and our party stood waiting nervously the report of the approaching rider. A knot of sheiks stood upon a sand dune a short way in advance of the main body and it was to this group that the racing camel-rider came to report. I felt my blood mount in excited hope. But the sheiks upon the dune waved reassuring arms back to the main body. There were loud shouts of "Tibesti! Tibesti!" and I knew that the dark rider had merely hurried back to report that he had seen the white city shimmering in the sunlight far ahead. My heart sank to the depths. Courtney, who did not yet understand what the excitement was about, called a question that aroused me. Tomorrow we should lie within those dreaded walls.

THE present relaxed watchfulness in the excitement might be the last chance I should have to secure a knife. A small group of Hausas stood just ahead of my camel, giving way to loud yells of jubilation. I dropped quietly from my camel, edged forward unobserved, as I thought—except by Courtney, who, I knew, watched me in a tension of strained nerves—and managed to secure a Hausa dagger from the sash of its owner. I slipped back to my waiting camel.

So far as I knew no one had seen the thing in the riot of celebration. The dagger was out of sight beneath my shorts next to the skin. I was kicking my camel gently in the shins, at the same time making that clucking, hissing noise with which Arabs command their beasts to kneel, when a big sheik came upon me from behind. I heard Courtney scream and then my neck was seized by a pair of talonlike hands and I was shaken like a rat. My wound had left me very weak and I must have been an easy handful for that turbaned ruffian. The dagger fell from my shorts to the ground. The Hausa relaxed his grip to pick up the knife and I whirled about and was on him like a wildcat. Courtney leaped from her camel without waiting to make him kneel, but she was just too late. The group of celebrants rushed to us and I was pulled from the sheik by a dozen hands before I could drag him to where I could reach the dagger. The dagger was picked up by its owner and I was bound to my saddle with my arms wound with knotted ropes of rawhide. I had taken my one chance and failed. Now I should be kept bound, hand and foot, and guarded. Now no power in the world could save Courtney Collingwood from that slave block!

I must have gone completely out of my head after that. I remember struggling insanely to loosen those rawhide bonds until finally the wound in my shoulder, that had been bleeding again from my struggles, no longer pained me and the world went suddenly dark. I knew no more until camp was pitched upon a hill as the sun was almost upon the horizon. To the northward I have the dim recollection of a great mass of white walls, bathed in the red light of the setting sun. It was a beautiful sight, no doubt—I suppose even the gates of hell would be beautiful from a certain artistic standpoint. It was Tibesti. We should arrive by noon the next day, and Courtney Collingwood— But I dared not let my mind dwell upon what was in store for her.

Two guards were placed in my tent that last night and the rawhide thongs that bound my arms were not even loosened to allow me to sleep. That night I went through a physical and mental hell in which my wounded shoulder and my tightly bound arms gave me excruciating pain. But that pain, if I do say it was nothing to the mental agonies I endured.

## CHAPTER XI

OUR party, two hundred and fifty Hausa fighting men and three hundred camels, entered Tibesti at the southwest corner of the thick walls by a gate known as Bauwabi Ahsud the Lion Gate. A lion couchant carved in stone decorated the arch above the wide entrance. Several of the leading Hausa sheiks had entered in advance, during the night, to make arrangements for the housing of our large party. And they had, no doubt, circulated stirring reports of the valuable loot we had brought. Our captors were hailed as real conquerors and the walls were crowded with yelling Arabs.

As we passed through the gate the populace swarmed about Courtney's camel, eager for a near view of the first European woman they had ever seen. Judging by the great crowd and by its extravagant expressions of delight at the beauty of the English captive, Hausa expectations of a fabulous price for the unfortunate girl who sat her camel with such quiet grace were well founded. I was thankful that Courtney understood no Arabic. At least she was spared the meaning of the suggestive phrases with which the gibbering mob pointed out her attractions.

*"You old fool," I shouted between spasms of raucous laughter, "I know nothing of powder-making! I lied to you!"*

I had not been allowed to ride with Courtney since my unsuccessful attempt to secure the dagger. I had had no word with her but I was often near enough in the long line of camels to receive a brave, reassuring smile and to know that she had not given up to despair. What a regular person she was! Now, as I turned and watched her riding in the midst of a seething mass of shouting Arabs, a feeling of deepest pity came over me for the hundredth time. She knew she was doomed to a fate so terrible that it is beyond the understanding of the average person. She no longer entertained the slightest hope that she might be spared that fate, either by death or by rescue. And yet her small head was held straight and high; it swayed in a graceful arc with the lurching motion of her camel and her tawny hair shone in the morning sun as her burnous fell back, with a lustrous sheen.

A wave of admiration swept over me. Ah, it would be a long time before these cutthroats would succeed in breaking that brave spirit! The unspeakableness of her fate came home to me and almost curdled the blood in my veins —for even that indomitable spirit would eventually be broken. Flesh and blood could not stand up forever against the cruelty of eunuchs, the solitary confinement, the forcible feeding and the whip—always the whip!

I find it hard to describe Tibesti as I saw it. To me, in my weakened condition, with the thought of Courtney constantly in my mind the great Arab stronghold appeared more like a city seen in a dream: a howling mass of dark barbarians, crowding upon us from all sides, leering into our faces, insane with joy at the sight of two members of the conquering race in their cruel hands. I knew then how the proud chieftains of the old German tribes must have felt when led captive at the tail of Cæsar's chariot through the streets of imperial Rome. You remember that Cleopatra preferred death from the fangs of a serpent to the humiliation of being led a captive to Rome in the triumphal march of Octavius. Courtney Collingwood would have chosen the same way out if the opportunity had arisen—and I would have been the first to offer her the fatal basket of figs!

The streets and houses of Tibesti were much like those of any large Arab city. But the rough stone pavements showed signs of great age. Some, I imagine, must have been laid hundreds of years ago. Deep narrow paths had actually been worn in the solid stone by the soft feet of countless camels passing back and forth through the ages. Ancient drinking-fountains that had long since dried up and fallen into decay stood at the intersections of more important streets. Newer drinking places had been established as the subterranean stream-beds had shifted through the generations. The Arab houses were built up to the streets and narrow gateways led to walled courtyards; gateways with verses from the Koran hewn in the rock above them. Camels and donkeys loafed about in those courtyards and mangy dogs with pointed ears swarmed and barked in the streets.

As we passed along the winding, narrow causeways, our camels shuffling noiselessly on the ancient stones, sometimes, when the insane yelling of the crowd ceased for a moment, I could hear muffled exclamations in strident

female voices from behind latticed harem windows that jutted from the second story of many of the houses. Into one of these dark dens the beautiful daughter of a British general, the fiancée of Henry Lovering, would be thrust —to pass the rest of her natural life! That brave and spirited girl who had always known the green of English pastures, the tang of the winter woodlands, freedom, the respect of clean men—above all the respect of men—to be forever buried alive in such a noisome kennel! The thought left me in such a state that by the time we arrived at a large courtyard and were ordered to dismount I had to be lifted from the saddle.

IN the courtyard a fat eunuch with flabby jowls drove a crew of sweating negro slaves with a cracking whip, belaboring their bare backs as they worked furiously to assist the Hausas in the unloading. He saw me, tottering from my wound and the cruel bonds which still held my arms in a painful position behind my back. He cut the rawhide at my wrists, pointed to the negroes and ordered me in Arabic to lend a hand, and with the order he wrapped the lash of his whip around my shoulders with all his strength. I forgot everything then! I threw myself upon him but arms and fingers were stiff and temporarily useless from the tight bonds. I was almost too weak to stand. He shook me off easily and I was saved from a cruel beating by the opportune entrance of the sheik to whom I had spoken of my alleged gunpowder abilities. The sheik jerked the whip from the hand of the fat enunch and slashed him a dozen times before the lumbering, howling creature could reach the safety of a doorway.

"If my property needs beating," remarked the sheik to the other Hausas watching the affair, "I will do it myself."

I was thrust into a small room built of stone and opening off the courtyard. The heavy cedar door swung shut and was locked from the outside. The place was without a window and with the door shut as dark as midnight.

Courtney had been quartered in another part of the city for that section of the caravan with which she had been riding did not follow into our courtyard.

A detailed description of the mental agonies I endured in the two days and nights that I remained in that black hole would be useless; no one who has not been through it could understand. I shall only say that I was led out into the sunlight at the end of forty-eight hours on the verge of mental and physical breakdown. Food had been pushed through a sliding cubby-hole in the cedar door but I had not tasted it. Of water I had taken but little. The pain of my wound, the lack of sleep, and the thoughts that besieged my mind like an army of demons had combined to put me into a state that may best be described as one of incoherence and hallucination.

The sheik whom I had falsely impressed with my tale of powder-making now led me into the house. I could hardly walk without the assistance of a burly negro slave upon whose shiny shoulder I rested my good arm. The sheik led us to a sort of patio, or open garden, with a cool fountain bubbling in its center. Seated on cushions around the walls of this airy chamber were half a dozen sheiks, evidently of high standing. And seated upon the tiled floor near the fountain were two ancient Arabs dressed in the striped clothes affected by magicians. Before them stood several gourds and metal pots.

I was told to be seated beside the magicians. The sheik explained to his friends that I had been brought to Tibesti alive because of my ability to manufacture the gunpowder of the *Franzawis;* that he would now have me demonstrate my abilities. He turned to me.

"In these pots," he stated, "are the materials. These two"—indicating the old gaffers in the striped robes—"are powder-makers. They will see how you do it." He sat down among his friends. Silence fell.

One of the magicians passed over to me a metal pot of stinking, gummy stuff. I took it from him mechanically—and then the grim humor of the situation crashed through my mental fog; here was the sheik with the men to whom he expected to sell me for a big price—or friends to whom he had bragged of his cleverness in keeping my real value hidden from the other Hausas. What an ass he was—how neatly he had been duped! I dropped the pot on the floor and burst into peal after peal of hysterical laughter.

"You old fool," I managed to shout in Arabic between spasms of raucous laughter, "I know nothing of powder-making! I lied to you as I lied to Courtney and everybody else!" And then I must have gone completely out of my head, for I remember nothing more. A shower of dazzling lights seemed to burst in my head and the floor came slowly up and hit me a stunning blow.

Hours later I recovered consciousness in the dark of my stone prison. My mind was clear, but there was a knot the size of a goose egg on the top of my head; that would be the place where the sheik in his rage had struck me with the first instrument that came to hand. It would account for the dazzling shower of sparks. Why I had not been beaten to death on the spot I do not know, unless the sheik in his desire for money had thought better of it and was now determined to sell me for what little he could get in the slave market. And it came to me all of a sudden that I had missed a great opportunity; I should have bluffed and put them off, explained that the ingredients they had offered were not those I was used to, made them believe that with a little experiment I could learn to use their materials and turn them out a better powder than their own crude stuff. I might have done that. And when I had learned—perhaps I could have made at least one huge bomb, set it off and buried myself and a dozen Arabs in one glorious explosion. But my mind had been too hazy at the time and now the opportunity would never come again.

The cedar door opened. Two slaves entered and dragged me to my feet. The sheik was waiting outside and I was hustled forward, and hoisted to the back of a kneeling camel. The sheik mounted another and with the two slaves walking at the side of my animal, we followed through the gateway into the narrow streets while the slaves shouted, *"Ruh Bâka!"* (Clear out!) to the inhabitants who impeded our march by their crowding.

AT last we came to a large open place near the center of the city. I could see a vast throng surging and shouting around a circular platform slightly raised above the surrounding ground. In the middle of the sunbaked mud platform was a large flat stone and as we followed the sheik through the outskirts of the crowd a dejected black with hanging head was led to the stone and pushed up the low steps leading to it. There he stood above the crowd, the bright sunlight gleaming from the ebony of his knotted shoulder-muscles. An Arab with a high, piercing voice mounted to the platform below, and in far-carrying tones harangued the crowd. His gesticulations were forceful and while I could not catch his words, they were uttered in a positive and domineering manner. I knew an Arab auctioneer when I saw one. I did not need a second glance to know this was the slave-market of Tibesti.

The sheik on his camel ahead found a way for us through the crowd and we came at last to the edge of the wide platform. There I was pulled from my camel and made to stand with a group of a dozen negroes waiting their

turns to be pushed to that sinister black stone upon the dirt platform. Some were weeping quietly, others, long since resigned to their fate during the long march with the caravan that had brought them here, stood with wooden faces, showing no emotion whatever. One, with many scars from the lash on his back, stood apart from the rest with the most homesick, lost-dog expression on his ugly features that I have ever seen. I edged over to him and asked in Swahili:

"Where do you come from, boy?"

He swung around at words in his own language and fawned upon me exactly like a beaten dog. He was a pitiful sight with those deep scars on his naked back and I knew the terrible homesickness that was clawing at his heart like a wild beast.

"Bwana! Bwana! Bwana!" was all he could say in a moaning, hopeless tone that shook his big body from head to foot. My own head was aching from the sun and my mental processes were none too clear, but I pitied that black man from the bottom of my heart. His spirit had been completely broken. He was not surprised to see a white man awaiting his turn upon the auction block. His poor, dull mind could contain nothing but his own misery.

The forlorn creature was hoisted to the black stone. The penetrating voice of the auctioneer rasped out praises of his strength, his health, and the scars of the naked back were pointed to as proof that the man had already been put through such a course of discipline that no further trouble from him was to be expected. He had been completely broken in spirit without injury to the big muscles so valuable in the fields. If you have ever seen a severe case of shell-shock you will understand. There was considerable bidding for that slave; the people of Tibesti seemed to be partial to blacks whose capacity for making trouble had been pretty well beaten out of them. Strength and docility were the two points emphasized by the leather-lunged auctioneer. The black man was finally purchased for ten *hamla* or baggage camels by a prosperous-looking sheik who sent him away under escort of two other blacks, evidently slaves of long standing.

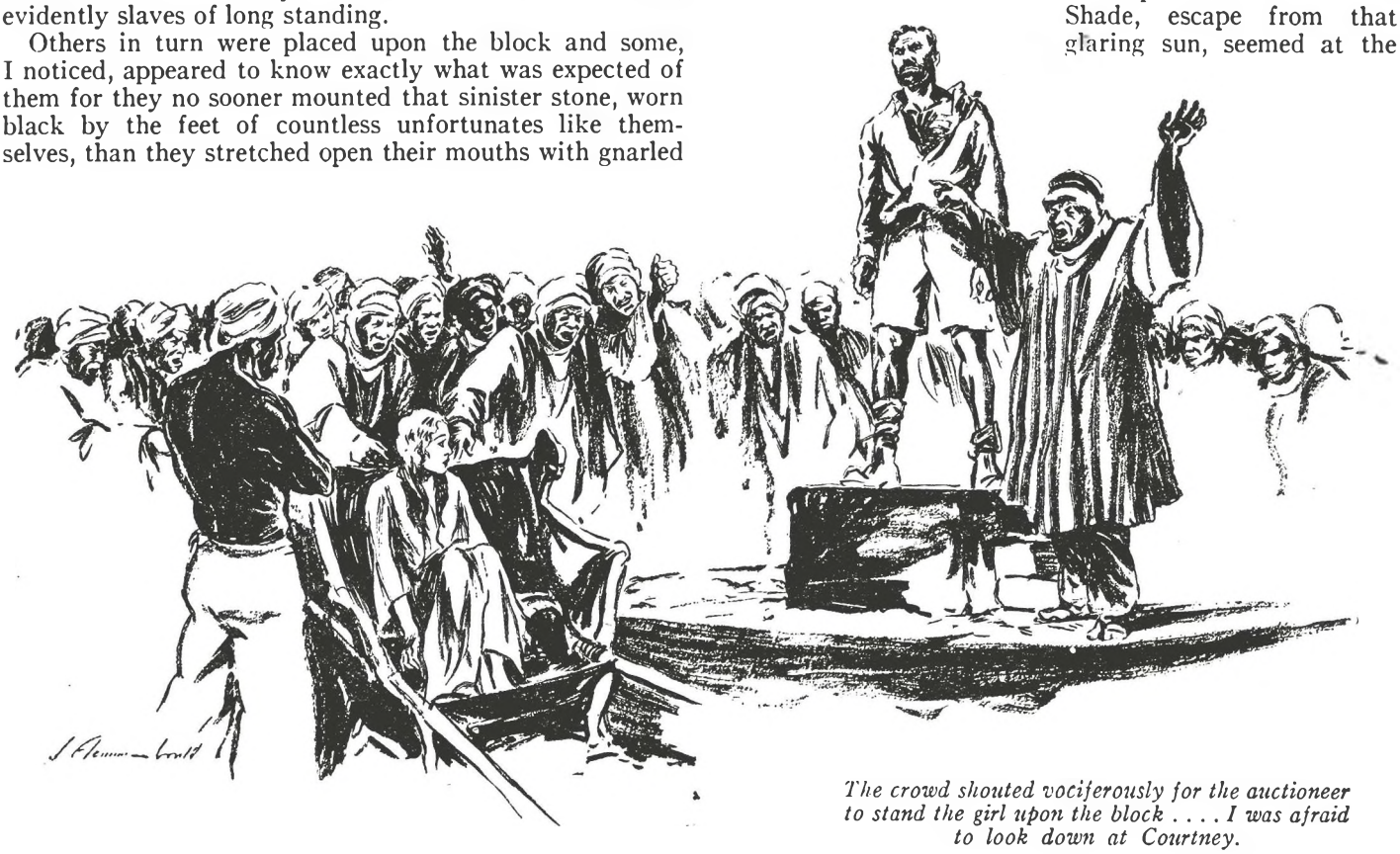
Others in turn were placed upon the block and some, I noticed, appeared to know exactly what was expected of them for they no sooner mounted that sinister stone, worn black by the feet of countless unfortunates like themselves, than they stretched open their mouths with gnarled fingers, to show perfect teeth, held up wide and spreading bare feet for inspection, flexed arm and leg muscles and showed off their strength to advantage.

"Those men," I thought, "have been well treated by their owners and have been coached to show themselves to advantage. And it may be a matter of pride with them to secure as high a price as possible for their owners. A strange pride—but one not incompatible with the doglike nature of the Central African."

There was a great deal of noisy wrangling among the purchasers. Any matter of business, however small, cannot be accomplished among Arabs without almost endless palaver and argument—and this was serious, and for these people, expensive business. Two important personages almost came to blows over possession of one insignificant negro; both had shouted bids at the same time and the auctioneer had heard but one of them. He had repeated this man's bid and called for a higher. All in the world the other man had to do was to repeat his bid in the silence that followed, but instead, he leaped forward gesticulating and shouting that the auction was not conducted on the square. It was a silly exhibition and typical of Arab business methods.

I noticed several of our late Hausa captors idly watching the proceedings. But they wasted only a glance on me. I had become an old story to them and was of slight value anyway. But the townspeople crowded about and stared curiously. The sheik who had settled for me with the rest of the Hausa band, took his seat in a row of men around the edge of the selling platform.

My turn came at last and I was told to mount the black stone. I suppose, if my mind had been normal, I could never forget the smallest detail of what followed. But as I think back upon it, I remember only that I tottered up those low steps to the flat stone, feeling my way blindly with head throbbing from the direct rays of the desert sun. And I was thankful that now, at last, the terrible business would soon be over and I would again be thrust into some dark place in the shade. Shade, escape from that glaring sun, seemed at the



*The crowd shouted vociferously for the auctioneer to stand the girl upon the block . . . . I was afraid to look down at Courtney.*

moment the most desirable thing in the world. And then, little by little, as the voice of the auctioneer rasped out Arabic words that I hardly bothered to translate to myself, I thought again of Courtney and how she too would soon stand upon this very spot—and with the thought, came vaguely to my ears a loud shouting from the outskirts of the crowd.

The people no longer listened to the auctioneer, but faced in the direction of the shouting. My eyes turned that way and I could see, coming through the mob of crowding Arabs, a small procession followed by a litter borne by four enormous blacks. A yelling rabble pressed the litter closely and I did not know, until they arrived almost at the edge of the platform itself that Courtney Collingwood sat in a sort of gilded, wooden chair or throne on that litter! The Hausas had set the stage and timed their entrance beautifully. How well they realized the money value of scenery—the size of the burly blacks carrying the litter, the gilded chair and the black draperies that half-concealed the person within, the ebony skins of the bearers, the pale, clear features and the light unbound hair of the slim young girl! What a contrast!

I suppose I had reached a point where emotion could no longer touch me. I stood upon that black stone and saw the slaves set the litter down carefully. I watched, without any emotion that I can recall, that innocent young girl step out and adjust the almost transparent robe of silk about her with careless disinterestedness. She was entirely indifferent to the costume they had compelled her to wear, which was little more than a gauze veil, and she was carrying on apparently, without the slightest trace of hysteria. She too had gone through hell in the past few days and every ordinary emotion must have been burned away.

THE crowd shouted vociferously for the auctioneer to stand the *Franzawi* girl upon the block. They surged forward until the throng was packed as tightly as men could stand against the platform at my feet. Some one, shrilling above the yells of the crowd, made a bid for me. Another came from a different side, a third, a fourth. The auctioneer called for silence and in a moment the people quieted down and he continued his demands for a higher bid. I was afraid to look down at Courtney. I dared not do it. I simply stood like a man of wood upon that cruel stone. My eyes traveled again to the outskirts of the crowd and far away to the sand dunes beyond the walls of the town—everywhere but to the young girl below at the edge of the platform. She had not yet noticed me, so intent was her mind upon maintaining her self-control. I knew she was fighting to keep herself in hand as she had never fought before. I feared the sight of me would break her completely—but again I had underestimated her.

She saw me in another moment and managed pitifully to contrive a reassuring smile. But she did not trust herself to speak, and as for me, I could trust myself no longer even to look down upon her.

I continued to stand upon that slave-block as if carved from a gnarled old tree, gazing, gazing in the sun over the turbaned heads of that vast throng of Arabs. I was dimly conscious of the metallic voice of the auctioneer arguing, pleading and begging for a higher bid. He droned on endlessly it seemed and then, into the range of my vision beyond the crowd swung a group of horsemen trotting leisurely past. There were only twenty or thirty of them but I noticed something curious. They wore the usual Arab *khila* or robe of white, and the cotton burnous, but the faces appeared to be as black as jet. They were fully two hundred yards away and I could not see clearly, but I knew instinctively that what I had taken to be the color of the faces, was the black of Tuareg masks. The horsemen had just entered the city through a gate that lay wide open in their rear.

It should be explained here that the Tuaregs have no cities of their own. They are Bedouins, tent-dwellers, but they have the free run of all cities in the Sahara. Desert towns cannot subsist without many caravans to bring food and other necessities. A city in the Sahara is in the position of a small island in the ocean. Ships of the desert bringing supplies must be allowed access to the populous island. The Tuaregs, professional raiders, control the caravan routes. Consequently the town-dwelling Arab, to secure safe passage for his caravans, must pay toll or otherwise knuckle under to the Tuareg. And the Tuareg may swagger through any town with impunity, for only too well do the townspeople know that should harm come to him at their hands, his wild, nomadic tribe will exact a terrible and relentless retribution from the caravans of that unfortunate city.

I STOOD upon the slave-block watching with languid interest the Tuaregs riding by. It had been so long since I had given Henry up for dead that the thought of him and the two Tuaregs with whom he had ridden from El Muluk did not occur to me at first. Then—and I suppose it was due to a combination of sun, lack of sleep, loss of blood and general misery—I became confused.

My mind wandered and I thought aimlessly of the things Courtney had told me of herself and Henry; of the young "Robin Hoods" calling themselves Lovering's Looters; of the unhappy predicament of the small lad held in the fence-corner by the barking collie—I was now in much the same unfortunate position as that child, but the creatures in front of me were not collie dogs but Arabs. I could no more escape from that slave-stone than the little boy could escape from the fence-corner. The boy had made a signal for help—what was it? Oh, yes, arms crossed above the head—that was it. I wondered dodderingly if I could make that signal with my wounded shoulder. I tried it. The left arm pained me severely but I forced my arms up, regardless of pain. It was an unnatural position at best and nearly impossible with my crippled shoulder but I did it finally and I held the arms there, too, for some time, in spite of the pain. And then, in a few seconds my mind came casually back again to the present. I heard the rasping voice of the auctioneer still calling for bids. Would they never have done with this business? A boy could not stand all day in a fence-corner in the sun. Was that sound the voice of the auctioneer or only the farmer's collie barking?

At last the auctioneer pronounced the word "*shil* (take it away)." Rough hands reached up to pull me from the block. My old carcass was now the property of another Arab, to do with as he pleased. I have a dim recollection of seeing, before I staggered from the great stone, the band of Tuareg horsemen forcing their way slowly through the crowd toward the platform. My memory of the next few moments is badly blurred. But I know Courtney Collingwood mounted the low steps, stood upon the auction-block and faced that yelling, hooting multitude with entire self-possession.

Her small head was still erect and she carried herself like the thoroughbred she was. A chorus of yells welled up from the crowd, gloating, bestial howls, triumphant and covetous. The human brutes set up an incessant demand that the thin silk robe, which was hardly more than a large veil, be stripped from the white body of the merchandise that buyers might be sure that no blemish marked the pale skin. But the auctioneer was too clever to accede to this demand so early in the proceedings. He began in a suggestive way to enumerate the good points of his valuable

harem prospect. A half dozen sheiks stepped forward for a closer inspection. I remember these details but dimly; then something happened that drove the feverish fog from my brain like a clear pure wind that blows across leagues of open water.

The band of Tuareg horsemen had forced its way to the edge of the platform and I heard a startled, incredulous exclamation from one of the masked riders. I saw him lean forward over the withers of his horse but the black mask allowed me no view of his features. My heart beat furiously and I had just begun to wonder wildly if— Then an agonized cry shrilled from behind the black mask and the Tuareg jumped his horse to the platform, knocking two men flat to the ground. He reined his horse to its haunches beside that black stone. Courtney, in spite of her steadfast resolution not to give way to fear no matter what might happen, shrank back instinctively. It was an involuntary movement, impossible to control, for horse and rider plunged to a sudden stop no more than four feet away.

Furious yells broke from the crowd, a deep and threatening volume of sound, ominous as death. It brought me to full realization of things and—in that instant I recognized the chestnut horse!

"Henry!" The cry burst from my throat as I tottered forward. "Take her! Take her—on your horse! The gate! Through the open gate! Quick!"

I don't think Henry even heard me.

In his slow, deliberate way, he removed the Tuareg mask. Courtney stared as at a ghost—but only for the fraction of a second. Then she sprang from that sinister black stone to the side of the horse with a throaty cry that was almost savage in its wild rapture. She buried her face in Henry's Arab *khila* and cried, over and over in a low moan;

"A Locksley! Oh, a Locksley!"

That well-trained chestnut horse had not moved as she leaped. Henry lifted her and held her tightly before him on the saddle, oblivious to that great, threatening crowd. I have never seen two people who appeared to be so utterly alone.

The Tuaregs with rifles across their saddles moved forward; one of them ordered the crowd back—and the crowd moved back. But I was almost beside myself with fear for those two upon the chestnut horse so rashly, sublimely unconscious of everything.

"The gate! To the gate! Hurry!" I yelled, almost in Henry's ear. When he noticed me finally he only turned his head slightly.

"Oh, it's you, Bahram? Good old Bahram!" He turned back again, whispering, to Courtney. Nothing would have surprised him any more and nothing on earth could have hurried him then.

But I, not knowing at that time the full power of the Tuaregs in the Sahara, was amazed to see that great crowd retreat, even in the face of those Tuareg rifles.

ONE of Henry's men dismounted and I was helped into his saddle. The Tuareg sprang up behind me and with veiled men of the desert all around us we moved slowly away. None of our party, except myself, seemed to feel the slightest need for hurry. One of the Tuaregs took charge, rising to the occasion with clear and prompt understanding of the situation. He gave low orders and a lane through the crowd opened magically. The terror inspired in the town-dwelling Arabs by the very name of Tuareg was enough. There was not the slightest attempt at interference. But we left a howling mob behind.

Henry came to himself for a moment as we passed out through the gate in the thick wall of Tibesti.

"Noise," he remarked looking back disinterestedly, "nothing but giddy, asinine noise. They dare do nothing. Jolly old swashbucklers, these Tuaregs!"

Then for the second time he noticed me.

"I say, Bahram, you look a bit knocked up. Lucky I saw your signal. It seemed strangely familiar. Intrigued me. Might have ridden by, otherwise. By the way, old sportsman, how did you know the signal of distress that Courtney and I have used since our Robin Hood days? Oh, Courtney told you, of course. Lucky whim, that old S.O.S. of ours!"

WE rode casually through the gate and out across a sea of sand dunes shimmering in the sun and stretching away as far as the eye could reach. We arrived in a flood of moonlight at a large encampment of the Beni Azrai. It is hardly necessary to say anything more, except that Henry, in the short time he had been with them, had accomplished the seemingly impossible. Even the leading sheiks had finally taken him into their councils. For they had come to know that they could count upon his fairness in any situation and they had learned that his judgment was better than theirs. He had none of the Arab lust for great herds of horses and camels, wealth as they knew it. He wanted nothing they had, and therefore they could trust him. He had made valuable suggestions that improved their fighting tactics and for this they honored him.

It had taken the tribe some time to understand these things. I learned later from the two old fire-eaters we had met at El Muluk that at first, before he had become established among them, three attempts had been made on his life. The first two had been thwarted by the man with whom he had fought the duel. The last he had handled neatly himself; the assassin, knife in hand, had fallen across Henry's camp bed with a timely bullet through his heart. As the Tuaregs had come to know him better, they met him, like the unspoiled animals they were, with absolute trust and frankness. When I asked Henry about these things he put them much more mildly, but the truth of the matter was the Beni Azrai were eating out of his hand—and they liked it.

They accepted me decently enough, which was more than I expected from those desert-bred wild men. The two old fire-eaters were even downright friendly. I cultivated their friendship at once, and we became quite chummy the first day, for I had something important on my mind and I needed their help.

Henry and Courtney decided to leave the desert in a few days and ride to Khartoum and so down the Nile and home to be married. Henry had a childishly chivalrous idea that General Collingwood should be given a chance to be present at the festivities. I told Henry privately just what I thought of that irascible old man—but it made no difference. Courtney was built more along my own lines; she didn't care where they were married—in fact it really made no difference to her whether they were married at all, or not, just so she could be with Henry for the rest of her natural life! But he had his notions of how the thing should be done.

I had made up my mind to stay on a while with the Tauregs. There was a certain piece of business that I felt ought not to be left undone. I told Henry what I had in mind. He agreed with me that it was too important to be overlooked. But we thought best not to mention it to Courtney; women are unreasonably straight-laced about some things.

Henry and Courtney mounted one morning prepared to ride east. About half the Beni Azrai were to escort them as far as the border of the British Sudan.

"This desert air is doing wonders for me," I said to Courtney, "and I'll stay on a while with the Tuaregs and give my wound a chance to heal. I'll see you in England in six months, perhaps. Best o' luck with all those prospective sons you once mentioned."

What she said to me makes no difference. I hate good-bys, and this one was unusually painful.

The day after Henry and Courtney left I called the two friendly El Muluk Tuaregs aside.

"Look here," I said, "you two old sportsmen—and the rest of the Beni Azrai—haven't any urgent business to take you away from these parts just now, have you?"

They knew enough Arabic to get the sense of my question. They answered something to the effect that time hung heavy on their hands.

"Good," I returned. "I have an important engagement not far from here and I need your help." I explained my plan and they listened with grunts of approval. They promised to take it up with the rest of the Beni Azrai.

Apparently it didn't take much persuasive eloquence to enlist the rest, for we all saddled up that same afternoon and rode south about three "chids," or marches. There we camped in a small oasis and settled down to wait. Every morning Tuareg scouts on fast meharis set out in the direction of Tibesti, returning at dark each night. You see what I had in mind? The Hausas would pass that way on the return to their own country. I knew they would stay in Tibesti no longer than it took them to spend the money received for the loot from Fort Bornu.

There are times when I believe in doing to others as they do to you—and this was one of those times.

The Hausas kept us waiting about a week, but it was worth it. They came marching along one day, as carefree as you please, straggling over the desert in a long line. The Tuaregs certainly knew their business and we captured the whole cutthroat crew, bag and baggage. I was especially glad to meet again the sheik who had struck Courtney with his camel-whip the first day of our captivity. She had pointed him out to me several times. And it didn't exactly cause me pain to see among them the bearded robber who had traded for me under the impression that I was an expert powder-maker. He had come near to cracking my skull when I confessed that I knew nothing about making powder. He had led me to that grim stone in the slave-market when I could hardly stand.

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," is a good enough principle for use in a civilized community, perhaps. But I considered the present reversed situation a heaven-sent opportunity for carrying out merited punishment.

We herded those Hausas—and they were now a different appearing lot from the haughty and savage band that had ridden away victorious from the flaming ruins of Fort Bornu—we herded them north, straight for the desert city of Ahaggar, where Hausas are not known and have no trade connections, as they have at Tibesti.

At Ahaggar I sat in the shade of a tall palm with a canteen of cool water and a handful of dates beside me and watched the Tuaregs stand every last Hausa upon the slave-block—just as the Hausas had stood Courtney Collingwood upon that other black stone in the Arab stronghold of Tibesti.

When the sale was over I arose, took a long drink from the canteen, and stretched my muscles. I felt ten years younger. I bid the Tuaregs good-by, made them a present of my share of the proceeds and rode east in the direction of the Sudan border, whistling a gay and airy song that Courtney had sung one night, months before, in the Hausa camp—in a brave attempt to make me believe the tears in her eyes were not the visible signs of a breaking heart.

THE END.

# *Free Lances in Diplomacy*

## *By* CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

*These well-known characters lend their aid to the capitalist Spass in an effort to solve a knotty problem of the present day.*

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

SPASS, a well-dressed man of average height, weight and appearance, who would have passed for a successful man of affairs from England, the United States or Scandinavia, sat imperturbably at his desk in the chamber of the Reichstag, calmly taking in the various features of the confusion which Fascists and communists were making of what is supposed to be an orderly, deliberative assembly of governing representatives. Presently, receiving the customary "recognition," he got slowly upon his feet and quietly waited for a lull in the uproar. In part, he said:

"Gentlemen, the most vital question before the Government appears to be that of unemployment. Mainly by means of private enterprise, with recognition and some assistance from the Government, I submit to you an agreement to employ half a million men within the next two months, and to quadruple that number in five or six—simultaneous propositions to be carried out in the other European States."

There was a moment of amazed silence—then howls of derision, above which could be heard shouted questions:

"What kind of employment? Where will it be found? What sort of wage-scale?"

"Union wages, or better. The sort of employment and the locality are immaterial. You claim that millions of men and women are idle and in danger of starving. If they will not accept work at good wages—including free transportation to the job—they deserve to starve. That's simple logic, is it not? I make the agreement I've outlined; I will sign a contract to the effect. That's the proposition—take it or leave it."

Pandemonium ensued. The proposition of Herr Spass was ridiculed as being a capitalist sop to the masses which would have so many strings that the plan would be a farce on the face of it. Demands were shouted for a Government plan—not a filthy capitalist one! Starving people must be fed by the Government—with or without work in exchange for the feeding. But when two hours later a vote was called, the Spass plan won by a majority of eight. After this the originator was called into one of the committee rooms by several of his party leaders, for a confidential discussion.

"Suppose you sketch for us the main outline of your idea, Spass? You carried the vote, and the bill will be signed—but I must confess that I don't see much remedy

*Trevor grabbed Smith's wrist, digging fingers into a certain nerve which paralyzed the entire arm, making the useless hand drop the pistol.*

for the political situation even if you are partly successful. Give us some idea of your procedure."

"The general scheme really isn't mine—though every industrialist in Europe has been thinking along somewhat similar lines as a stop-gap in the economical emergency. Three of the wealthiest men in England have been quietly trying it out as a private enterprise during the last six months, with entire success as far as they have gone—they would have accomplished more if their Labor Government had been inclined to coöperate. Briefly, there are a dozen or more industrial leaders on the continent—as many in the States and England—who can provide employment for at least five or six millions if they are willing to run their enterprises a year or longer without profit and spend a certain percentage of their surplus. What they're up against, sooner or later, if they're not willing, is considerable risk of a communist revolution—and confiscation for a few years, until insanity simmers down to practical government again. There's scarcely a doubt of their going into the plan when more or less Government backing is guaranteed."

"Hmph! Has it occurred to you, Spass, that the communists may not really wish any practical relief from the average of unemployment that always exists in every country?"

"Naturally. My proposition, if successful, will destroy their principal stock-in-trade—the foundation of all their arguments and invective."

"Precisely! And, in that case your—er—well, elimination—will be decidedly to your advantage?"

"That's understood perfectly. I weighed the chances pretty well before making my proposition in the Reichstag. You see, I start with a slight advantage. As a 'political,' I'm practically an unknown man. This is the first time I've represented a Hamburg or any other district. To the best of my knowledge, no illustration has been published of my house on the Aussen Alster. My portrait is rarely published in the periodicals. When it does appear, I look so much like thousands of other men that there is nothing striking by which to identify me. I never travel by railway or commercial planes—I have my own excellent means of transportation, available at a few moments' notice. The chances are that I shall have my plan started sufficiently to carry on if anything does happen to me, before I'm closely enough spotted to make espionage really serious."

"*M-m-m*—I think you're overconfident, Spass! Our underground agents have just reported that a certain Londoner and two Muscovites have been in conference with the communist leaders during the last two days and that a decision has been reached to simply eliminate every man politically prominent in the Continental States who is likely to interfere with their schemes. Those three men—particularly the Londoner, in appearance the most negligible of the lot—not only have abnormal brains for the planning of various *coups*, but are thoroughly unscrupulous, cold-blooded murderers with heavy rewards on their heads at the moment. Yet they defy Scotland Yard, our own police and the French Prefecture, as if under no apprehension for their personal safety."

"Yes—I know something of them. It happens that they went by plane to Vienna this morning. Before they see my Reichstag proposition in the Viennese news-sheets, I will have left Berlin. I'm obliged to have an information bureau of my own, you see, because of my widespread commercial interests. Within a week, I hope to advise you that several millions have been privately subscribed, and to suggest the ways in which we depend upon the Government for assistance. These you can incorporate in a short bill which I think will pass."

Reaching for one of the telephones on the table, Spass called his suite in the Hotel Adlon; his valet Franz Spiegal answered with two code-words which identified him beyond any question. That particular telephone-wire presumably was tapped somewhere in the buildings before it went into the conduit—but those listening in got no information. The conversation, carried on in Portuguese, sounded like a mess of gibberish—and Franz Spiegal had checked out of the Adlon with his master's luggage before inquiries were made there. Spass had dropped out of sight.

With the average revolutionary fanatic, that would have been all—for the present at least. But the very ordinary-appearing Londoner called Smith who sat with a telephone at his ear for about three hours that evening in a Viennese tenement, with two Muscovites and a Hun-

garian—talking to communist leaders in Berlin, Hamburg, and Bremen—was not the ordinary sort in truth. When convinced that Spass had disappeared, he told the Berliner to keep three houses in his own city under espionage night and day—on the certainty that the man would turn up at one of them sooner or later. Similar instructions went to Bremen. To the Hamburg agent, the Londoner described the location of the Spass house on a narrow twisting street near the Aussen Alster, one elbow running parallel with and a short block from it. He had been considerably surprised at the report that the unknown Spass suddenly had become a menace to their plans—up to that night the man had appeared to be negligible as far as communist plans were concerned. But an hour before Spass came down at the Hamburg landing-field and saw his plane trundled away to his private hangar by mechanics who were liberally paid to keep their mouths shut, two communist agents were closely watching the front door of his house on Gobenstrasse. They persistently kept up a fruitless espionage for three days and nights—then were told to take the next plane for Paris and closely study a man by the name of Merson who was stopping at the Elysée Palace Hotel. This was the way of it:

SPASS had been driven with Franz in one of his own cars from the flying-field to the Binnen-Alster boat-landing at Jungfernstieg, where a small launch of his was lying. In this they ran under the Lombards Bridge into the Aussen-Alster and along one of the banks until they came to a brick garden-wall with a small iron door in it and a narrow boat-landing outside. Inside the wall a row of tall privet stretched across the garden, preventing any view of the iron door from the houses on Gobenstrasse. In a corner between wall and hedge, was a small brick tool-house. Part of the floor in this was hinged so that a concealed trap-door could be pulled up, permitting a descent of several steps to an underground tunnel running back into the house—coming up by a circular iron stairway to a space behind the wainscoting of the dining-room in the rear of the house, overlooking the formal garden and the Aussen-Alster beyond. After the tunnel passed under the house, a branch led off to the left until it came up under the tenth house down the block, on the opposite side of the street and around the elbow in it. Both tunnels were blocked by steel grilles fastened with excellent locks—permitting free ventilation but no passage until the grilles were unlocked. Taking care not to show himself at any of the front windows, Spass dined—and then outlined the situation to Franz, who remained standing at attention. Spass had not climbed the ladder to wealth and influence without finding that inferiors are equally human beings and, when they were alone he treated Franz with a decency which made the man worship him like a dog.

"The ordinary communist and bolshevist, you will observe, Franz, is a very common sort of brute with seldom a trace of finesse—dangerous when one is actually in his power, but negligible in the way of intelligent planning before that. On the other hand, Smith, Roupokoff and Kolaub are of another class altogether. They use their heads instead of rushing about with guns and clubs. Evidently they got word of my Reichstag speech by telephone, in Vienna—and then phoned directly here when they couldn't locate me in Berlin. There are two men in the street at this moment, watching the house. Of course they've no suspicion we're here—they didn't see us come in. If they get on any of these roofs or one of the warehouses in the block, and spot the wall door, they'll begin watching that from a launch in the river. I've decided to begin with De Fourche, Luyties, and De Rougemont in Paris—the biggest industrialists in France. But it's out of the question for me to appear in any Paris hotel looking as I do now. On the other hand, those three men are familiar with my everyday appearance. I can't talk with them in any sort of disguise—they'd simply walk out of the hotel and report me to M. le Prefet as an impostor. I can't go to their houses in disguise and change there, because it won't do to let them know I use a disguise. What do you suggest? Eh?"

"As you know, Excellenz," said Franz slowly, "I was on the stage five years—much of the time in character-impersonation—usually carry about with me when traveling, a make-up kit and several different suits. I would suggest this: By adding four lifts to the heels of your walking-shoes, it increases your height over an inch and raises it above the average. With practice in maintaining an erect position with those heels, you give the impression of at least five-feet-ten, or more. This is a noticeable difference. Then, with a rubber pad worn above the teeth between gums and lip, the upper lip is pushed out enough to change the whole expression of the mouth, lower nose and cheeks. Mandarin spectacles with plain lenses will change the expression of the eyes. You are known to have a fondness for blue suits, with gray accessories—so a monochrome in your color-scheme, of smooth brown suiting with socks, hat, tie, gloves and shoes to match, will give an instant impression of a different person. With just those simple changes, I will guarantee that you may chat by the hour with anyone who knows you, and not once be suspected—if you are careful to keep a wad of chewing-gum in your mouth. The hair should be parted and temporarily oiled down, if you are to remove your hat. Of course I cannot openly accompany you—two of us together would increase the risk of arousing suspicion. But if we stop at near-by hotels, I can, with my own appearance altered, call upon you frequently as a business acquaintance. You can leave word at the bureau to send me up whenever I call. I arrive before the men with whom you have appointments. In five minutes, I assist in changing your clothes for the ones you habitually wear, including shoes with lower heels—the rubber pad, gum and spectacles are removed instantly. The floor detectives, hall-boys and clerks have seen you about the lobby in your disguise—seen you enter your room that way. You receive your callers as yourself, in the bedroom of your suite which can be entered only through the living-room where I shall be sitting—presumably for a later appointment. If anyone else comes in, he does not get by me. When your visitors go, you resume your disguise in five minutes. All this—and even further preparation in the way of disguises for your trip—can be arranged in two days at the outside, during which time you remain in the rear of the house guarded by me, the butler, the two chauffeurs and the boat-coxswain. When we wish to leave, a car will be in front of the other house around the bend of the street, where it cannot be seen from here—and I think it will be safer to make Paris by car—through Luxembourg. The flying-fields will be watched."

THESE suggestions appeared to meet the requirements so thoroughly that they were followed with no further discussion. Spass had had three conferences with the French industrialists before a communist agent who had been haunting the lobby of the Elysée Palace noticed their calls upon some one in the hotel and telephoned the circumstance to Smith in Vienna—which resulted in the change of orders to the two Hamburg spies.

On second thought, Smith and Roupokoff decided to reach Paris before they did—and got a good look at the

supposed Mr. Merson in the main dining-room as he was eating his dinner with a friendly American, who was lonesome, and had picked him up in the smoking-lounge. Securing a table near the other two, Smith covertly studied the man called Merson and the American—not being able to make out which was which until a whispered question of the *maitre d'hotel* set him right.

"Er—isn't that Mr. James Merson at the table, yonder? . . . . The one in the dinner-jacket?"

"But no, M'sieu'! That is the so-rich American—M'sieu' Barton, of New York. It is the taller one in the brown morning-suit who is the M'sieu' Merson. *Un Avocat, très distingué,* one hears."

AS Jacques moved away Smith said: "You've seen Spass, Roupokoff, and I haven't. Is that the chap?"

"Not a chance! This fellow is a good two inches taller—would weigh a stone or two more, as you put it—much fuller in the face!"

"Now, wait a bit—you certainly ought to know. But get a glimpse of that heel of his, back under his chair. Ever see any man but a Spaniard or a Yankee cowboy wear a heel as high as that? Eh? Point is—those three French industrialists have called here several times for conferences, in his private suite, with that chap over there in the brown clothes—and they're the first three he'd pick in the whole of France to go in with him on this proposition he put up to the Reichstag. If those heels account for about two inches of height, the rest of him is merely padded clothes, glasses and facial swelling."

"But Spass has lighter hair—cut *en brosse.*"

"Suppose it to have grown out, leaving it long enough to be parted and slicked down with pomade—which naturally makes it look a bit darker. Eh? Of course we don't want to risk difficulties with the Prefecture over the wrong man—but I fancy we'll not let this one out of our sight until we're sure!"

Spass had gone over with Franz the question of being caught by the hotel people without his disguise, or with only part of it—the upshot being that pajamas were chosen three sizes too big for him, giving the appearance of being larger than he was even if the sleeping-suit was a trifle loose. Also, of sleeping with the spectacles on a table by his pillow—keeping the high-heeled shoes under the edge of the bed where they could be slipped on in a moment—and wearing the rubber pad in his mouth all night. When he unbolted the door for the chambermaid to light his fire and draw his bath, in the mornings, she saw him as Merson and had no suspicion that his appearance was faked.

Smith and Roupokoff took a room farther along the hall on the same floor—having in mind nothing so crude as attempting to pick the lock of Number Seventeen during the night. The Londoner had glanced up reflectively at the façade of the hotel as they came in after a short walk—noticing the string-courses of stone in the architecture, among other things. At two in the morning, being something of a human fly, he climbed out of their window with sneakers on his feet—felt around with one of them until it rested upon a little three-inch projecting ledge—found his fingers would just reach the casing of the next window, with a bit of stretching—and stopped a few seconds in that precarious position to count windows. Then he inched along methodically until he came to the sixth, with nothing but his eyes and cap showing above the window-sills. That particular window happened to be open for ventilation—though it would have been merely a detail for him to open it, anyhow. Silently pushing it up a little farther, he drew himself across the sill and slid into the room on his hands. Stepping along into the bedroom, he glanced at the spectacles on the table; a wad of chewing-gum lay beside them. Feeling around under the bed, he came upon the high-heeled shoes—and examined them. Then he filled and lighted his pipe, sat down comfortably in a leather chair—and smoked.

Spass was sleeping soundly, but in his sleep became more and more conscious of the burning tobacco, until presently he woke with a start and sat upright in bed. A low drawling voice jolted him wide awake.

"Just as you are, Spass—that'll do very nicely. You'll notice my hobby in regard to automatics of small caliber with a long cartridge—and, of course, a silencer. This carries ten very businesslike slugs—soft-nosed, with a notch in the end. Quite devastating as they penetrate."

The man in the bed hugged his knees with his arms and tried to study his visitor's face in the dim twilight which came through the transom from lowered hall-lights.

"You've got me guessing, my man. I was sleeping so heavily that you've had plenty of opportunity for going through my clothes. Hardly enough in them to pay for your trouble, I'm sure."

"You're insulting me, Spass—though I'm aware that it's unintentional. I'm no burglar—you know that! This get-up of yours is clever—did you figure it out yourself? I must compliment you. But it was an oversight to have De Fourche, Luyties and De Rougemont call upon you here several times—the only three men in all France you'd be likely to confer with. That's what turned the spotlight on. Now—your scheme is almost entirely a private enterprise, and it's only temporary. You said it would be nonproductive for several months at least. Possibly—but we don't believe that. We've no intention of permitting you to scatter unemployed members of our communist party far and wide to suit yourself and break up our organization. This is a show-down, you understand. You've signed a contract for something you'll not be permitted to carry out. We're entirely impersonal in this matter—have no animus against you as long as you're not a menace to us. So you'll agree to withdraw your Reichstag proposition—or—the hotel people will have something to hush up in the morning."

Spass looked at the man owlishly through the mandarin spectacles he had reached for and put on.

"Either you're crazy, or I'm having a bad dream," he observed. "My name's James Merson, from Chicago. I'm counsel for a manufacturing syndicate—over here on business for a few months with headquarters in Edinburgh, Scotland. These Frenchmen who've been conferring with me buy our goods, and handle some of 'em for Italy. I don't know anything about this Spass you mention."

"That's your final word, is it? I'm sorry. These cases are unpleasant even when there's but one possible ending for them. Too bad you can't see it our way. I shall have to say good-by now, and run along."

CLEARLY Spass sensed that the man must be a dead shot—and meant to shoot before he left the suite. His brain was racing to think what instantaneous movement he could make to avoid the bullet. He wondered if a sudden quick turn might make it glance. He watched the dark figure as it went through the door into the living-room, saw the arm suddenly go up—and as the flash came dodged sideways, twisting his head. Then he fell back upon the pillows with all the stars in the sky shooting through the room. A gasping groan—and everything went black.

Smith casually inched his way back along that narrow edge of projecting stone, grasping one window-casing after another, and climbed into his own room. . . .

It wasn't quite four o'clock when the pseudo Merson,

with his hat pulled low over a bandage around his head, lugged his portmanteau silently down two flights of stairs —checked out—took a taxi to the near-by hotel where Franz was staying under another name. In fifteen minutes, Franz had one of the Spass private cars at the door, and his master—leaving him there with full instructions for the remainder of the day—was driven rapidly out to Le Bourget. Here one of his own planes was waiting for him with its pilot—and before sunrise, they were in the air, flying north. . . . .

About nine o'clock in the morning—first making sure that nobody in the street was looking up at that floor—Smith opened the window as if for ventilation. For a few seconds, he stuck his head out, looking up at the sky as if estimating what the weather was going to be—but in that casual glance he satisfied himself that there were no marks either on window-sill or the ledge below it which might indicate that anyone had attempted to move along toward other windows on the same floor. As he had worn rubber gloves, there were of course no fingermarks anywhere. So the pair went down in the lift—spent an hour over an excellent breakfast, during which they glanced through the morning journals—then went up to their room again for their luggage, and checked out. As their passports were in order, they had no difficulty in booking through to Hamburg from the Gare du Nord, crossing the German border in four hours. Then, as they had the compartment to themselves, Roupokoff drew a long breath of relief and began to ask questions.

*The Londoner called Smith sat with a telephone at his ear for three hours that evening, talking to communist leaders in Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen.*

"*Peste!* These affairs are something of a nerve-strain until one is safely across the nearest barrier! Dev'lish clever, the way all big hotels handle anything of the sort! There wasn't a word or a glance around that hotel to indicate anything unusual had happened. It's not possible you could have missed the man, is it?"

"Well—you've seen me shoot, times enough. I heard a slight, choking groan after I fired—saw the body fall back on the pillows. No—I fancy we needn't concern ourselves about Spass any further. By the way, that American he was dining with last evening—Barton was the name, wasn't it?—booked through to Hamburg just ahead of us; he must be somewhere on this train. Might look for him presently in the dining-car, an' get the next table. He'll be talking to somebody, as Americans always do—may possibly drop a few words about his friend Merson which'll be of interest to us. I'm wonderin' how long they'd known each other?"

It was the American who remembered them, as they were entering the diner—asked if he hadn't seen them at the Elysée Palace—suggested their occupying the same table. After a while, he mentioned having dined with a fellow-countryman in the same line of business the evening before, and regretted that Merson had left the hotel that morning before he had a chance to ascertain where they might run across each other again; he had found Merson very good company and would have remained longer in Paris if they could have gone about together.

"You say your friend left this morning, Mr. Barton? Noticed him going out, I suppose?"

"No, in that case I'd have chased after him. The clerk in the *bureau* said that my friend had checked out before daylight—got the impression that he was leaving the country for the present. There was a bloodstained bandage around Merson's head and he came down the stairs instead of ringing for the elevator. There'd evidently been some trouble—and Merson was getting out of reach."

"Hmph! Well—you never can tell what these quiet-looking chaps may have been up to. You're sure it was your friend that the clerk was referring to?"

"Oh, undoubtedly!"

When the two were back in their own compartment, Smith said musingly:

"The only explanation I can think of is that the hotel people were right on the job from the moment the body was found—had two supposed ambulance-orderlies take it out on a stretcher by the service-lift, as if it were a sick man going to one of the hospitals, and leave it at some undertaking establishment where the Prefecture would have every opportunity for examining it. Then they cook up the story in the *bureau* that Merson had checked out before daylight with a bandage around his head, in case there were inquiries from his friends—Barton, for example. The management doubtless have their understanding with the Prefecture permitting them to hustle the body out of the building as long as the agents have every opportunity for inspecting the room on the quiet. It's all under the surface—guests never hear about it until they read a much later account in the news-sheets—minimized to look like suicide."

"You're dead sure you couldn't have missed him?"

"As much so as one is sure of anything! . . . . It would be the first time in several years. Still—it's possible. If I did, we'll hear some rumor of the chap's activities—run him down—try again. I consider the man dangerous, myself—he has money an' influence enough to bring about what one would consider rather impossible results, an' I'm convinced that he'll smash our communist organization in more than one country if he can."

Meanwhile, Spass was flying to London, dropping the clothes and accessories of James Merson into the Channel as the plane crossed it—the chances for his being known by sight to anyone in the London streets being practically negligible. Instead of coming down at Croydon, he flew

over the city to Hendon, where he had secured Government permission for a private hangar at the extreme edge of the flying field, but where he and his plane were subjected to a more careful inspection than would have been given him at the commercial airport. Spass was one of the world's leading industrialists and wealthiest men—but he was from Hamburg—a deputy in the German Reichstag—and His Majesty's Government rather relished the idea of having his arrivals and departures by plane at a place where he could be thoroughly investigated at such times. In a way, the arrangement was a protection to him—as no other foreign plane would have been permitted to come down there without indefinite detention of its crew and passengers. One of his own cars was parked by the hangar when he arrived, and took him in twenty minutes to the comfortable house he owned in Kensington. Three hours later Franz Spiegal arrived in the early plane from Le Bourget.

AFTER dinner, when Spass' head had been dressed by the skillful surgeon he had sent for, he was driven around to the house of Prince Abdool of Afridistan on Park Street—a rather unpretentious building for the town-residence of a man so highly placed—but the interior was a perfect gem of Hindu and Oriental decoration. Aside from that, its walled garden in the rear had a steel gate admitting one to the beautiful gardens surrounding, within the restrictions of city lots, the Jacobean mansion of George Trevor, Marquess of Lyonesse, and the Prince's closest friend—also, there was an underground tunnel connecting His Highness' teak-paneled library with that of the Marquess on Park Lane, so that there were exits and entrances from either house on different streets. Upon a former occasion, Spass had been admitted through these gardens—and considered it safer to get in that way if the Prince would permit him to do so. As His Highness was just finishing dinner with his friends in the other house, his *khansamah* phoned and was told to fetch Spass along through the gardens. They were all in the big library when he arrived, and greeted him with unmistakable cordiality.

"We heard your speech in the Reichstag through our wireless-sets, Spass. Been talkin' with De Rougemont by wireless this afternoon—no names mentioned, but we understood about those conferences. Frankly, old chap, we've been rather apprehensive over the chance of a report that something had happened to you. On a small scale, Lammerford, Prince Abdool, the Marchioness an' I have been doin' pretty much what you proposed—though, of course, without the slightest Governm'nt backin'. —I say! . . . . You've had an accident—what?"

"Well, I wouldn't call it *accident,* Marquess. I was assured that I was asking for it when I contracted to go ahead with this scheme. The average lot of communists are bad enough, but there are three in particular—an Englishman and two Muscovites—who are more dangerous than so many poisonous snakes in the grass. One of them got into my room at the Elysée Palace—through a third-floor window, mind you—at two o'clock this morning, and delivered a sort of ultimatum. Sat in my leather chair and puffed his foul pipe over my bed as he talked. I was disguised so that I supposed myself safe—but he was clever enough to figure that my three French confreres wouldn't be calling upon anyone else at that hotel immediately after my proposal in the Reichstag. Of course there was nothing else for me to do but carry out my impersonation of Merson, the man from Chicago. Had I pretended to promise that I would withdraw my proposition, he wouldn't have swallowed it for a second. He was there to wipe me out on general principles—"

"Will you let me examine that plaster a bit more closely, Spass—see exactly what part of your forehead it covers? . . . . Your visitor was Smith! And how you come to be alive at this moment is one of this century's greatest miracles—you certainly never had a closer call in your life. How in the name of wonder did you escape, man? I saw two men a few minutes after Smith had finished with them. . . . . How in the name of holy cats did you manage it?"

"Watched him like a cat as he walked across to the door of my living-room—I knew he'd not leave without shooting me. Just as he turned in the doorway and flung up his arm, I jerked my head to one side with a twist to the left. The slug hit my forehead exactly in the spot you mention—but struck it only at a sharp angle and glanced off the bone. Knocked me out for a few minutes —I was bleeding all over the pillows when I came to. I checked out of that hotel before daylight—and I hope that Smith is satisfied I'm a white-robed angel. That person is too abrupt!"

"Shook your nerve a bit, I fancy—that sort of thing would! Feel like droppin' the scheme—playin' with something less explosive?"

"No—not noticeably."

"Spass, you know about what we've been tryin' to do in the employm'nt line. Now—how have you blocked it out?"

"Each country has its own particular needs at any given time. Here in England, for example, the general post office should have at least one or two million more telephone subscribers in the United Kingdom—but hasn't the equipment to give them. Constructing the conduits —laying the wires—making and installing instruments—would require the labor of two hundred thousand men and women at least—labor not at present employed. If the Department issued short-term bonds at five per cent for ten million pounds, it's a simple matter for us to form syndicates that will take up the entire issue. Pending Parliamentary authorization for such bonds, the syndicate will accept Department receipts for cash advanced, as tokens of Government indebtedness. There you have a lot of badly needed construction—there's the money for it—there's so much unemployment taken care of!

"NEXT—in every country, there is always need for road-making and repairing in all sections. Such roads pay for themselves in facilities they offer farmers and manufacturers for getting their stuff into the cities by motor transport. To provide immediate funds for wages, impose a tax upon every motor-vehicle traveling through it of one shilling for every county. For example—suppose a person is traveling from Scotland to London—over four hundred miles. He crosses about ten shires coming down the East Coast—ten shillings—two dollars and forty cents in American money—and that's a long drive for the British Isles. He can afford to pay that without hurting him—yet figure it up for every motor-vehicle crossing every shire, and it mounts up to a rather amazing sum. The tax is both optional and negligible. There's ready money to be going on with. But to employ more labor—take care of more people—issue county road bonds, long or short—and syndicates will be ready to take up the issue for spot cash. The shilling tolls would more than take care of the interest. It's a case of Government and capitalists working together.

"New Government buildings, municipal buildings, or housing in various sections for the lowest-wage classes—that's something badly needed all the time. Private enterprise can handle such housing at very small fixed profit, provided the owners of the ground and previously con-

demned buildings, if any exist, will accept long-time payments for them. They will—because it's the easiest way to cut worse losses and risk. Well—those are a few of the points for this country alone. I've equally practical ones for other European States. Now—besides yourselves—there are five men I wish to confer with here in the United Kingdom. Perhaps you can offer suggestions as to the safest way of doing it. Eh?"

"Why—yes, we can, old chap. We'll even do a lot better than that. Nobody can be certain that you are in London for a week or two at least—though your pictures have been in our illustrated gazettes since your speech in the Reichstag. Not very good ones, to be sure—look like most any man on the street—but they may assist in spotting you. How many men on the continent do you fancy you need see in this proposition?"

"H'm-m—let's see. Not more than eight or ten, I think."

"Very good! Are most of them night-owls—or do some go to bed early?"

"One or two A. M. would be about the dead-line."

"An' it's now nine-thirty. That gives us several hours for gettin' in touch with 'em at once. Write out a list for me with the phone-numbers most likely to catch them—I'll have my chief operator, down in the communications-room, try to get through to them. When we are through, you persuade 'em to come here to this house—transportation paid—and then be driven down or flown down to my estate in South Devon, which is enclosed by an eighteen-foot wall, four and a half miles long, protected with wires charged with high-tension current. Nobody will get at any of us there—you have a series of conferences for as long as you wish, with a bit of yachting thrown in—thresh out the whole proposition so that you're ready for a start. I'd also include Cabinet men from each of the Governm'nts to confer with us an' start things moving in the various Parliaments. When everybody goes home again, the whole scheme will have so much of a start that nothing short of revolution will stop it—an' with so much of the unemploym'nt wiped out, they'll not pull that off."

SMITH and Roupokoff had unerringly figured out the continental industrialists likely to be called into conference by Spass—and had set their organization to shadowing each man. From a communist rendezvous in the little Rue Vanneau at Paris, they kept various lines of communication in hand, knowing within the hour when each of those industrialists left for London by air or rail transportation. When there was no longer a doubt that a conference had been called in London, the two communist leaders unobtrusively drifted over to an old house in Stepney—where their London agents reported that the industrialists all had gone to the famous Trevor mansion in Park Lane, had remained but an hour or two, and then left in high-powered cars for some destination outside of the city, driving in a general westerly direction. The communists were convinced that a big conference was scheduled to take place at the Devon estate of the Marquess—but when Smith announced his intention of going down there at once and somehow getting into the estate, they laughed at him—explaining how many times and how unsuccessfully that had been tried. So the leaders had to be satisfied with concentrating their attention upon a close watch of the Park Lane premises, Croydon—and the Channel boat stations. So far, it hadn't occurred to them that a man of Spass' wealth and wide interests probably would have a house of his own somewhere in or near London. They were looking for him—if he really was alive—in twenty or thirty of the hotels and popular restaurants.

When Spass returned from Devon, the successful carrying out of his scheme in detail was practically a certainty even if something happened to all of the big men immediately concerned. Possible delays by Parliamentary and other legislative bodies in authorizing bond issues had been discounted, because the economic situation didn't permit of obstructionist tactics from any of the major-party politicals. Even if they tried it for a month or two they would jeopardize their seats if they persisted—always excepting, of course, the Left Wings who were bound to obstruct in every way possible. The Hamburg capitalist had accomplished what he started out to do beyond any serious risk of being blocked. It would be necessary for him to maintain a casual supervision in various directions for a few months, of course—and London appeared to be as safe a base for such operations as he was likely to find anywhere.

IN Spass' long absences, his Kensington house was in charge of an elderly Hamburg woman and her son—so thoroughly imbued with the idea of utter subservience to the "higher-ups"—and so unbelievably well-paid—that their powerful employer could do no wrong in their eyes. Orders were orders—to be unquestioningly obeyed, no matter what they might be.

Spass was admitted through the basement door—an hour later, Franz Spiegal came in the same way, in time to wait on his master at dinner, which Frau Humpferling had promptly cooked for him. Half an hour later, when Franz returned to the dining-room and study at the rear of the house, he found his master in the dark front parlor, peeping between the edges of the heavy velour curtains at the narrow street outside, in both directions. Presently, he came tiptoeing back into the study, where Franz had thoughtfully closed the window-blinds so that no spark of light showed on that floor across the small rear garden—and lighted a cigar.

"Well—it is done!" he said relievedly. "Nothing can now stop the scheme! Unemployed men and women will leave London by the hundred thousand to work in various shires and smaller towns—removing that much inflammable material for the communists to fire. They will not love me for it—no! But my death no longer will have any effect upon what has been so well started. I think, however, that they will not see the matter in that light. *Psst!* . . . . Listen! . . . . Did you hear anything upstairs? No? I seem to imagine things! This is, I think, as safe a place as any on the globe. Fortunately, I had the four telephones installed under as many different names—the post office must consider this a 'rooming-house'! But you and I cannot remain here as ourselves, my faithful bear! Come! A suggestion of some sort?"

"Frau Humpferling becomes the cook, Excellenz. Hans goes to live for a while with his cousin in Surrey. A middle-aged widow should be found, of the utmost respectability in appearance—middle-class British respectability—yet privately amenable to a business arrangement for a very tempting salary. Discounting every possibility, we will assume that some of the communists get into this house—size up what they see. And it must appear to be actual living conditions here to fool them. . . . . You and the widow are the caretakers—a married couple from Dorset. Your clothes are mixed together in wardrobe and bureau-drawers. Her lingerie is respectably English, not Parisian. All three of us—I am her brother, living with you in the owner's absence—must come and go by the basement door or the gate from the mews into the rear garden. We must be known by sight and by name to the postman—the P. C. on point-duty—tradesmen along the business street at the next corner, where we purchase provisions and supplies. We give out casual information that

the owner, who lives on the Continent, has not been in the house for six months—that he probably would consider a good offer to lease or purchase, from the right sort of parties. It will be advisable to notify my Lord Marquess of our new names and general appearance. Does this seem to provide for all contingencies, Excellenz?"

"Why, yes—yes; I think it will do very well. You will explain everything to Humpferling and Hans. But—about this female caretaker? How do we get hold of such a woman?"

"Your regular physician here in London—the Herr Doktor Johann Pflummer, formerly of Berlin, who has known you for years—will instantly grasp the reasons for needing such a woman here. In his wide practice he is sure to have some widow in her thirties, left with a small income, and quite willing to be accommodating for a material increase. I will guardedly get through to him on the telephone and have him come around at once—the woman should be here before midnight."

"Yes — yes — do that, Franz. I—I am—not quite myself, tonight. Er—you might fetch me a quart of champagne, at once. At once, do you hear! And then get busy with altering my appearance! Your own, too! Damn you—don't stand there like a fool! Hurry!"

The capitalist was evidently suffering from nerve-strain. As Franz left the room, Spass turned down the light and tiptoed out into the front parlor where he stood peering through a slit between the curtains until the valet returned with the wine.

Next evening, the Marquess and Earl Lammerford—greatly altered in appearance—rang the bell of the basement door and were admitted by Spass himself in his new character. When they were up in his study they carefully looked him over.

"Hmph! . . . . Franz certainly is an artist in make-up! I can't spot a single detail that's wrong. Your 'wife' too, 'Mrs. Bradford,' would grace a Hammersmith living-room to perfection. Fact is—you prob'ly wouldn't be as safe anywhere else as you are here—and your job is practically finished. You'll be directing, here and there, of course, for two or three months. After that, I fancy you might go back to your seat in the Reichstag. Your constituents won't care how long you're away, considering what you're doing for the unemployed all over Europe."

"You—er—you didn't notice anyone hanging about as you came in, did you, Marquess?"

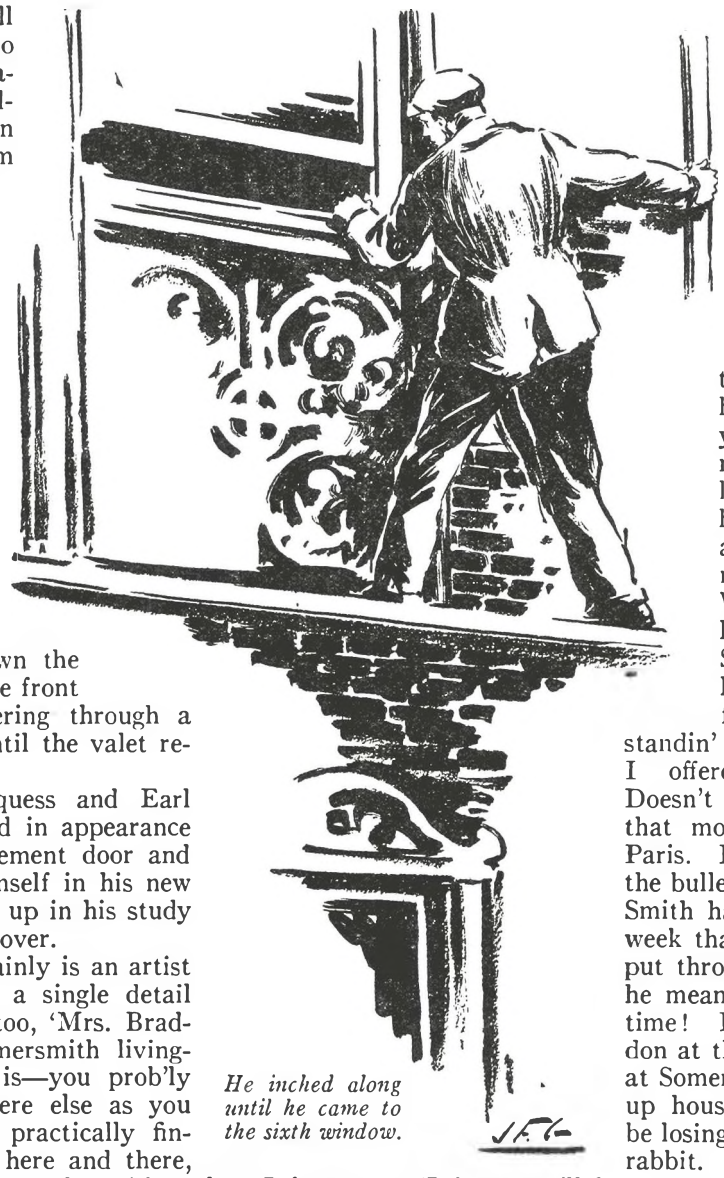
"No evidence of anything like that! Whenever you suspect that sort of thing come around to Park Lane—nobody'll interfere with you there—the house is too well guarded."

After some discussion of the Spass plan, the visitors left. Trevor stopped at a branch post office to phone Scotland Yard—asking for the Deputy Commissioner, Sir James Baldwin, who agreed to call at Park Lane within the hour. When he came, the Marquess asked why nothing seemed to be doing in the way of protecting Herr Spass while he was in London.

"In the first place, my Lord Marquess, nobody seems to know where he is—"

"You didn't know that he owns a house here?"

"There's none recorded under his name. Wise precaution, of course, for a man in his position, with so many widespread interests—but makes it a bit diffic'lt for police protection. An' there's another side to it. We know the man's a public benefactor—has just undertaken what may prove the biggest thing ever done in the way of relieving unemploym'nt. But the Left Wingers in Parliam'nt don't look at it that way—they're accusin' him of just one object—breakin' up their radical organizations with a capitalist sop of temp'rary employm'nt. An' when it's found we're detailin' a dozen or more constables to protect him, the Home Secretary's goin' to be heckled until we get orders that the men are needed elsewhere."



*He inched along until he came to the sixth window.*

"We appreciate all that, Sir James. There is, however, another feature you've not considered. Some months ago a peer of England was shot in his own house, an' a Foreign Office attaché with him, by a communist leader named Smith. We caught him; you hanged his two companions — but Smith escaped before you got him to the Yard. There's a five-thousand-pound reward standin' for him now, alive or dead—I offered three thousand more. Doesn't anyone of the C. I. D. want that money? Smith shot Spass in Paris. By some unbelievable fluke the bullet glanced and didn't kill him. Smith has found out within the last week that Spass is still living an' has put through his big proposition—and he means to make sure of him this time! Both men are hiding in London at this moment. Smith was seen at Somerset House yesterday, looking up house-records. Spass appears to be losing his nerve—he's like a hunted rabbit. Well—how about it?"

"I fancy we'll have a go at those rewards, Marquess! Nobody can interfere with the C. I. D. when it comes to runnin' down a cold-blooded murderer like Smith. I'd kill him myself if I got a chance—an' couldn't save him for the gallows!"

Day after day, Spass walked the streets of London—bearing letters from himself to various big men who were carrying out his instructions and supposed him merely an employee of the Hamburg capitalist. Smith was sitting in the outer office of one of these men, one afternoon—waiting for an interview which he didn't expect to get, and closely studying everyone who seemed to have an appointment with the magnate—when Spass arrived

and was immediately shown into the private office—one stenographer remarking to another:

"Him? . . . . Oh that'll be one of Spass' agents, here—he comes in every day or two with letters."

That was enough for Smith. He followed his man home to the Kensington house—made a few guarded inquiries in the neighborhood. If this caretaker was delivering letters from Spass to big commercial leaders every day, he must be in constant touch with him. Spass must be hiding in that very house. Up to then, Smith didn't suspect the caretaker—but he did discover C. I. D. men hanging about the neighborhood, already getting careless, and tired of watching a house where nothing seemed to happen. The former mews in the rear was now a row of garages, two of them not let. Cruising taxicabs were housed in the others. It was a simple matter to lease one of the empty garages and drive a last year's model into it two or three times in each twenty-four hours. A simple matter to fetch in a couple of mechanics, one night, to overhaul the motor—and, in the fog which had settled down, get over the brick wall into Spass' rear garden. A thick stem of wistaria which had grown up to the leads was as good as a rope ladder. The three got into a dormer window in the roof and sat down to wait in the unoccupied room until the people below had gone to bed.

Spass' nerve had seemed to pick up a bit as he went about the city with no evidence of recognition, but he had drifted into a sort of morbid melancholia—the determination of Smith and the communists to have his life appeared to be as strong an obsession as his own for putting his plan through regardless of consequences. His Park Lane friends had dropped in that evening for another visit, thinking a cheerful talk would buck him up. They had been chatting an hour or two when Lammerford, whose hearing was unusually acute, casually asked if Frau Humpferling slept on the top floor. Spass said no—she always had occupied the front hall-bedroom on the second floor—Franz, the larger one adjoining—while Spass and his supposed wife were quartered in the rear near to the bath—all of them being on the one floor. With a questioning glance at Lammerford, the Marquess drew from his pocket a very sensitive microphone which he himself had perfected—with a couple of ear-phones attached. Placing the transmitter against the hall partition, he distinctly heard the whispering of three men on the top floor. Glancing at a clock on the mantel, he figured that something was due to happen as soon as the house had quieted down, and for the moment slipped the microphone back into his pocket—thereby nearly costing him and Lammerford their lives.

Smith and his companions knew it was safer to be out and away from the house by midnight, when the detectives would be relieved by a fresher detail—so they had crept down the stairs in sneakers and were standing in the dark end of the hall when Lammerford heard a board creak. He motioned violently to the Marquess and Spass, then jumped over behind a heavy divan as Trevor slipped into a set-back of the wall at the side of the door into the hall, and Spass dived into the knee-space under his massive desk.

As Smith stood in the doorway with his pistol half-raised, Trevor's hand shot out from around the casing and grabbed his wrist, digging fingers into a certain nerve which paralyzed the entire arm. The useless hand dropped the pistol on the floor, and the man crumpled down in utter misery. The man behind him was grasped around the back of the neck before he knew what was happening, and rendered unconscious by a different nerve-pressure. From behind the sofa, Lammerford caught the third man with shots which broke a leg and an arm. Smith lay moaning on the floor—but his left hand inched closer to the pistol he had dropped. Lammerford suddenly shouted:

*"Watch out, George!"*

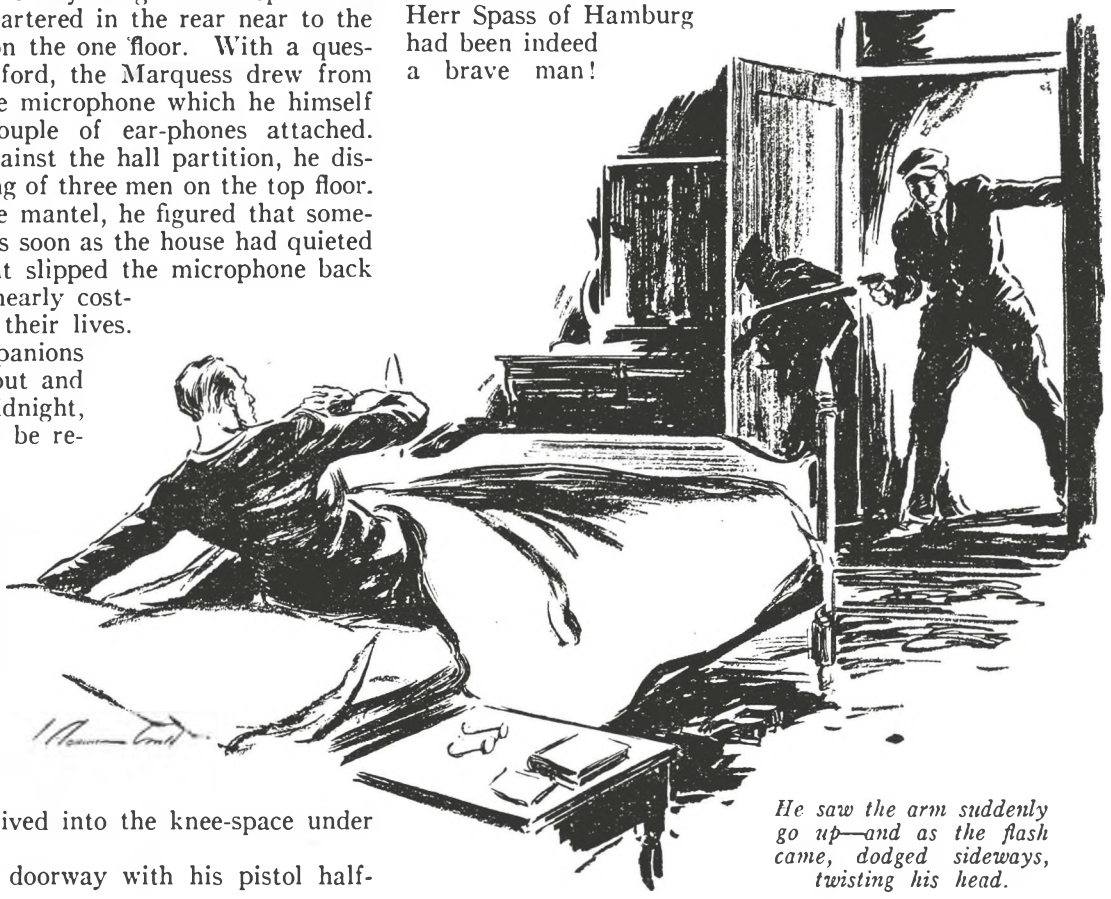
Smith's shot and that of the Marquess came together—the one went squarely through Spass' forehead in the knee-space under his desk—the other splintered Smith's arm.

They got their captives to Scotland Yard, this time. Smith's left arm was amputated near the shoulder a few hours later. He fooled the doctors into a belief that his right arm had been indefinitely paralyzed by the Marquess' jiu-jitsu grip—but he knew, and Trevor knew, that within twenty-four hours it would be as good as ever.

Smith was tried, convicted, and sentenced to the gallows—then escaped in so ridiculously simple a way that the Yard will not discuss it with anybody. A one-armed man is never as helpless as he may look.

IN all the various features and details connected with the Spass plan, the Marquess and Earl Lammerford will remember longest the scene in that Kensington study when Franz and the pseudo Mrs. Bradford came running into the room after the shots were fired. Their first action was to lift their employer out from under the desk and put him upon the sofa. The one was merely a paid valet—the other just a theatrical "prop"—yet they stood leaning over the dead man with blurred eyes—sensing the iron nerve which had carried through his scheme in spite of obstacles and threats—the reaction when he was hunted down to his death. . . . .

Herr Spass of Hamburg had been indeed a brave man!



*He saw the arm suddenly go up—and as the flash came, dodged sideways, twisting his head.*

# The Side-Purse

*If you like the courage that will not admit defeat, you will like this very moving story of a horse, a gentleman—and a jockey.*

By EWING WALKER

Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean

AN August sun was trying to thrust its rays through the foliage of the walnut trees; a bluegrass lawn was mottled with splotches of shade; a meadow-lark was singing half-heartedly, and away off yonder somewhere, a turtle-dove was mournfully calling. Mary's Jim, —we call him that to distinguish him from another Jim at Oakmead,—small and black and trim in riding-boots and jockey's cap, was sitting upon a stone bench that has stood these many years at the Elbow, which is a turning-point along Alan's Walk, which leads from the "Big House" to the paddocks.

There was a bucket containing soapy water and a sponge, at Mary's Jim's feet; several racing bridles were at his side. He was supposed to be cleaning them; instead, he was contentedly leaning back, with eyes closed, against the bole of a giant cottonwood tree and singing:

*"Mister Blue-darter Hawk he come a-zoomin' low;*
*He grabbed him up a biddy an' away he go.*
*Yaller gal chuckle an' sort o' turn away;*
*Say, 'Boy, I'm li'ble do you jes' perzactly dat a-way'!"*

"Oh-h, Jim!" The voice, crisply emphatic, came from the big stable.

"Yas suh, Boss! Comin'!" And Mary's Jim went.

Barney Moore, Oakmead's trainer, was waiting at Mercy Lodge, that thick-waisted log cabin where Little Gill lives. Jim, energetic enough now, pulled up before him like a shuttle-train halting at a station.

Barney observed him dourly. "You aint worth killin'," he growled.

Jim grinned. "No suh, Boss."

"Finish those bridles?"—crisply.

"Ya— No suh, Boss. Dey was so gummed-up—"

"Runnin' around all last night, I reckon."

"No suh, Boss. Jes' barely had lef' out, as you might say, 'fo' I was back ag'in."

Barney pursed his lips for what seemed to Jim a mighty long—and a mighty ominous—time. "Jim, you aint worth knockin' in the head, except around the horses—"

"Yas suh, Boss."

"—And those triflin' yellow gals."

"Ya—no *suh,* Boss!" Mr. Barney sure was actin' savigous-like. Had to mighty quick think up somethin' to tickle him—only way to handle white folks when they's fretted! "Boss, if dem gals waited for me to pay 'em any mind, dey'd be lonesome ez a dollar in a black hobo's britches." Umph! That's better. Mr. Barney sort o' grinned. "I's a race-ridin' niggah an' de stable's mah home!"

"Well, you shake a foot and *get* home. You get busy or there's going to be a first-class funeral round this place."

"Yas suh, Boss!" Mary's Jim headed toward the stables, singing low as he tripped jauntily along the grass-tufted and worn bricks of Alan's Walk:

*"Mister Mockin'bird a-settin' in a sweet-gum tree.*
*Mister Polecat say-a, 'Wal, yo' can't mock me!'*
*Mister Bird broke a egg what had done gone bad—*
*'Yes, yo' kin!' say de cat—an' he sho' was mad!"*

Barney turned to Little Gill, who was seated upon the wooden bench before his door, a battered gamecock on his lap. "This heat—or these gals—is makin' Jim more worthless every day."

" 'E's a rare good rider, sir." It is the nature of Little Gill instinctively to rally to another's defense.

Barney's manner softened as he studied the old-young face of the small man before him—the small man who limps along through life with one shoulder lower than the other and one leg shorter than its mate, grim and lasting relics of his last ride over the jumps in England. Barney, hot and tired, was glad to relax.

"Gill, do you always think of the other fellow and never of yourself?"

Quickly Little Gill glanced away. "Oh, no sir! Not at all, sir."

"I see. Thoroughly selfish." Barney chuckled. "Sometimes I think—" Straightening, he broke off abruptly. From down the driveway toward the gate came the spluttering and rattling of an old automobile. "Old Major Townley. Of all days to have to listen to him tell about that horse!" Leaning over, he peered under the low-hanging limbs of the trees to make sure. He saw an old rattletrap car halt before the entrance to the big house and a man, wrinkled and gray but stubbornly erect, step out and glance about him; he saw the man jerk his coat into place and square his shoulders with a hint of defiant pride and then, with rare dignity, start along Alan's Walk toward Mercy Lodge.

BARNEY rose as the visitor drew near. "Evenin', Major!" At Oakmead, evening still begins at noon and night sets in with dark. "Sit right here in the shade." He surrendered his end of Gill's wooden bench.

"Warm weather, suh." The Major spoke with studied deliberation. "Pastures dryin' out any?"

"A little."

"Bad for the brood mares and the youngsters, suh!" He turned to Little Gill, who bent over the gamecock in his arms. "What have you there, Gill? A stag?"

Gill moistened his lips—a habit of his.

"Yes, sir. Leg broke, sir. One o' the 'orses must have stepped on 'im."

Reflectively Major Townley pursed his lips. "That reminds me, suh, of an interesting little incident. The year my horse Traveler was a two-year-old, a brood cock

—he was a Mugwump, and a good one—took up with the colt. Roosted in his stall every night; most of the time was sittin' on the half-door of his quarters. They were regular friends." Abruptly he straightened. "You remember Traveler, suh? A colt of great promise! He was still runnin' at his mammy's side when I made the prophecy—"

Barney rose with a certain desperate abruptness of manner. "Sorry to have to leave you, Major; but I must phone a party in Lexington. You'll excuse me?"

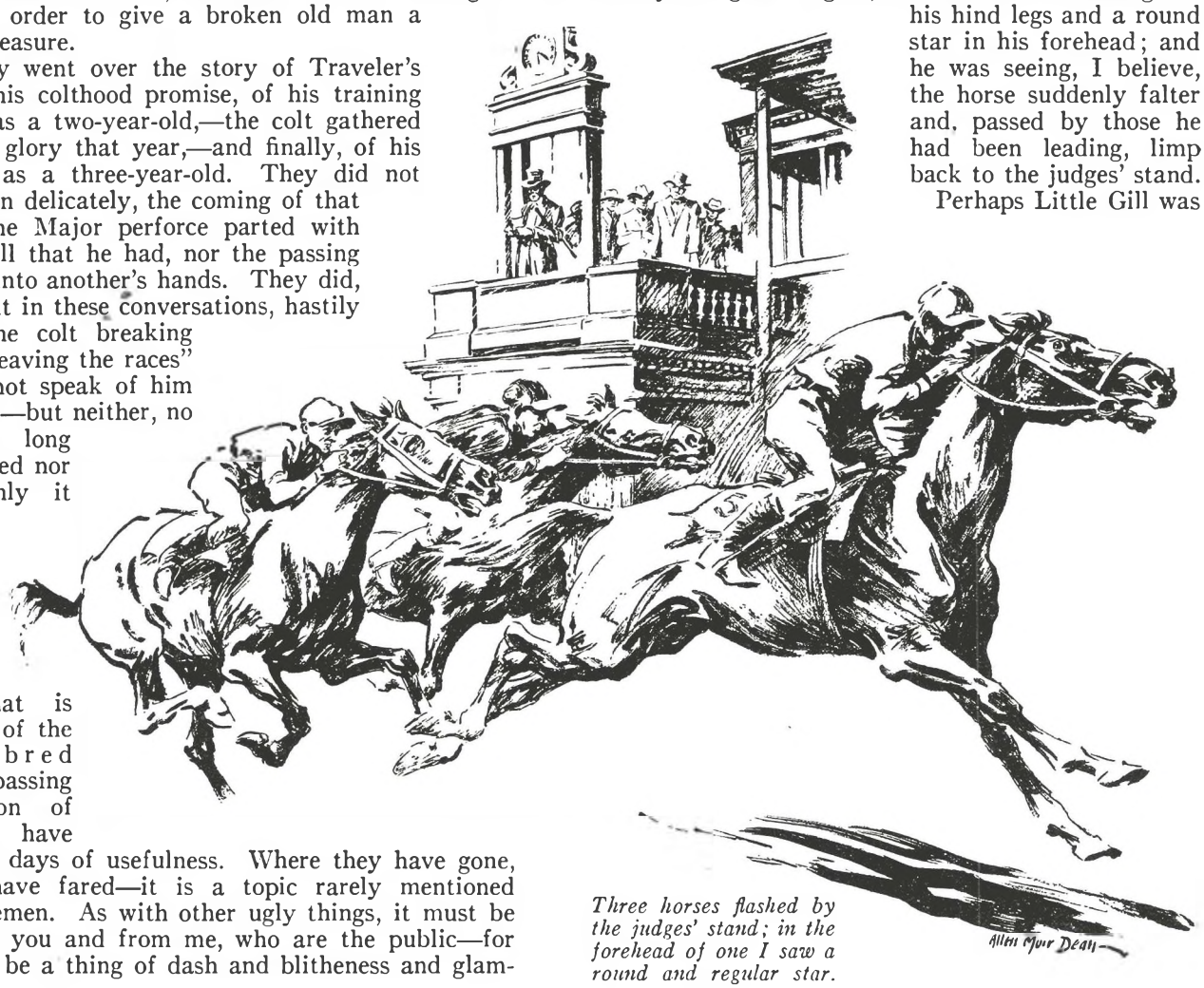
"Of course, suh. I would not in any way discommode you. I merely came over to saunter about for a few moments and look over the youngsters."

Barney hurried away. Little Gill, ever alert to save another wound or embarrassment, turned to his guest. "I remember Traveler as a yearling, sir."

Major Townley's fingertips met. "Yes, I know you do. I called him Traveler for Robert E. Lee's favorite mount. I knew he'd be worthy the name."

"'E was a bold-headed colt, sir." All this had been gone over uncounted times; but Little Gill was willing to carry on, in order to give a broken old man a moment's pleasure.

Again they went over the story of Traveler's coming, of his colthood promise, of his training and racing as a two-year-old,—the colt gathered his meed of glory that year,—and finally, of his single start as a three-year-old. They did not mention, even delicately, the coming of that day when the Major perforce parted with just about all that he had, nor the passing of Traveler into another's hands. They did, at some point in these conversations, hastily allude to the colt breaking down and "leaving the races" —they did not speak of him as being sold—but neither, no matter how long the talk lasted nor how smoothly it flowed, ever advanced a theory as to the colt's whereabouts. That is the tragedy of the thoroughbred world—the passing into oblivion of those that have passed their days of usefulness. Where they have gone, how they have fared—it is a topic rarely mentioned among horsemen. As with other ugly things, it must be hidden from you and from me, who are the public—for racing must be a thing of dash and blitheness and glamour.




*Three horses flashed by the judges' stand; in the forehead of one I saw a round and regular star.*

We see or know of the anxious waiting for the arrival of the youngster, bred in the purple; we see him, a pampered princeling, frisking at his mother's side about a green pasture; we see him broken, each step taken with infinite pains so that his body and spirit receive no wound. And at last, to the blowing of a bugle, we see him with others of his kind march out upon the track and, wheeling, face the barrier.

All this you and I—the public—see; but we do not see —and a fortunate thing it is—the fate of those that fail. Perhaps one day at Churchill Downs or Empire or Saratoga you saw a sleek-limbed aristocrat face the barrier, and with eyes gleaming and stanch limbs driving, give all that he had. Later—one or two or five years later—you may have caught your breath or muttered a curse at sight of an unkempt, ill-nourished animal drawing cart or plow or wagon. You did not know it, of course, for he was strangely, pitifully changed; but you had seen that horse before. For him, the notes of the bugle are muted. I like to fancy, when I come upon one of his kind, that he's but spending a little while in a sort of equine purgatory, from which ere long he will pass into a fairer, kindlier state.

Little Gill took up the thread of their talk. "'E was marked very odd, sir: two white stockings that ringed 'is hind legs as even, sir, as if they'd been painted."

"And a star in his forehead round as a silver dollar," contributed Major Townley. Seemingly, his eyes rested upon Little Gill; in reality, he was seeing a shrub-dotted infield, a track that shimmered under an August sun, a half-score thoroughbreds hurtling down the stretch, and in the lead by two good lengths, one with white stockings on his hind legs and a round star in his forehead; and he was seeing, I believe, the horse suddenly falter and, passed by those he had been leading, limp back to the judges' stand.

Perhaps Little Gill was seeing the whole of it too. "Our American tracks, sir, are 'ard on 'orses."

"Murderous! If Traveler had been running on the turf, he would never have bowed that tendon. Perhaps he would still—" His shoulders, usually so defiantly squared, sagged a little; and the glance he turned upon Little Gill was one of appeal. "Surely you know I did not sell him because of his injury?"

It was more than old Major Townley had ever before said to another; but there's something about Little Gill that leads others to open their hearts—and not regret it.

"Of course, sir. And now"—managing a smile—"would you care to look over the youngsters? There's some right promising, sir."

HOW the old gentleman, year after year, managed to attend the races none knew. We did know that his place, the Grove, was mortgaged to the last streak of mortar between its age-stained bricks, that its paddocks were empty save for two or three aging brood mares, its fields neglected, its pasture fences in a woeful state of disrepair. And yet, when we reached Lexington or Louisville, Cincinnati or New Orleans, there we'd find Major Townley, head thrown back, shoulders squared, elbows shining, collar frayed.

There was a peculiar stubbornness in his journeying each winter to New Orleans. I think he must have felt that by showing himself there he was proving he still was a part of the web and woof of racing. Louisville, Lexington, Cincinnati were, in a way, right at home; but New Orleans—that was different—that meant something! And so, each year, when we reached New Orleans and as we loitered about the stables or lingered in a hotel lobby, we'd hear a voice—a voice in which courage and uncertainty were intermingled—exclaim, "Good day, suh! I wondered had you arrived." Turning, we would see the Major, seeming a little thinner and more frail than the year before, but with his graying head thrown back and shoulders squared as ever. I'm afraid we made matters worse by the excessive heartiness of our greeting, for we wished to hide the fact that we understood and were sorry.

Two things marked his changed estate; and I would have you remember these two, for they tell a large part of his story. A few years before, when the world was dealing gently with him, he would enter a taxi, drive to the St. James Hotel, engage one of its choicest rooms, and, in a large bold hand, inscribe himself upon the register thus:

*Major Churchill Townley, the Grove, Kentucky.*

No town or city, mind you; merely the name of his home and his State—his State spelled out in full.

Now it was different. He entered no taxi. Instead, he took up his old telescope bag and, thin lips pressed close, made his way along streets that finally led to an obscure, cheaply bizarre hostelry called the Acme; rather hastily, he made his way to the desk and with a hand none too steady, placed his name upon the soiled register:

*C. Townley, Paris, Ky.*

No title before his name, his home not even indicated, his State abbreviated as though he might thus spare it a bit of shame.

The Acme has a side entrance, opening upon a narrow, obscure street. It was through this doorway that C. Townley, first glancing to the right and the left somewhat furtively, always entered.

WE who knew him for what he was, realizing how he must be put to it to carry on, tried to devise ways of helping; but it was not an easy thing to do. He would neither ask nor accept a loan; rarely would he dine with us; he would not even accept a tip on the races, so stiff-backed was he and so inflexible his code, unless it came to him through the proper channels. I remember the day black Mary's Jim looked up at me with a bewildered expression.

"Who stole *your* girl?" I asked.

He was silent a moment. Then—"Ol' Majah Townley sho' did gib me a stiff workout."

"How come?"

"Well, suh, 'co'se I knowed de ol' gemman's up ag'in it; an' I knowed how you-all feel t'wards 'im. So, a little while ago, whilst I was comin' 'cross de infield, I met up wid 'im.

"S' I, 'Mawnin', Majah.'

" 'Good mawnin', Jim,' s'e. 'Many mounts today?'

" 'Three, suh,' s' I. Den I looks aroun', makin' sho' dey warn't nobody list'nin'; an' I says, sort o' confidential-like, 'Majah, dat filly o' ourn, Meg's Julep, is in de right spot today, suh, an' us figgers she'll breeze. She'll pay a good price. You ought 'o get yo'se'f a bet down on her.' "

Mary's Jim paused long enough to moisten his lips and to give me a look promising a surprise. "Cap'n, when I said dat, de ol' gemman sort o' drawed hisse'f up an' says to me, speakin' mighty slow an' solemn-like: 'Boy,' he say, 'did yo' master gib you permission to pass me dat information?'

"Dat sort o' had me swallowin'. S' I, 'No, suh.'

"He shook his finger at me. 'Boy,' he say, 'de plans of a stable should be sacredly confidential; any word from a stable should come from the owner hisse'f or de trainer!' An', wid dat, he strutted off like a game rooster huntin' hisse'f some trouble."

Meg's Julep was in the third race that day; and it so happened I found myself sitting three or four rows back of old Major Townley, my presence unknown to him. He sat there and, with never a penny down, watched Meg's Julep come home in front to the tune of better than eight-to-one.

Oh, yes, his code is inflexible, is Major Townley's. Though Major Churchill Townley, formerly of the Grove and the St. James, had become merely C. Townley, of Ky., and the Acme, there had been no change in his code. . . .

It was, I think, the third day of the races at Jefferson. Our Oakmead stable was established in its quarters. There was Barney Moore our trainer, and Mary's Jim, and the usual stable-boys and swipes; and Little Gill, of course, who has no title but who has come to be so very much a part of all things at Oakmead; finally, there were fourteen of our thoroughbreds—and myself.

IT was, as I say, the third day of the races. Little Gill and I had returned to the city and were strolling along toward the lower end of Royal Street. Suddenly Gill halted, staring before him. The next moment he was running down the street.

It is not customary, to say the least, for a small man, with one sagging shoulder and with a pronounced limp in his stride, to grasp his cap and run along Royal Street—or any other street—at the top of his laborious and limited speed. Passers-by halted to watch; a grim-lipped policeman looked on suspiciously, deliberating whether he should follow the fleeing figure merely with his eyes or with his feet as well. With Little Gill a matter of fifty yards away, I took out after him—upon which more passers-by paused to look and the policeman took out after both of us. Even now I feel twinges of shame upon recalling certain remarks hurled after us by several small boys having far more wit than charity.

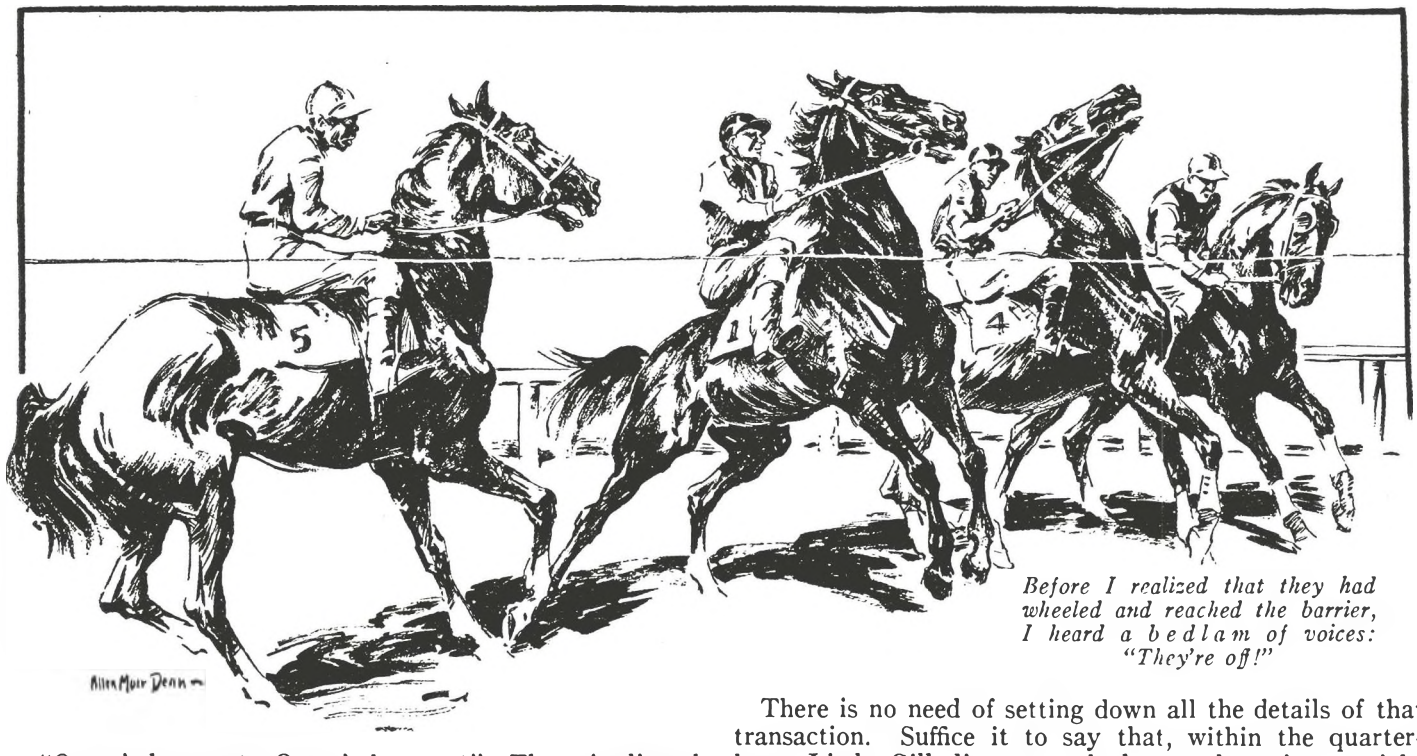
At last I caught up with him, standing in the center of the street. A curious crowd already was about him and his old-young face was crimson with embarrassment. One nervous hand rested upon the body of a small two-wheeled vegetable cart, between the shafts of which stood a weary-eyed, gaunt horse of better than sixteen hands.

Little Gill was looking up into the perplexed face of a Cajun vegetable-peddler. "Where did you get this 'orse?" he asked.

"Me, I don't see dat's any o' your business, maybe."

"Tell 'im 'bout it, Tony!" shouted one on the fringe of the growing throng.

The Cajun wheeled. "You shut up too, huh!"




*Before I realized that they had wheeled and reached the barrier, I heard a bedlam of voices: "They're off!"*

"Out o' the way! Out o' the way!" The grim-lipped policeman had arrived. "You're blockin' traffic."

"I merely wanted to ask him," explained Little Gill, in a voice hardly audible, "where he bought this 'orse."

The officer saw in Gill's eyes that which all who look into those eyes must see. He turned to the vendor of cabbages and carrots. "Pull off to one side, you, and tell the gentleman what he wants to know."

I noticed Little Gill flinch as the swarthy one jerked the bit and steered his horse to the curb. Gill, the policeman, the crowd and I followed.

"Have you had this 'orse very long?" softly inquired Gill.

The Cajun glowered, glanced toward the officer and back to Gill again. "One year dis past-gone June."

Gill recorded the fact in the small notebook he carries with him. "What is your name, please?"

"Geel-bair Boudreaux."

That too was set down. "You live in New Orleans?"

Gilbert found no encouragement in the policeman's glance. "No. Me I leeve down de river at Promised Land."

"Who did you buy the 'orse from?" He peered down toward his book, for in that way he could avoid the glances of those in the crowd.

"Me, I bought de horse"—testily shaking his head and speaking with slow emphasis—"from Meestair Walter Roberts. And Meestair Walter Roberts he also live at Promised Land. Meestair Walter Roberts he got him de farm at Promised Land. And Meestair Walter Roberts he got him de horse from who I do not know. Now, maybe, you satisfy, huh?"

Little Gill stepped to the horse's head and examined his teeth; gently, he drew the sagging head lower and studied the mark in the forehead; he drew back a step and glanced toward the long, bony hind legs. He again looked up into the swarthy countenance above him. "How much did you pay for the 'orse?"

"How mooch? Now, dat's my bus—" The policeman gave him a glare. "Thirty dollar."

Little Gill took his purse from his pocket and drew a bill from it. "I will give you fifty dollars for the 'orse and bridle. You can keep the 'arness and the cart. But"—with an emphasis uncommon to him—"I want the 'orse right here and now."

There is no need of setting down all the details of that transaction. Suffice it to say that, within the quarter-hour, Little Gill, lips pressed close and staring straight ahead, was limping down the street, leading a weary-limbed, gaunt-sided horse; and I, conscious of an unusual warmth in my cheeks, strode along at his side.

When we had covered a block, I glanced down at my small companion. "For the love of heaven, Gill, what's it all about?"

He moistened his lips. "I—I just decided I wanted that 'orse, sir."

"Wanted him? Going into the vegetable business?"

"No sir; just— If you don't mind, sir, I'd rather not say any more just now. You—you don't mind, sir?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "What are you going to do with him tonight? The St. James might object to your taking him to your room."

Gill's tone made me ashamed of my crude effort at satire. "There's a public stable, sir, about three blocks from 'ere. I'll stable him there tonight and tomorrow I'll have a 'orse-van take him out to Jefferson."

The next morning, I saw Little Gill lead the horse to a stall at one end of the stables; I saw him, with strange gentleness, remove the rough bridle from his head and the harsh, stiff bit from his mouth, and I saw his hand linger a moment upon the harness galls—marks of ignominy for a thoroughbred. Then I watched him do a strange thing: I saw him take that bridle and go into the tack-room, to come out again with an armful of old papers; I saw him place those papers and the bridle in a trash-burner and touch a match to them. As he turned away, I saw a faint hint of a smile upon his lips, for he was doing his best to obliterate a chapter of the past.

That afternoon I did not watch the racing, for we had nothing entered and the card was an ordinary one. I stood at Little Gill's side, leaning over the half-door of a stall and studying the wreck of a horse within. Suddenly I heard Gill draw in his breath. From across the infield came the notes of a bugle sounding "Boots and Saddles;" and as the clear, crisp notes reached us, I saw the long-limbed, gaunt horse before us straighten and his head come higher and his ragged tail stiffen; I saw the weariness and the hopelessness for a moment leave that horse's eyes and in their place come a look of spirit and valor. Gill turned to me, an expression of triumph in his own eyes. . . .

I have seen, in my day, many a filly and colt trained for the races, but never one trained as was Bones, as the

boys about the stable called him. Gill allowed no one else in the horse's stall; it was he who prepared the animal's feed and bedded him down, who brushed and rubbed and washed him.

The first week or ten days Little Gill led him about by the halter, letting the horse nibble grass or stand gazing away toward some unusual sound, or, flinging back his head, watch a horse working out on the track. On the fourth day, I saw Gill grin broadly. The horse, for a moment watching another flash by, shook his head playfully by way of a challenge.

That same day, as I later learned, Gill drove down the river to Promised Land, and, calling upon one Walter Roberts, made various records in his notebook.

ON the tenth or twelfth morning, he put a five-pound saddle on the horse, walked him along the track to the deserted stands and back to the stable again. From then on, he rode him each day, at first only walking him, but finally putting him into a trot and at last into a slow, easy gallop.

I've seen horses "come out," as we term it, but never another as did Bones. His flanks filled out, his ribs disappeared, his head came higher. The harness galls, of course, would show until he shed in the spring—and perhaps longer.

Each day or two, old Major Townley came to the stables. At times, though rarely, he arrived early and watched the horses given their workouts.

On one such day, I turned to Little Gill. "Aren't you working Bones today?"

He shifted his glance. "Not today, sir." Evidently he caught the look of mild surprise—and truly it was a name to surprise any!—in old Major Townley's eyes. "It's just a nickname for a 'orse, sir," he explained. . . . .

At last the races closed at Jefferson and we moved over to the Fair-grounds, Gill, of course, taking Bones along. Each morning he gave him his workout, later walking him around and around the cooling-shed. Once I fell in beside him, matching my stride with his.

"I worked him a half today, sir," said Gill.

"Fine," said I. "How did he move?"

"Eager-like as you please, sir. And I made, as you might say, a discovery, sir."

"What's that?"

" 'E's sound. Whatever it was that caused him to leave the races, 'e's overcome it now." We halted a moment as a spirited gelding in front of us lashed out with a hoof; then we took up our slow marching again. "You see, sir, while 'e's been starved and treated like a common workhorse, in a way it's been good for him—all but the starvin'. While they've even plowed him,"—he managed the word with difficulty,—"and hauled that cart with him some, 'e's never been run. Most of the time, I found, 'e was doing work about the farm—slow work, as you might say, and on soft ground. It was a grand chance, sir, to get over his lameness—or whatever 'is trouble was."

"What's his age?" I asked.

"Five, sir."

"Not figuring on racing him, are you?" I inquired.

Little Gill glanced away. "It all depends, sir," he replied evasively.

Finally, the Fair-grounds closed and back we went to Jefferson; and back with us went a horse now incongruously called Bones—a horse high-headed and bold-eyed as any in the stable. As the days passed, the workouts of that horse grew in length and in intensity.

"What do you reckon he is?" I asked Barney one day.

"How should I know? But I'll do one thing: I'll lay you plenty Gill knows."

From around one end of the stables, came old Major Townley, his face more drawn than usual, but his shoulders as ever squared.

"Gen-tle-men"—precisely.

"Howdy, Major?" Barney drew up a backless chair. "Have a seat."

"Thank you, suh."

"Were you down on Huckleberry yesterday?" demanded Barney with accustomed directness.

"No, suh. I wasn't playing them yesterday."

"Too bad. I had five hundred on his nose and he paid a little better'n four. It's a grand and glorious feelin'!"

Major Townley looked toward the empty stands and, I've an idea, on beyond toward objects hidden from all visions save his. "There's a grander feeling than that, suh."

"What feelin's that?" challenged Barney. "*I* don't know it."

"It's the feeling, suh, that comes to a sportsman and a gentleman when he sees a colt of his own breeding run an honest race and gallantly finish in front of his field."

It was Monday. On Saturday would be run the Pontchartrain Cup, an all-age event at a mile and an eighth and worth, roughly, ten thousand dollars to the winner.

About ten o'clock of that Monday morning, I stepped from my car at Oakmead's section of the barns. Barney Moore and Little Gill were standing before the tack-room and it struck me Barney's red face was redder than usual.

Seeing me, he called. "Hey! Come here!" And, once I halted before him—"Got a job for you."

"Right. What is it?"

"Keep your eye on Gill here. Don't let him out o' your sight! Most 'specially, don't let him get hold of any dangerous weapons."

Moistening his lips, Little Gill looked away.

"What's it all about?" I demanded.

"Don't let on to Gill I told you," cautioned Barney in sham confidence, "but he's loco—walkin' on his heels. Know what he's figurin' on?"

I shook my head.

"Startin' Bones in the Pontchartrain Saturday—*Bones!*"

" 'E 'as a good chance to win, sir," interposed Gill mildly.

"Oh, Mr. Legree, please spare me!" Barney buried his face in his hands. "The Pontchartrain! *Bones!* Plow-horse! Collar-marks!" He straightened, turning to Gill. "Listen! They'll beat that bag o' despair so far you'll have to get the hounds out to find him. Figurin' on Mary's Jim ridin' him?"

"I was 'oping you'd consent to that, sir, seeing as 'ow Oakmead has nothing entered in the race."

Barney favored me with a resigned expression. "See? You see? Comin' out o' the Oakmead barn; Oakmead's first-string rider with the leg up— If the boys don't rag me!" He wheeled upon Little Gill. "What do you hope to get out of it? That ten-thousand-dollar purse?"

Gill glanced toward the infield. "More than that, sir; a very much bigger stake than that. A sort of side-purse, as you might say." Looking toward neither of us, he limped away.

"A side-purse, eh?" mused Barney. "Now, what do you reckon he meant by that?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

IT was Thursday—two days before the running of the Pontchartrain Cup. Little Gill and I leaned against the outer rail of the track, chatting.

Barney came striding toward us, thrust a folded paper under Gill's nose and tapped it with a testy finger. "What does this mean?"

Innocently enough Gill glanced at the indicated column.

"It's a list of probable starters in the Pontchartrain."

Barney thrust the paper toward me. "Read it!"

I skimmed over the story itself and came to the list of horses: *Bay Pilot, The Tartar, Brown Sugar, Billy B. D., Trav*— Perhaps I stared in wonderment; certainly I held the paper nearer, and read:

"*Traveler* BC *5. Nomad—Wanderlust. C. Townley—O. Gilliver. 105. 100-1.*"

Which, should you be unversed in such abbreviations, meant that one of the likely starters was Traveler, a bay colt five years old by Nomad out of Wanderlust; that he was owned by C. Townley, trained by O. (Oakley) Gilliver (known to us of Oakmead as Little Gill), would carry one hundred five pounds in the race and that the odds against him would probably be one hundred to one.

I looked up. "You mean, Gill—"

"Yes, sir,"—moistening his lips—"it's *him*. I knew it the minute I saw those even white stockings and that regular star."

"But you've entered him in Major Townley's name."

"Yes sir. You see, I just advanced him, as you might say, the amount of the purchase-price. He of course will reimburse me, as soon as he knows."

"Oh, I see. He knows nothing about it, eh?"

Gill glanced away. "No, sir, 'e doesn't. I wanted to make sure of the 'orse first because—well, sir, it was just a long chance, and if 'e didn't come through it would have been rather—well, rather bitter, as you might say, for the old gentleman."

"Tell me this," Barney interposed gruffly. "How the devil did you know the horse was sound again?"

"I didn't, sir; but I did know that plenty of men, 'orsemen among them, make mistakes; and I knew that every 'orse that goes lame, doesn't always stay lame, sir."

"But to think he was dragging a vegetable-cart—"

"You forget, sir, that the Godolphin Arabian himself hauled wood about the streets of Paris."

"I understand all that—or don't understand any of it," I acknowledged. "But where is Major Townley now?" I recalled I had not seen the defiantly prideful, threadbare old figure for two or three days.

LITTLE GILL, looking down, drew lines in the dust with the toe of his boot. "'E's out of town for a day or two; in fact, sir, until Saturday." He looked up at me, in an appeal for understanding. "You see, sir, I 'ad to get him away. If there'd been any last-minute slip— And I 'ad to have him, sir, where 'e wouldn't see the papers."

"Right; but how'd you manage it?"

"I explained to him that in certain parishes of Louisiana they race a 'eap of quarter-horses—small, short-coupled animals they are—and that I thought perhaps they'd make good polo mounts, which are bringin' good money these days. So, as a favor to me, sir, 'e went up to investigate. I sent him in a car, sir."

Barney cocked his head. "You really think Bones—"

"*Traveler*, sir," Gill corrected mildly.

"You really think Traveler has a chance?"

"I do, sir. 'E's sound as a new guinea." Then, hesitantly—"There's a favor you two can do for me." He glanced away to hide his embarrassment—that embarrassment that comes over him when discovered doing something for another, which he so frequently is. "I'm lending Major Townley five hundred dollars. 'E'll not be here in time for me to consult him, so I want you both to tell him what I've just told you—that, being as he and I are friends, as you might say, I acted for him. In that way, sir, 'e'll think it's a debt of honor. The 'orse'll pay eighty or a hundred to one. To keep from pulling the odds down, I'll wire it to different books around the country—a bit here and a bit there. Of course"—trying to be matter-of-fact—"if the 'orse should lose, we'll say nothing to him about the five hundred."

"If he loses, we'll say nothing to *him*," growled Barney, who fancies he can hide emotion under gruffness, "but we'll say plenty to *you*. I'll take care of a third of it myself."

"And the same goes for me," I managed.

Little Gill looked from one of us to the other. "Don't you see what it would mean to him? Don't you see, sir? With the ten-thousand-dollar purse and the real money from the bets, 'e could do what's needed at the Grove; and the 'orse, with all that'd be said and written of him comin' back as he did, could be retired to the stud and would keep the old gentleman up very handily." Once more he looked toward the ground. "And, it would do more than that, sir. It would—well, it would give him new life, sir, if you know what I mean."

Yes, I knew what he meant; and I believed I understood when he spoke of the horse winning a "side-purse" greater than the purse of ten thousand. . . .

Now and then I find myself trying to decide whether I like to recall that day or would prefer wiping it from my memory. It was not the sort of day one would choose for racing. The air was sultry, murky, dispiriting. Occasionally the sun appeared, a pale, cheerless disk, only to be quickly hidden again. Low-scudding clouds swept in from the marshes and the sea, and about midmorning it rained a little—not a definite, refreshing rain, but a depressing dripping or oozing from the overcast heavens.

Not a horse was entered by Oakmead, and yet it was a day of trial for all connected with the stable. They seemed to have caught the spirit of the thing and the meaning of what Little Gill had termed a "side-purse." Barney Moore, being Barney, strove to hide what I knew was in his heart by the sharpness of his orders; Little Gill, nervously moistening his lips, limped from Traveler's stall to the driveway and back to the stall again; Mary's Jim, his small black face sober for once, sat upon an upturned feed-bucket, the whites of his eyes showing; exercise-boys, stable-hands, moved about with strangely little to say.

At one o'clock, Gill gripped my arm. "'E's due at the gate, sir, at one-thirty. If you'd be good enough to meet him, sir, and sort of take him in hand, as you might say, until after the race, and maybe explain what's needful, why, sir—"

Major Townley was there on time; and as he stepped from the car I found myself wondering how I would begin—and when. Purposely walking slowly, I guided him toward the stands and the Oakmead box in those stands; I walked even slower as I glanced toward his rusty black hat and his threadbare clothes and his defiantly squared shoulders, and most of all, at the expression in his eyes.

Soon—all too soon—we were seated in the box. Haltingly, groping for words, I told him as much as I could—yet withal, as little as I could. Now and again, during the telling, I saw his hands open and shut—and his eyes close for a moment. Not once during the telling did he glance toward me. Perhaps he feared to reveal what was in his own eyes—or to discover what was in mine. He but sat there rigidly erect, gazing ahead across the infield; and though the day was dark, so dark that even the stables were barely visible, I know he was seeing—with merciless clearness—much that lay beyond those low-walled barns.

OF the first and second and third races I recall not a thing; for all my memory of them they might as well not have been run. Then, the murky clouds still scudding so low it seemed they must brush the tops of the live-oak trees before us, I heard a bugle sound; and at my elbow I heard the old man sharply draw in his breath.

I found myself trying to devise possible alibis. "A rotten day for racing," I offered.

A moment he was silent. "An honest horse, suh, will give you his best on any sort of day."

A piebald pony, with red-coated rider astride him, emerged from the paddock and started down the track toward us, followed by a line of dimly seen eager forms.

"It rained just enough to make the track treacherous," I muttered hopefully.

"A great horse, suh, doesn't pick the going," the Major rejoined.

I slumped back in my seat, mumbling a heartfelt, if somewhat profane, prayer.

BEFORE ever I realized they had wheeled and reached the barrier, I heard the gong sound and a bedlam of voices above and below and about me shouting and screaming, muttering and whispering, *"They're off!"*

Eight driving, racing forms flashed by; somewhere near the middle of that group, I caught sight of two flashing, white-stockinged legs and, somewhere above them, a small crouching figure the whites of whose eyes I could see, but whose black face was hidden from me.

They made the first turn, and I leaned forward straining my eyes to single out a certain horse; but with the darkness of the day and something that kept stealing into my eyes, I could tell no one from the others.

I sank back in my seat, silently cursing weather that hid the driving forms from me—and silently thanking the fates for such weather. The man beside me was built of sterner stuff. He stood with head back and shoulders squared; but for the manner in which his fists were clenched at his sides and his lips pressed into a straight line, he might have been watching a cheap claiming race in which he had no interest.

A murmur, that grew into a great rolling wave of sound, arose about me, and I knew the horses had turned into the stretch. Once more I was upon my feet, trying—yet fearing—to find a certain horse struggling toward us.

Then, down the track, I saw three dark, obscure forms coming on and behind them—hopelessly behind—another group. I opened my mouth, that I might breathe the freer, for I had seen through the gloom two shafts of white—two shafts that rose and fell in unison to a sweeping, rhythmic stride; and that white was upon the legs of one of the three horses leading.

To a roar, that seemed to press back the murky air about us, three horses flashed by the judges' stand; in the forehead of the one in front I saw a white star—a strangely round and regular star—which at the moment seemed to me to gleam as brightly as ever did a star in the heavens.

I found myself foolishly laughing and gripping the arms of the old man at my side.

And then I heard him speaking—as evenly and as meticulously as ever he had spoken to us while we lingered at the Elbow on Alan's Walk at Oakmead: "I never overrated him, suh! He was still runnin' at his mammy's side when I made the prophecy—"

HOW we became separated I do not know. Perhaps it was as we passed down the crowded steps, or in the milling crowd before the stands. In any event, separated we were and, after searching about for a half-hour, I hurried over to the stables. None had seen him. Gill too, had not been seen. I got into the Oakmead car. "To the Acme Hotel," I ordered; "and step on it." I reproached myself for letting the old gentleman get out of my sight. I was afraid of what might have happened. Undoubtedly it had been a shock to him, despite his stoical demeanor.

Arrived at the unsavory Acme, I tried to speak evenly to the pasty-faced clerk.

"Is Major—is Mr. C. Townley in his room?" I queried.

He referred to a dog-eared register. "C. Townley o' Paris, Kentucky?"—languidly.

I nodded.

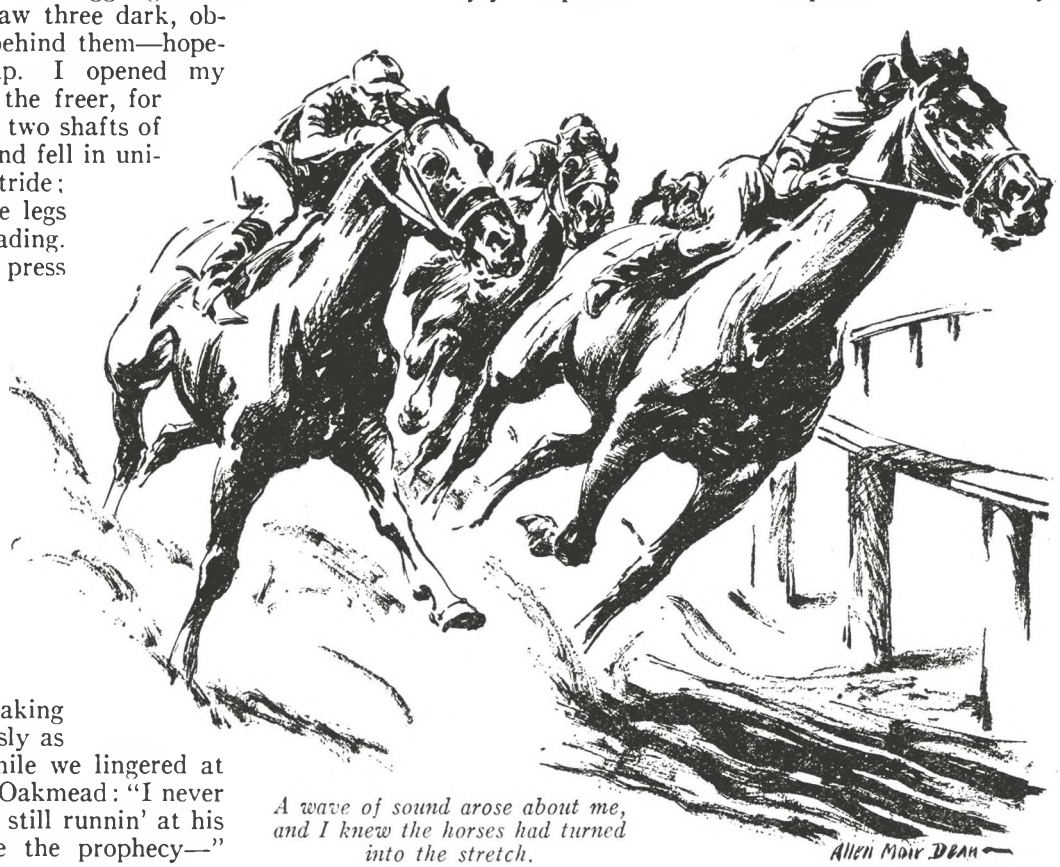
"Checked out 'bout thirty minutes ago."

I left the place dejectedly. "Go back to the track," I instructed our chauffeur. "I'll walk from here."

Checked out! Now, why—I would go to my room at the St. James, calmly think the situation over and then start out upon a systematic search. Entering my hotel I started across the lobby—and abruptly halted. Before me I saw, making his way toward the desk, a small figure of a man in riding boots, with one shoulder lower than the other and who walked with a telltale limp; at his side I saw another figure—tall, slender, stiff-backed, and with shoulders squared and head held high, despite his weight of years.

They reached the desk. The old man spoke, and a registration-card was handed him. Noiselessly I approached and looked over his shoulder. I thought—perhaps it was fancy only—I saw his lips for a moment tremble ever so slightly; then I saw him take up the pen and in a bold hand, with a brave flourish here and there, write: *"Major Churchill Townley, the Grove, Kentucky."*

As silently as I had come up to them, I withdrew. Somehow, I felt that only those two should for the moment enjoy the promise of the "side-purse" won that day.




*A wave of sound arose about me, and I knew the horses had turned into the stretch.*

# *Pirates of the Frozen Seas*

*The crew of the stanch little trading-schooner are forced to abandon their plans and attempt a secret retreat in an effort to save their lives.*

## By WALTO W. PUTTA

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

THE schooner *Iskum* sailed from Vancouver to open Siberian trade for the Phœnix Northern Trading Company. Captain Walto Putta, experienced in Arctic sailing, was in command. Among the crew were his friend and engineer, "Jumbo" Thomas; Ira Diem, secretary; John Felkel, trader; Jack Oliver, ex-Marine and cook; Alex Nicholson, mate; and Dave Tripple, fourteen-year-old nephew of one of the owners. Upon arriving at Indian Point, they discovered that all trade with the Eskimos was under the control of the Soviet Government. Burgh, the Red representative, would give them no permit, and forced them to plow through the icy waters one hundred and forty miles north to East Cape. He accompanied them, ostensibly as a passenger—but in reality they were his prisoners. In East Cape they were again refused, and sent on to Anadir. It was now early summer, when the ice-packs break and bergs and floes make sailing extremely perilous. But Captain Putta navigated the small schooner safely through these hazards and reached the small trading-town of Anadir. Here they found the Red control arrogant and domineering. They were not allowed to trade, and were told to wait until the Russian commercial expedition arrived before they would receive a permit.

The disheartened crew waited here in gloomy inactivity, virtually prisoners of the Reds, who helped themselves to supplies under the pretense of trading, forcing the *Iskum* commander to open an account which he was doubtful would ever be paid. Always they were under armed surveillance. Matters grew worse until the British trader *Baychimo,*—bringing the awaited Russian expedition—arrived in the harbor. Captain Putta, in desperation, sought the advice of Captain Carroll, British commander of the *Baychimo*. Although Putta was given friendly assurance of help in an emergency, he learned the truth of his dire situation. He was in grave danger of having his ship, with all its cargo of trade-goods, seized by the Soviet power. *(This true adventure continues in detail:)*

AS we of the *Iskum's* crew collected to return to our own ship, we loitered a bit on the after-deck of the *Baychimo* where a company of Russian musicians, two young men and four girls, sat with their instruments, the native balaleika, like a combination of mandolin and guitar, on their laps. They were playing and singing.

I leaned against the railing to listen and to observe the performers. A chance like this was one to be grasped and enjoyed to the utmost. The young women were all strikingly attractive, even beautiful, though dressed in incongruous garments of coarse gray woolen fabric that might easily have been homespun. The men wore khaki trousers, with Russian top-boots and fur-lined coats. All the group were as agreeable to the eye as their music was to the ear.

At the end of their song they paused before starting the next one, and I turned to see where the rest of my party were. Diem, Felkel, Oliver, and Jumbo were grouped on either side of me, all engrossed as I had been with the music and the ones who made it. Of the girls, two were pretty blondes, the other two brunettes. Blue, brown, and black eyes, all merrily dancing, were now looking in our direction, accompanied by coquettish smiles and tosses of the head. When in repose, however, the faces all revealed lines of sadness and care which the unbecoming drab clothes accentuated. I felt almost overcome by the charm of the lovely voices and the beauty of the singers. It seemed to me that these people, with their friendly smiles and playful gestures, were expressing toward us the true sentiments of the Russians as a nation, which were grossly misrepresented by the treatment the local authorities had accorded us.

We turned from the railing to be on our way, and discovered on guard behind us three imposing military figures with revolvers strapped to their belts. Soviet Russia was taking no chances with the stranger within her gates, whatever the heart of the people might be.

BY way of introduction I extended my hand to the officer of the squad, a fair-haired young man of athletic build and military erectness, and gave my name.

He responded to my gesture, giving his own name quietly: "Chigmaroff."

I shook hands with the other two, also, though they were not enthusiastic about making my acquaintance.

Chigmaroff, I learned, was the new military commandant of Northeast Siberia.

We could not leave without expressing our pleasure and gratitude to the musicians, and so we exchanged felicitations and bits of gay talk with them, the women in particular, in a hodge-podge of English and Russian. We did not accomplish much in the way of conversation, but our handclasps spoke for us with entire clearness. Say what you will, a woman's smile, and a few gay words even in a tongue he does not know, make a tremendous difference with any man, particularly with a sailor who has just had rough treatment from the elements, and in the bargain, as in our case, a bitter dose of flimflamming from swashbuckling officials.

In an extraordinary sense women make all the difference in the world in the life of the average sailor. The coquettish little smile of a girl among the Scandinavians, the Mediterraneans, or the Australians—the efforts at conversation where words may not be understood, although the subject-matter is as clear as the sky—the kiss in the shade of the giant oak, the old apple-tree, or the coconut

palm—the sweet melody of love running in the mind, learned from this, that, or the other fair maiden—it is these that induced the sailor of the old windjammer to roll up the sail just a little more neatly than was his wont, and his forearm to fall a bit harder on the gasket as he wrapped it around the sail and the yard, attaching the canvas so snugly that no typhoon, hurricane, *cordonaso, pampero,* or other kind of storm could tear it loose. Heartened by the thought of some sweet experience as he worked, he would come down from the rigging humming the universal tune of love. In short, woman in the roving life of a sailor represents the hitching-post at the star.

With the *Iskum's* crew in the inhospitable bay of Anadir on the coast of Siberia, I saw that this same old magic was doing its stuff. We took our leave of the attractive group on the deck of the *Baychimo,* and as Jumbo cranked up the one cylinder of our power dory, one of us in the boat started to whistle a tune the charming Russian schoolma'ams had just sung, and in a moment more we had all joined in.

Somehow I felt that the entire Russian nation had expressed its true feeling toward us through the medium of these musicians. My mood had been transformed by the contact. As for the chief of police who was making himself so obnoxious, I dismissed him in my thought as merely a mistaken small-town egotist. As soon as we were granted opportunity for an understanding talk with the representatives of the Central Government, all would be well with us of the *Iskum.*

At the rail of our ship I was confronted by Chief Mike, who had come aboard to deliver a message of state.

"Mr. Burgh wishes to see you at once," he said importantly.

My hopes rose. This must be for the delivery of our trade-permit.

"Then Mr. Diem had best go with me," I answered.

"No," returned Zebec, "it is only you he wants."

Again my mood changed. This was not so good. However, I went ashore with him, striving to retain a philosophic cheerfulness as to the reason for the summons. I entered the Government house, and while waiting for Burgh to speak to me looked around at the bullet-holes in the walls and on the doors, some with slivers torn off around them. It was impossible for me to resist the gloom that descended then on my spirits.

Burgh looked at me with the contemptuous, sneering expression I had seen before, while his eyes bored into mine like corkscrews.

"After this you will have to stay in here," he said.

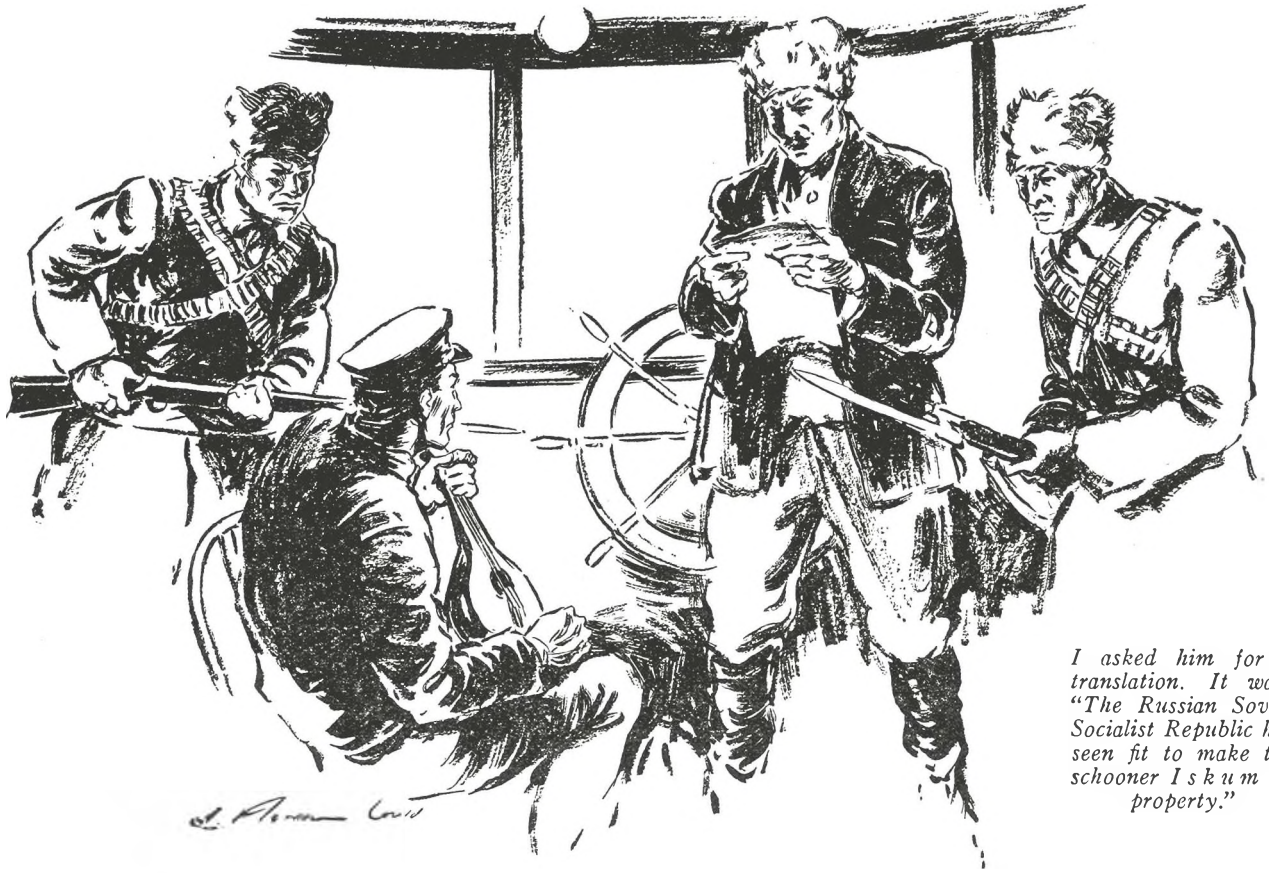
That was all. No explanation of any sort was forthcoming. He merely turned back to the sorting of some disarranged papers on his desk with the air of one too busy to spare more time on so trifling a matter. Collecting my wits, however, I asked a not unreasonable question:

"Stay here? What for?"

Burgh did not reply.

Chief Mike, waiting beside me, was about to show me to quarters behind a door whose lower portion was of solid wood, with the upper opening crossed by heavy bars. A most sinister-looking door it was, bringing to my mind Mr. Lampe's jesting remark that to be a prisoner here was like stepping on a fuse-cap while looking down the side of the Grand Cañon. I could not grasp the idea that I could be made a prisoner in this way for no reason whatever.

At that moment of bewilderment and suspense, the outer door opened, and in walked Dave Babakayoff, our supposed friend whose realistic story of the destruction of Butchkaroff's army had formed our introduction to Anadir before we even saw the town. I had merely glimpsed him during these recent days we had come and gone in the village, and he now gave no sign that he noticed me as he plunged into a rapid-fire conversation with Burgh in Russian. Whatever he said, he seemed to have the bet-



*I asked him for a translation. It was: "The Russian Soviet Socialist Republic has seen fit to make the schooner I s k u m its property."*

ter of the argument, for at the end Burgh turned to me and spoke in English.

"You are a damn' fool," he said, "for risking your life only to make profit for the *bourgeoisie,* and you are trying to trick me. Nothing can be put over on me by the *bourgeoisie* or by anybody that represents them."

"How about the trading-permit you promised me?" was all I said in return.

His answer was a chilly sneer and another deadly look.

MY position before Burgh's desk gave me a view out of the window behind him, with the *Iskum* directly in line. Suddenly I jumped, shouting out a curse. The *Iskum's* stern was swung toward the shore, her masts at a marked slant from their normal vertical position.

"The ship's on the beach!" I yelled. "She's aground!"

We all gathered around the window and watched. The *Iskum* was keeling over as the tide receded.

Rapidly I explained that the river had evidently gone down greatly as a result of the breaking of the ice-dam at the mouth of the bay, and that it was imperative for me to take immediate action if the ship was not to be beached permanently. My alarm was by no means assumed. With the grounding of the *Iskum* I saw the finish of her crew. However, the ship if beached would be of no use to the Reds either, and if they gave me a chance to get her off, our own chances grew a shade less hazardous.

Burgh finally ordered me to go on board and take her to a safe anchorage, if I could get her off the ground.

With Dave accompanying me as guard, I returned to the *Iskum.* Even in my anxiety I experienced a great thrill at being let out of that prison-house on shore. I would take no more chances alone, whatever happened, while if the worst came, I would risk running the ship out of the harbor in defiance of orders.

A fresh breeze was blowing, which was all in our favor. I set sail, in order to list the ship still farther, and by then manipulating the anchors, windlass, and engine to good advantage, was able to bring her off readily enough. The water in mid-channel was sixty feet deep. With my project for possible escape in view, I chose an anchorage in six fathoms of water at the very edge of the channel. From here we could drag the anchor into the deep current by giving the engine the merest start, and move away without any outward indication of our intention.

Mr. Diem, always hoping for the best, and expecting the same fair treatment from others which he consistently accorded them, had prepared a letter to the new governor of Anadir just landed from the *Baychimo,* explaining our plight and renewing our request for the trading-permit which would allow us to go about our business. Taking this with us, he and I went together to interview the new local authority at the Government house. Dave Babakayoff accompanied us, and the chief of police also, they to act as interpreters because they spoke English more fluently than Burgh or anyone else connected with their Government.

The new *natchalnik* proved to be a small dark man; in his build he reminded me of a shoemaker who used to come to my home to make shoes for all the family when I was a boy. He seemed anxious to impress us with the seriousness of our crime in coming to Siberia without proper clearance-papers from the Russian Consul. To anyone who knew the facts, this was of course a joke, but Burgh, who was present at the hearing, and Chief Mike both smiled and nodded approvingly.

The governor finally reached a decision. It would be necessary for us to wait for further orders from Vladivostok. He would send a message there at once.

When we went away from this audience, Mr. Diem was still undaunted. The new governor had not bamboozled us yet, he argued, and might be as good as his word. For his part, he meant to wait for the reply from Vladivostok.

I was less serene. On our way on board, we had a surprise. We met Mike Zebec, but he no longer swaggered and swished in the character of chief of police. He had been superseded by a Central-Government policeman. He seemed more than usually willing to talk, and from his conversation we gleaned that numerous disagreements had sprung up between the Central Government officials and those formerly in control of the village. For one thing, Mike himself was now a mere trader like the rest of us, divested of all his former authority.

"And," he said, with astonishing cordiality, "don't you worry about yourselves. You have plenty of friends in this burg. The people would rather take your thirty-five dollars for their Number One fox-skins than the seventeen-fifty the Government pays for them. The authorities won't seize your ship. The local people don't intend to let them. They think too much of you." He turned to me individually, as he added: "The natives think you are some kind of god. You know they can't swim, and that stunt you pulled in jumping into the river was no doubt the first time they ever saw a human being travel through the water on his own power—icy water, at that! They will never quit talking about it. You don't have to worry; we won't let them seize your ship. After the *Baychimo* leaves, you can have our furs, because you offer more for them."

This certainly was an earful. I now understood why the crowd had gathered on the beach to watch my wild antics among the icebergs. It was most amazing, to think that the acts to which my mental desperation had driven me, as a mere release for my pent-up anger, grief, and rebellion over the plight of Ivan Ivanov, and incidentally my own sense of frustration and futility, had reacted to establish me in the minds of these simple Siberian villagers as a being of supernatural power! Moreover, this feeling on their part had been proved more than a sentimental tribute. We knew now that definite plans for the seizure of the *Iskum* had been discussed by the Anadir Soviet, and, but for the negative vote of the majority favoring me and my "godlike" manifestation, the ship would have been taken from us out of hand. Truly, Providence moves in a mysterious way. Out of our very extremity had been wrought this opportunity which pointed a means of possible escape.

EVEN Mr. Diem was convinced now, admitting as we continued on our way back on board that he had lost all faith in Russian officials.

"What do you, as the Phœnix Northern's representative, propose that we do?" I asked him. "Do you advise that we make an effort to leave while we still have a fighting chance?"

"You are the captain of the vessel," he answered. "Whatever you decide, I will back up to the best of my ability."

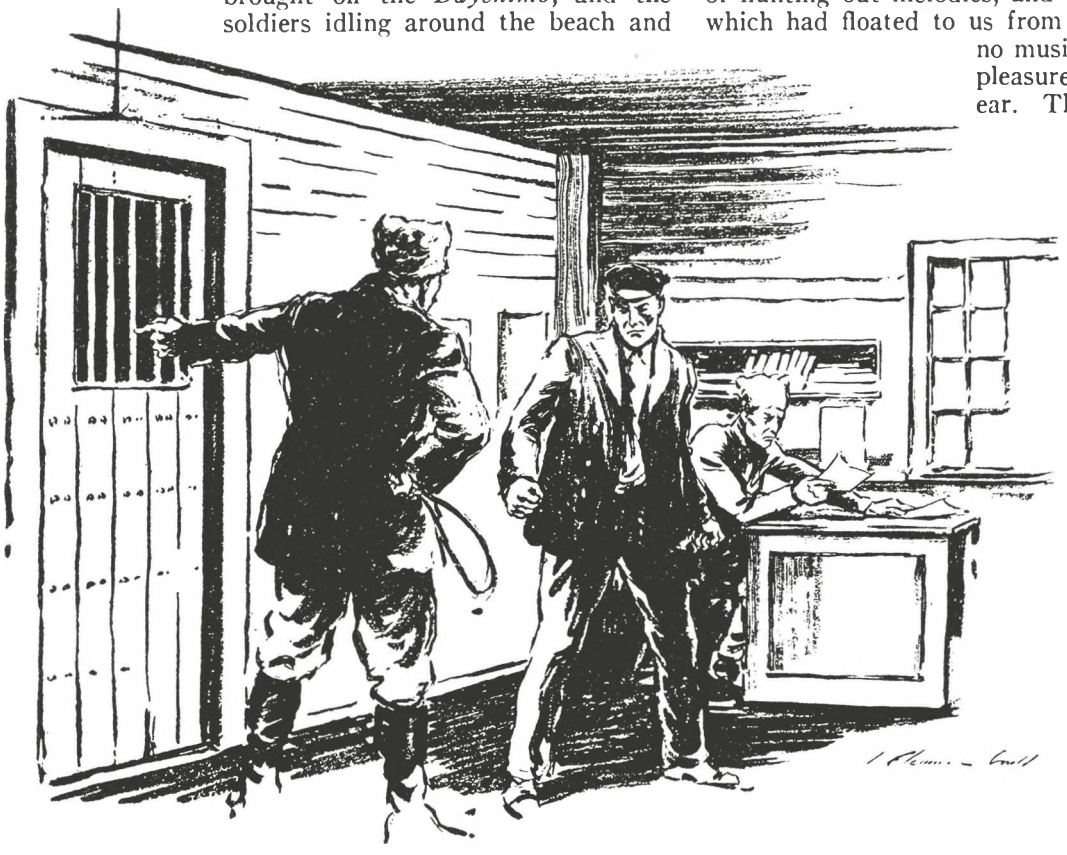
So our policy was determined. The method was yet to be worked out.

First, I made up my mind to remain on board the *Iskum* unless good reasons took me elsewhere. Second, the Stars and Stripes were to be kept flying above us day and night, our power dory also to carry the United States ensign whenever going ashore for any purpose. On United States property, with her colors at our masthead, the insignia of the greatest nation in the world, we would resist seizure unto death. These thoughts passed through the minds of all of us as we went about our routine affairs.

Next, we opened the hatches and armed ourselves from

our own stores. Since guns and ammunition formed a large part of the trading-goods on the Siberian coast, we were of course provided with our share. Mr. Diem, as the man in charge, gave me a .38 six-shooter in addition to the one I already had. I stuck both into a roll of charts above my table. Every other man of the crew was correspondingly equipped with some type of shooting-iron.

I was now seriously turning over the chances we would run in attempting to leave the harbor. I took observations through a porthole, noting on the beach the machine-guns brought off the *Baychimo,* and the soldiers idling around the beach and



*"Stay here? What for?" I asked. I could not grasp the idea that I could be made a prisoner for no reason whatever.*

the barracks. Back and forth went the *Baychimo's* lighters, laden with men, munitions, and goods of varied sorts, towed by the Anadir Government's Red launch, of which my friend Andrea was the engineer. The *Baychimo's* launch was carrying the Russian girls with their balaleikas around the bay, the music coming to us sweetly over the water as they passed near us. The girls waved their shawls in response to the simulated semaphore-signals of the *Iskum's* crew.

Back and forth my mental arguments ran. Suppose we stayed here, with the people holding their furs for us, as Mike Zebec had said, and orders came from Vladivostok at last, permitting us to trade. We would surely be due to make a killing. If I took it on myself to leave now, and such a situation should eventuate, I would not only bring the company nothing but liabilities in return for the present trip, but ruin all opportunity for business in the future. The entire matter was up to me. . . . Should I risk losing the boat and the crew in addition to the profits of the voyage by further delay in departure—or risk losing a big business chance by turning tail too soon? The burden of decision rested all on me, as in our earlier hazards with icefloes and currents.

I finally reasoned that if the Soviet sent out two or three men to take formal possession of the boat, it would be a sure sign to me that we could gain nothing by remaining in Anadir in the hope of favorable word from Vladivostok. It would also give me all reasonable warrant for leaving the place, provided I could take those men by surprise and disarm them, arranging to send them ashore at Russian Spit or some other outlying point in a skiff. Until some such move was made on their part, I would wait. There might, after all, be something in what big Mike had told us.

I picked up my mandolin, on which I made a practice of hunting out melodies, and began to pick out the tune which had floated to us from the passing launch. I am no musician, but it gives me much pleasure to play bits of melody by ear. This one was easy to follow, and my efforts with it served to take my mind for the time from the muddled problem with which the Russian officials had brought us face to face.

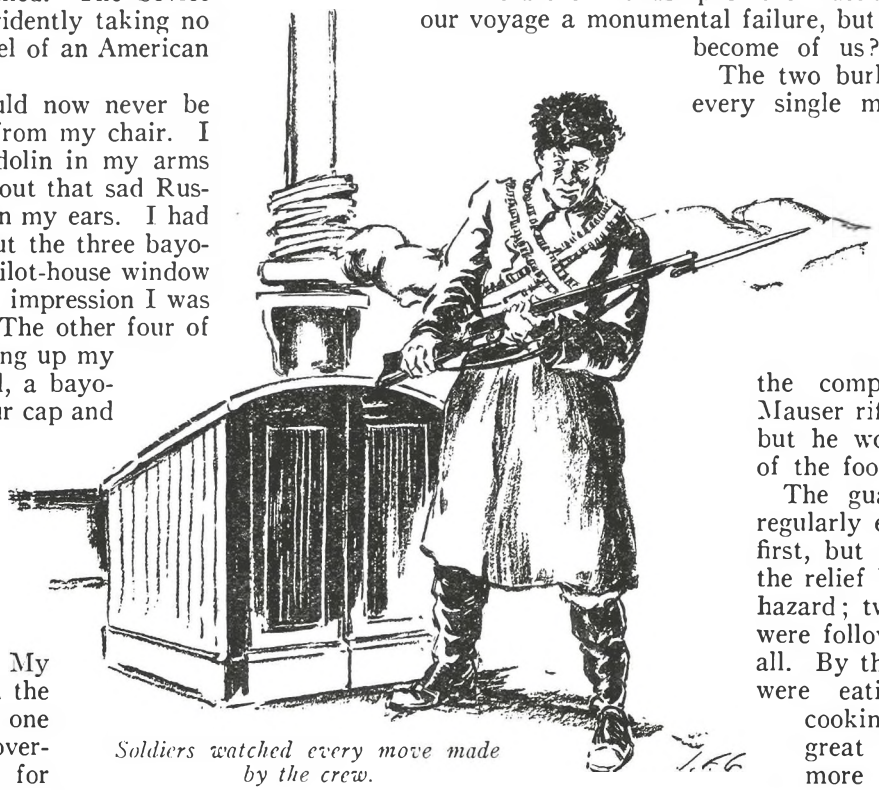
I rose, arranged my guns so that they would be within quicker reach, and proceeded to rehearse a scene of handing the ship's register to the seizure-officers. Giving time for them to turn to go, I grasped the guns and shouted, "Hands up!" The more I practiced this, pacing off my steps, manipulating the doors and then swinging for my weapons, the more feasible the plan seemed. I would disarm the pirates and have them under guard until ready for our final action. Jack Oliver would cover Andrea, in the Reds' launch, with a rifle, as he was the one man I would hate to harm, while our crew removed the guns from the launch, and one of us used a blacksmith's hammer to put the valve tappets of their engine out of business. We would then place our two prisoners in the launch again, and set them adrift as Jumbo started us at full speed ahead out toward the open sea and relative safety. The launch would soon enough be rescued by the *Baychimo's* boat, though probably not until we were well beyond the range of the machine-gun fire from the beach.

It seemed a remarkably simple, workable plan, except for two points. Would my own crew back me up? And how far would those machine-guns carry? Shooting at the water-line, how good a chance would their bullets have of penetrating our iron-bark sheeting if we were within range? We now had a heavy plate over the engine-clutch, which we could probably use in the manner of a shield against the bullets for the man at the wheel.

Having thought things through to this point, I decided to look up Jumbo for a conference on all details. Seated in my chair, however, for a final review of the situation in my mind, I was gazing out of the pilot-house door, when, to my utter dismay, I saw that the Reds had been quicker than I. Their launch had just drawn alongside the *Iskum.* In another instant the blond military commandant Chigmaroff, with two guns at his belt, two other officers

similarly equipped, and seven soldiers with bayonets fixed stepped over the railing, accompanied by the deposed chief of police, who was unarmed. The Soviet Socialist Republic was evidently taking no chances with the personnel of an American trading-schooner.

My strategic plan would now never be tested. I did not move from my chair. I merely cuddled my mandolin in my arms and began again to pick out that sad Russian melody which rang in my ears. I had it pretty well by then, but the three bayonets visible through the pilot-house window gave me no clue as to the impression I was making on my visitors. The other four of the bayonets were rounding up my crew. This accomplished, a bayonet, followed by a gray fur cap and something like six feet four of impassive gray-coated Bolshevik soldier, entered at each door of the pilot-house. The bayonets halted within a few inches of my waistline.



*Soldiers watched every move made by the crew.*

I remained seated. My first impulse was to crash the mandolin on the point of one of the bayonets, but I overcame this quaint notion for fear my guests would not see the joke. Backing up the soldiers appeared the commandant, stiff-necked as always, and the ex-chief Mike Zebec, who had told me how much the villagers of Anadir revered me. The other two officers and five soldiers were no doubt fully occupied with holding my wild crew in bounds.

The dog-whip swisher began reading in Russian from a document he held in his hand. When he had finished, I asked him for a translation. This was about as follows:

"The Russian Soviet Socialist Republic has seen fit to make the auxiliary-powered schooner *Iskum* its property. No goods are to be removed from the vessel. All firearms and ammunition are to be given up, and the Government will, for the time being, maintain a guard on board. No charges of any kind are preferred against the vessel or any of its personnel."

I gave up my two guns without a protest, for I knew Mr. Burgh had paid particular attention to the supply of weapons we carried, as that is customary in any port. It was no use trying to hold out. I quoted the correct number when asked for it. Even Jumbo's dearly prized shotgun was seized, too, which nearly broke his heart.

The munitions in our personal possession were removed, and the cargo hatch, holding the rest, was sealed, after which Mike, as interpreter, told me we were as free as birds to go and come as we liked on shore. Two husky young communists, one a lieutenant, the other a private, were left to guard us on the ship.

When all but these had departed and I again stepped out of the pilot-house, I received another shock. In place of our Stars and Stripes ensign on the masthead, a square of bright red bunting was flying.

## CHAPTER X

IT had happened—our beloved *Iskum* had been seized by the Bolsheviki! We could not believe it. And yet, we had been warned before leaving Tacoma that we were taking chances on this very thing. We had failed, miserably failed, in what we had felt was well within our power—to hold the friendship of the Russians. Not only was our voyage a monumental failure, but what was going to become of us?

The two burly soldiers watched every single move made by the crew. In order to get stores from forward, we had to have them escort whoever it was that went on the errand. At meal-times one of the guards sat at the companionway with a Mauser rifle across his knees, but he would not share any of the food with us.

The guards were changed regularly every four hours at first, but by the second day the relief began to grow haphazard; two eight-hour shifts were followed by no relief at all. By this time the soldiers were eating Jack Oliver's cooking, with no fear, but great relish, which was more fun for them than for Jack. I caught him turning the medicine-locker inside out and asked him what he wanted.

"Just a little bit of arsenic," he answered as casually as if that were one of our usual flavorings. I had to smile.

Jack's meals, and the cheerful, sociable attitude of the crew in general toward the soldiers, soon made them feel very much at home, allaying such suspicions as they may have had as to our intention of running away. The big lieutenant was one who stayed with us, the other a soldier named Dimitri, not so powerful physically, but able to give a good account of himself, no doubt, in hand-to-hand combat. All these soldiers were inland men, they told us, unused to the sea. Many of them were from Tomsk, in central Siberia.

The Red launch kept plying between the shore and the *Baychimo*—with her British flag bravely flying—towing lighters which went out empty and came back laden with all sorts of merchandise, while the *Iskum,* first in port, had to lie idle in the roadstead with a red flag on her mainmast. It was enough to take the heart out of any sailor. Then another boat appeared one day, not from the outside, but down the Anadir River. It was the stern-wheel river-steamer which the members of Miss Kelly's party had built at their sawmill up the stream, and on which they had all come down in response to summons from the Anadir authorities. I met Miss Kelly ashore and talked a little with her. She was a big, red-haired, competent, Irish-looking woman, dressed in trousers like a man—rough in manner, and carrying a gun, but educated and intelligent above the average. When I told her the Reds had seized the *Iskum,* and were more than likely to do the same with her boat, she answered determinedly:

"Not unless it's over my dead body!"

The talk was, however, that the Soviet meant to confiscate the sawmill, as they had the fish-cannery of the other pioneer.

These stupid checks placed on trade enterprise, as destructive as they were short-visioned, made me think more

and more about Ivan Ivanov, whom I had not seen since the one time when we talked heart to heart about the problems of Russia. I had dared to ask few questions, but my suspicions had been roused one day when Mike, then still chief of police, had come aboard the *Iskum* in a state of excitement he could not conceal, although there was no apparent cause for it. His face was flushed, and he talked faster and more loudly than usual. I got the feeling that the last of the White prisoners in Anadir had just been done away with. As I never heard a word about Ivanov again, I am confirmed in that belief.

THE *Baychimo* had been in port a week when one of its laden lighters went adrift one day, due to a breakdown of the launch which was towing it in. The current carried it over alongside the *Iskum*, and I threw a line to the man in charge of her, so that he could moor to us and wait for the launch to be repaired. To my delight the lighter-man proved to be none other than my old friend of the handlebar moustache and the ocean-roll walk.

Our guards were eating down in the galley at the time, leaving those of us who were on deck undisturbed. I handed my friend a package of cigarettes across the railing, and we had a confidential talk. I was hungry for information, and he was bulging with it, only too eager to find a place to deposit a generous supply.

I learned that our cargo on the *Iskum* would have been discharged long before this, and the boat loaded with troops to be taken to the Kolyma River, twelve hundred miles up the Arctic coast, to subdue a group of traders belonging to the old régime who were sitting on a rich store of furs there—except that the local authorities wanted to discharge the *Baychimo* first and let her go about her business. Also a partial strike was on among the longshoremen, and it was about to become general. The laborers at Anadir had decided they would no longer work for nothing. They were striking for four dollars a day. What was more, those who had furs to sell were not going to give their Number One skins for seventeen dollars and a half when the *Iskum* stood ready to pay thirty-five. How did these Central Government people get that way anyhow, they were asking.

"Bringing a lot of lazy soldiers here," said my friend disgustedly, "making us do all the work without any pay, and then taking our furs away for nothing! That kind of stuff is not going to go with us."

So internal troubles were brewing for the Soviet! Evidently not all the people can be fooled all the time even in Russia, whether by Czarist or proletariat dictators.

The salmon were now running. I noticed women fishing for them from the shore with a contrivance such as I had never seen before. From a boom projected over the river-bank by means of blocks and ropes a gill-net was suspended in such a way that the salmon, swimming along the shore upstream in shallow water, would become entangled in it. The women then had merely to pull the boom in from time to time and pick the fish out of the net. But I thought to myself it was rather a peculiar thing for the men of the village to be doing none of the outdoor work—the women did it all.

As I watched the process from my place on the *Iskum's* deck during this conversation with old "Handlebar," a platoon of soldiers walked out along the bank and stopped to speak to each of the fisherwomen. The latter at once suspended operations with the net and proceeded to the barracks.

"What's the idea?" I asked my friend.

"They are just ordering the women to clean out the barracks," he answered. "They do get dirty in time. The women always clean them."

A wonderful army, I thought—fifty men lying idle, yet compelling women engaged in the highly necessary labor of procuring food for all in the village to stop and clean out their living-quarters!

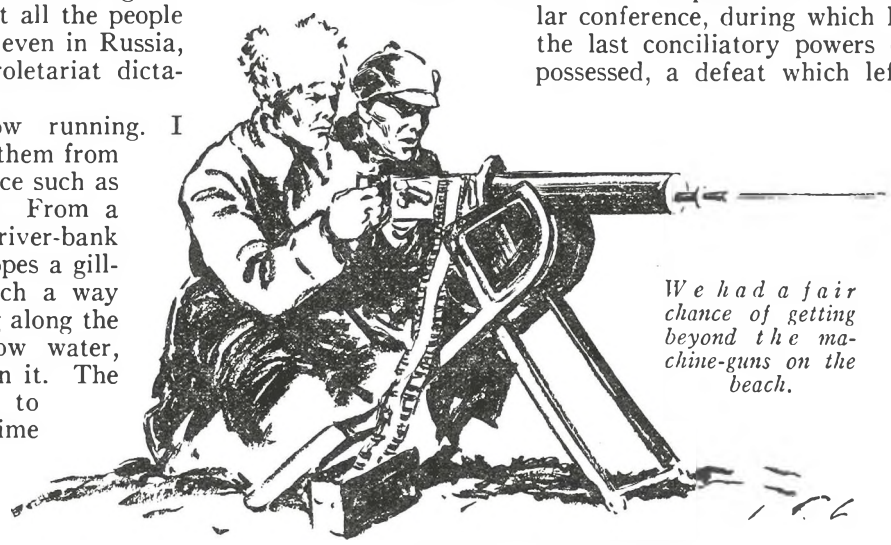
Handlebar apparently read my thought as to the lack of interest manifested by the villagers as a whole in the short and precious salmon-run.

"I guess nobody will do very much fishing this season," he volunteered, "because that fellow's fish were taken away from him last winter. We don't know just how we stand with regard to permits and such things. And," he added, "it's going to be a tough winter if these fellows don't get matters straightened out before the summer is over. There is nothing here for the people to eat, let alone the dogs."

The Red launch, ready for service again, came up at this point and towed the lighter away, but it could not take with it the material for thought it had brought me. My reflections, somber in aspect, ran somewhat like this: If they strand us here for the winter, we will be due to starve to death along with the rest of them. Even if we could stand the quality of such grub as they did provide us, I would reach a point of complete exasperation and rebellion on account of the injustices heaped on the villagers in general—a full share of which injustice Burgh would see that I also encountered. The safety of our lives was greatly in doubt, along with that of the other Americans unable to get away. We, with our own ship, had a fighting chance for escape with our lives and the cargo still stored in the hold. If we got clear, we could have Colonel Ashton appeal to Washington to send a coast-guard cutter after Lampe and all the other traders entitled to American protection.

My mind was finally made up. We must make a get-away!

I told Diem of my decision. He was fully agreed, although he felt we should make one last appeal to the Soviet officials—this despite Mr. Felkel's failure in a similar conference, during which he had exhausted the last conciliatory powers of which he was possessed, a defeat which left him extremely down-hearted.



*We had a fair chance of getting beyond the machine-guns on the beach.*

Accordingly, Diem and I went ashore the next morning and offered a final frantic appeal for justice, reminding the Soviet leaders of the fact that some people in the United States favored recognition of Russia under the existing government; others emphatically did not—but that the Phœnix Northern Trading Company belonged to the former group. We also told them that Colonel Ashton, broad-minded on all

public matters, and particularly well-disposed now toward the Soviets, was a man of considerable influence in Washington. We tried to impress them with the fact that good treatment accorded to our little group, of which Ashton was the managing owner, would be sure to have a salutary effect on future diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"Not only that," we said, "but the way you treat a weak, defenseless trader on your shores, who has brought better goods than anyone else, and who also offers higher prices for your furs, will have a far-reaching influence on the American people at large. If you treat us well, as you have every reason to do, you will encourage all American citizens to favor trade-relations with Russia, even though the heads of the Government postpone the matter of diplomatic relations.

"We are relying on you to protect us," I went on personally to say. "I was told by the Customhouse people that we were taking a risk in coming here, but I trusted in the great Russian Soviet Socialist Republic either to allow us to trade as we had been accustomed, or to leave the country peaceably."

All our pleas, however, fell on deaf ears, at least as far as Burgh was concerned. We knew we were beaten.

On our way back to the boat, Mr. Diem said:

"It is up to the captain of the *Iskum* to take such action as will prevent us from being stranded here in Siberia and probably losing our lives. Property values are no longer to be considered."

So at lunch-time, when the crew were all together, with the guards out of hearing, I announced that we had decided to make a run for life, the only course remaining open to us. I told them frankly that every one of us might have to fight, and that we might be wounded, or even killed, in the struggle, but that come what might, I was going to pursue the plan mapped out in my mind, for I was convinced it held our only chance for freedom. I pictured the long dreary winter ahead, which everyone except Jumbo and myself would have to spend in the short-rationed village, and of the misery in store for the other two of us, forced to run our boat as a transport for the Bolshevik troops to the Kolyma River, where we would probably be stranded and eventually killed. I painted a gloomy scene, for I had clearly in mind the various bloody tales told me during these recent weeks of what had happened to others who questioned the Soviet power or its local administration.

Jack Oliver was the only one who spoke up when I had finished. He was in some doubt as to the advisability of risking our lives in a fight. He thought it might be better to take a chance where we were than to bring matters to an issue in which any of us might be killed.

"I'm determined, Jack," I said, "either to get away from this hole or to die fighting. That's my last word."

"All right," he returned promptly. "If you believe it's that serious, I'll fight beside you—and die if necessary."

THE rest, from the mate to young Dave Tripple, agreed without a single protest, only asking how we were to go about it. In their minds stood the gigantic problem composed of the various obstacles of the Government's launch, the machine-guns on the beach, the hundred or more soldiers equipped with high-powered rifles within a quarter of a mile on shore or still aboard the *Baychimo* with their officers, the guards on the *Iskum,* with all of us unarmed, the *Baychimo* herself able to pursue us, and the Red flag already at our masthead.

"We can dismiss one of these dangers," I told them, "—the *Baychimo*. She will not follow us. Captain Carroll said he would not, and I trust him absolutely."

Everyone was at once busy figuring out a plan of his own, but each of these held an element of danger. Still, we found a number of circumstances in our favor. The launches and lighters were not running now, for one thing, the longshoremen being out on strike, as Handlebar had said they would be. Again, our guards had not been relieved during the previous twenty-four hours, with the result that they were taking turn-about at sleeping. This would make it comparatively easy to overpower them. Another advantage was that we had many friends in the town, including Andrea, the engineer of the Red launch, with the superstitious natives opposed to any violence to me, as big Mike had told, on account of my power over ice-water. The Reds had taken possession of our power dory, although for some reason only Jumbo could have explained the engine in it would not work for them, something having gone wrong with the mechanism. This left us with another dory, which could be rowed, and we had taken the precaution to haul it up on deck. By the time we had finally worked out the details of our chosen plan, we were all feeling cheerful and ready to go.

## CHAPTER XI

WE decided to begin action at midnight. The light would then be a bit dusky for half an hour or so, making movements on the boat less noticeable from the shore. The sighting of the machine-guns and rifles would also be more difficult. Under these conditions we would jump our guards, disarm and gag them, after which two of our number would put on their uniforms and stay in view. Others would bring the heavy plate from the engine-room which was to be used as a shield for me as I took the wheel. We would start the engine, heave the chain short, and go. We felt sure the Red launch would follow us, but we could use the guards' two rifles to keep it back, and get others from the hold. We had a fair chance of getting beyond range of the machine-guns and the rifles before the shore-guards noticed we were on our way.

Everything seemed likely to turn out as we had calculated, and we agreed to go to bed and to sleep as usual, to be refreshed when the hour came to act.

I tossed around a good deal in my bunk, however. Too much depended on me alone to permit of relaxation enough for sleep. Sitting up one time, I casually glanced out of the porthole. At once I saw that a strong easterly wind had sprung up quite suddenly, whipping up a nasty chop against the river current. The flagpole on the Government house and the wireless tower on the hill, which I used in taking my observations, were no longer in range. The *Iskum,* already at the edge of the deep mid-channel of the river, had begun drifting with the current, though the strong wind against her was retarding her movement so that it was scarcely perceptible.

An idea flashed across my brain. Instead of taking the action my training instantly indicated,—moving the ship back to anchorage and giving her more chain,—I pulled the blanket over my head and pretended sound sleep. Occasionally I would peek out through the port again, and each time noted with delight that the *Iskum* was making steady progress away from the village.

I was fully aware of our interpreter when he came to my bunk. I had been expecting a call. Allen had to speak to me four times, however, before I stirred. I looked out from my blanket and saw the burly lieutenant with him.

"We are drifting," Allen said.

I glanced from the porthole, and then settled back in my bunk. "You must be crazy, or something," I answered. "The ship's all right."

Five minutes later a violent jar shook me. The lieutenant's huge hand was on my shoulder. A stream of incomprehensible speech came tumbling from his thick red lips, which I interpreted as a demand for immediate action on my part.

This was when I determined to beat the R. S. S. R. at their own game, by using the same tactics they had employed in luring us to Anadir. Here aboard the *Iskum* I was *natchalnik*, military commandant, and chief of police, all in one! What did these young Bolshevik soldiers, born and reared in the heart of Siberia, know about boat-directions, anchors, or anything else nautical? If I could not fool them, I would not be very proud of myself.

At once I was all seriousness over our situation. I got out my sextant, azimuth circle, pencil and paper, logbook, and compass-error book. Taking the compass-error, I marked it down, after which I took cross-bearings of the Government-house flagpole and Mount Dionysius, plotting the position on the chart. Both guards, now on the alert, watched every move with the interest of the uninitiated, while the ship in the meantime drifted farther and farther.

At last I called Allen and gave him a report to relay to the lieutenant. We were in a very dangerous position; the wind was against the current, making it impossible to steer back to our former anchorage. Even if we could get back, we would only be driven on the beach and pounded to pieces. It was equally impossible to put the dory out into this rough sea and attempt to return in that, as we would then probably all be drowned. I suggested that we go toward Cape Nerpichi, four miles north from the village, on the upper side of the bay.

To these suggestions, as translated by Allen, the lieutenant readily agreed.

I felt that in case our movements had been observed from shore, and the launch came out and overtook us before we had overpowered our guards, I could explain the shifting of our position as a desire to get into safer anchorage. Accordingly, Jumbo started the engine and Alex Nicholson hove up the anchor. The wind had now attained the force of a moderate gale. We reached our objective point, but I told Alex to let the anchor barely hit the bottom so that we would drag again. Soon the *Iskum* had drifted into the deeper water, and began to pitch violently in the short choppy sea.

I shook my head in deep concern.

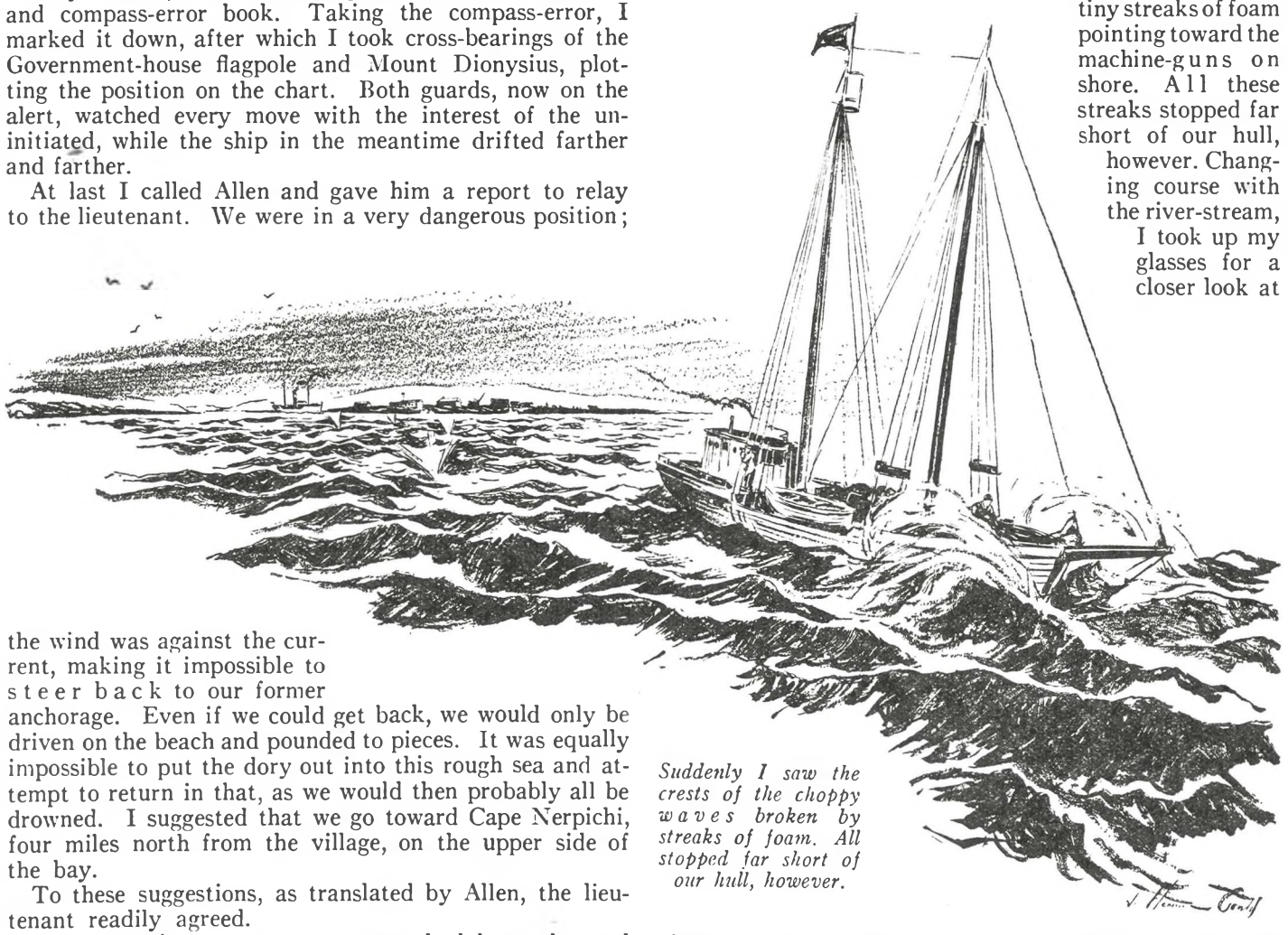
"Tell the lieutenant," I instructed Allen, "that we can't hold anchor even here—we shall have to go outside the harbor to weather out the storm."

The lieutenant objected definitely to this.

In order to get outside, we would have to pass within a mile of the village anyway. I intended to go on whether permitted or not, but I could risk this only by means of a ruse. I steered for the village, as the lieutenant could see, but turned the engine slowly and stopped at intervals, which allowed the river-current to carry us down sideways past the town. Our steady heading toward Anadir allayed the suspicions of both guards, giving them the impression that I was making an effort to reach the place, while all the time the current was carrying us steadily on toward open waters and freedom.

This gave me time for scheming. Once at a safe distance from the village, we would spring on the guards, but for the present must await developments.

Constantly scanning the lagoon-entrance for signs of the Red launch, I suddenly saw the crests of the choppy waves broken by tiny streaks of foam pointing toward the machine-guns on shore. All these streaks stopped far short of our hull, however. Changing course with the river-stream, I took up my glasses for a closer look at these streaks. The wind was howling over us toward the village, so no sounds whatever from that direction came our way, but it was clear both that our escape had been noted on the beach and that we were safely beyond machine-gun fire. But a dense volume of smoke began to rise from the midst of a crowd which had gathered on the spit in front of town. In a second a red flame showed. I moved my glass on the *Baychimo*, and my heart turned over. Her anchors were up. She was coming. The Reds had forced Captain Carroll to start after us!



*Suddenly I saw the crests of the choppy waves broken by streaks of foam. All stopped far short of our hull, however.*

I swung the *Iskum* around. The story I had concocted for this emergency was convincing enough to explain our antics, taking all the weather conditions into consideration. But my brain was whirling with questions. Why had Captain Carroll gone back on his word? The possibility of his following us was the one danger I had told my crew we need not fear. What pressure could have been brought to bear on that upstanding, independent

British commander to send him in pursuit of an innocent American fellow-captain who was only trying to save his men and his ship from shore-pirates?

That was the darkest moment of my experience. On our way to escape, with the worst of our calculated obstacles almost miraculously overcome, here we were, dragged back like schoolboys due for a thrashing! Again I put my glass on the *Baychimo*. Suddenly she swerved to starboard toward the spit. An instant later she came to a complete stop.

"She's aground!"

I FAIRLY yelled inwardly as this realization flashed over me, and it was all I could do to hold my voice back from wild shouts. But the guards were watching too. I must play my part. Letting the *Iskum* swing around again to a course taking the direction of the current, I began to explain through Allen our absolute need for going outside to weather the storm.

As I had felt sure, the guards had no realization of what had happened to the *Baychimo,* or of our real intention in again changing course away from the shore. The feeling that they were very much at sea about most things was strengthened in me by the fact that they had not even had sense enough to ask the use of my glasses, which they saw me using constantly; also by their clumsy absent-minded movements generally. But they were strong for our staying within the bay. I was on the point of demanding whether they wanted me to wreck the ship, and then getting the crew to close in and rush them, but they had grown suspicious of my every move and held well in the clear.

I was debating just how best to handle these two sullen, powerful fellows, when for the third time the elements themselves came to our rescue. A thick wall of fog appeared, moving toward us from the direction of Mount Sokoloff. It was as if Destiny were, indeed, working with us and for us. First, the lowering of the river-current had beached the *Iskum* just at the critical moment, bringing about my release from imprisonment by Burgh. Second, the high wind had drifted the boat away from the village without the slightest move on our part, giving us an inestimable advantage. And now, a veil of mist was about to hang like a curtain between us and our enemies—a cloud by day to give us protection as we fled.

Before we were enveloped by the fog, I took bearings by which I ascertained positively that the *Baychimo* was aground. And yet, the ship had just as definitely been in pursuit of us a few minutes before, under command of a man who knew these waters as few navigators do. What had happened? I constructed in my mind the scene on board the *Baychimo* when it became known the *Iskum* was headed for open water. The officials of the Russian commercial expedition on board were in touch with all the Anadir officials had been doing in relation to the *Iskum,* and both had exhausted their meager store of patience in trying to bring me to reason. They had made me what they considered a very generous offer of a master's berth on a Soviet vessel which was once the property of my former employers, and as I had turned it down, they classified me as a tool of the *bourgeoisie,* due to be condemned to death at the first favorable opportunity. I knew this had been whispered in every corner of the village—knew too from Mike Zebec's information that only the good will of the villagers themselves toward me had prevented action before this. Now I had been discovered trying to run away with the ship the Red Government considered its own property! This was quite enough to warrant my execution. I was a criminal of the first rank in the eyes of the Red officials.

This was why the officers aboard the *Baychimo* had been able to move Captain Carroll. He occupied the position of a diplomat as well as a sea-captain, representing a great Government which had a trade-agreement with the Soviet Republic. He must do nothing which could be construed as a violation of that agreement. And yet, what other international entanglements would follow, if he, commanding a British vessel, took hostile action against an American vessel in the interest of the outlawed Russians?

Confronting a dilemma with two such sharp horns, Captain Carroll, as I figured the matter out in my own mind, knowing his duty, performed it with timely tact and true seamanship. He hove up anchor and made a start at the behest of the Red officials, but rather than break his personal promise to me, and become a pirate in the bargain, he had deliberately beached his ship.

This action, with all the courage and the diplomatic significance it implied, occupied my mind. Along with my own gratitude I was much concerned for his personal safety, the reassurance of his ringing words, "I am a Britisher, and master of my ship," not altogether allaying my anxiety. Still, I could do nothing now but benefit by the opportunity he had given me. I knew that he, together with a dozen or more other white men, and all the natives, at Anadir wanted me to keep on going. I also believed that by making our escape now, I could have a United States coastguard vessel in the bay within a week, to rescue Lampe,—whom I would gladly have brought away with me if possible,—Miss Kelly and her party, and others who might be in danger of their lives.

The fog had soon enveloped us completely, and while I rejoiced over the protection it gave us from the rear, I could not deny that it complicated matters as to our course ahead. It called for no acting on my part now to convince the watchful guards that we were in a bad muddle. Raid Reef lay somewhere between the *Iskum* and the safety of the outer bay, with a treacherous current to navigate in a heavy fog in order to get around it. To go aground on the reef meant that our enemies would certainly catch us. And then, what wouldn't they do? But the mere change from one worry to another is something. I was grateful for the gain already made.

"Full speed ahead!" I shouted to Jumbo, through the speaking-tube, at the same time telling Alex to fish up the anchor.

Diem was at the wheel now. I gave him a temporary course, while I noted down the position as nearly as I had it, and then laid the courses outward on the chart, using my judgment for calculations as to the current. The gale was still blowing against us, while the current carried us along.

"Just luck if I get out," I reflected, but I determined to stick to my course. Alex had begun heaving the lead in his customary "no doubt about it" style, which alone gave me fresh heart. To have men like Alex Nicholson along in a pinch such as that brings one a feeling too grand and glorious for words.

AFTER five hours of pounding at it, we had, according to my calculations, passed Cape Salomatov, the western arm of St. Nicholas bay, along the north coast of the mainland. Directly south from the middle of the bay lay Raid Reef, solid rock hidden from view in high water.

"Two fathoms!" shouted Alex suddenly.

The *Iskum* drew a foot less than this. Bang! The choppy waves had dropped her weight on her keel against the frozen bottom, but whether Raid Reef on the starboard hand or the main shore to port, I could not tell. The masts shivered. The rigging wabbled.

"Hard to port!" I shouted, steering for what I hoped was mid-channel, and something white suddenly loomed in view on the port side—the main shore.

"Luck!" I thought to myself, as, after a five-minute run at right angles to the old course, I put her back on to it. Soon, however, we were in the midst of ice, and in order to skirt around the edge of this, we moved dangerously near to the shoals lying on the south side.

But the next morning brought a clearing of the fog, and we found ourselves in Anadir Gulf, with Geka Point, beyond which lay the open sea, in sight to the southwest. This was the twenty-fourth of July, almost an even month from the time we had entered the gulf.

The lieutenant had kept asking me through Allen when I thought that we would reach Anadir again, and I had repeatedly explained that no one could make sure of anything in a fog, as both the wind and the current also interfered with navigation. The main object, I reiterated, was to keep in the clear, so that we should be able to get back when the fog lifted. I counted that the three weeks the guards had spent outside Anadir Bay on the *Baychimo,* expecting daily to get in, would have sufficiently accustomed them to the uncertainties of ship-travel in those waters to make my stalling more plausible. Allen told me, however, that each of the guards had put a cartridge in the firing-chamber of his rifle, formerly left empty for safety's sake, which indicated that they were primed for action. We did not know certainly whether they carried revolvers under their coats, but I suspected that the lieutenant at least carried one.

In our plans for escape we had listed the overcoming of the guards as the smallest of our difficulties. Now, this was the only obstacle we had not conquered. The weather at last being clear, they would soon be demanding that Anadir show up ahead. They knew it would take a whole day from this point to bring the village within view under favorable conditions, which gave us a little more time, but they had no sense of direction in relation to our course. The fact remained that they were very much on the alert, and had two loaded rifles, while we, though numbering seven against two, were unarmed. The situation still carried very real danger.

BUT little Allen, with his lifelong experience with whale-hunts and long fishing-trips through dark Arctic nights, snowstorms, and every imaginable kind of weather, was fully aware of the direction we were taking. We had not trusted him with any of our secret plans, for our problem was not altogether his problem, but he seemed to sense our intention of escape, and was making himself helpful in every way he could. As interpreter for the guards he could stay with them almost continuously without arousing their suspicion. I had quartered them in the storeroom under the forecastle head, while the crew all lived aft. Allen brought me regular information as to their movements and conversation. Dimitri was suffering somewhat with seasickness in these heavy waters, and both were tired. While one slept, the other would sit watching the companionway.

"They pester me with questions," he told me. "They are very anxious to get back to Anadir. They ask me every few minutes how much longer it will be."

I smiled at him.

"As soon as we find our way, we may get there," I told him. He winked his eye at me wisely and went off for another conference with our local Soviet headquarters.

Yes, before we had started on this runaway escapade of ours, we were of one mind in thinking the conquest of the guards on board a mere detail, although one offering enough pleasure for everyone to want a hand in it. Their present system of espionage, however, was putting quite a different face on the situation. Whenever one of the Russians came up from under the forecastle now, he left his rifle with the one below, their object, apparently, being to keep our store of munitions constantly protected by two rifles. Even if the one on deck should, for some not-so-mysterious reason, fail to show up again for his shift, his companion would feel safe enough with two guns at hand. The seven of us, unarmed as we were, would be easy meat for one man with two loaded guns. This made of our airily considered detail a major feature with which we had not yet found a way to cope.

WE left young Dave Tripple—very much a man these days, despite his fourteen years—at the wheel when the rest of us met at five o'clock in the morning in the galley to work out a new plan. Mr. Felkel's suggestion that we amiably ask the guards to give up their arms, brought a roar of objections from every other man present. I turned the matter over in my mind, however, and put a question to Allen, up on deck, whom I engaged in conversation for this purpose.

"Do you think the boys from Tomsk might like to go to America instead of back to Anadir?"

Allen's eyes fairly popped out.

"Don't tell them that!" he begged. "They will make you stand at the wheel with a rifle pointed at you till you bring them to Anadir!"

I trusted him fully now. He was on our side. I went back to instruct Mr. Felkel by no means to ask the guards for their guns.

A lot more discussion followed. Jumbo suggested that the next time one of the Russians came up to ask me about their precious Anadir, I take him into the pilot-house for the ostensible purpose of showing him our position on the chart. He, Jumbo, in the meantime, accompanied by one of the other boys, would go forward to the storeroom under pretense of getting a case of milk, which would be heavy enough to justify two of them in coming down after it. Turning over various articles in the room, they would work close to the guard with his two guns and jump him before he could level either one. After that they would give us a signal up above, when Alex and I would handcuff the guard in my room.

I agreed to this program if some one would volunteer to accompany Jumbo on his dangerous job. Jack Oliver readily offered. This left Diem, Felkel and young Dave to stand by and lend whatever assistance proved necessary. Our one point of uncertainty was whether either guard kept a revolver under his coat.

Neither one of them came up for a long while. They were pretty well worn out with their unrelieved labor, and Dimitri had been pretty miserable. Allen went down for a reconnaissance. He reported both very tired, but only one asleep.

We too were tired from our twenty-four-hours' run, with very little sleep just before starting. I advised Diem, Felkel, and Dave Tripple all to go take a nap. Dave was the only one who objected, but he put up a stiff argument to be allowed on deck. He wanted to be awake when the guards were taken. This would be the highlight of the voyage for him, and he didn't propose to be done out of it. I rather wondered at the time at his peculiar insistence, and although I did not fully understand it until later, I finally promised him I would call him before we started the fireworks.

**This authentic account of an attempt at friendly trading with the Soviet Republic and its disappointing outcome, due to the treachery of the Russians, ends in our forthcoming March issue.**

# *The Day of Disaster*

*When Gangland gets its own medicine—a great story that has more action than a machine-gun has bullets.*

## By SEVEN ANDERTON

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

"HULLO, Frank!" said a harsh voice. Frank Gordon, sitting at his desk in the small front office of his garage, looked up at the speaker. The caller was one of the last men in the world whom Gordon would have wished to see.

"Nice layout you have here," remarked the visitor. He was a swarthy, heavy-set man with a pockmarked face. His black hair was slicked down to his bullet-like head and his garments were flashy. He was Filippo Torrigiano, lieutenant of Buck Loring, one of the overlords of the city's underworld.

"What do you want, Torrigiano?" asked Gordon, ignoring the remark of his caller. He knew it had not been prompted by friendly interest.

"I'm just doing a little looking around," answered the pockmarked rogue with an oily grin. "Saw your place and thought I'd drop in and say hello."

"I wish I could believe that," growled the young garage-owner, "but I'm too well onto you fellows. Come clean. Let's get it over with."

Torrigiano seated himself on the corner of the desk. He continued to grin at Gordon while lighting a short thick cigar.

"Well, Frank," he admitted when the cigar was going, "as a matter of fact, I came around to do a little business with you."

"I thought so," remarked Gordon grimly. "What is it?"

"I've got a little plan I want to show you," answered the gangster, fishing in his pocket.

"I can tell you beforehand that I'm not interested," said Gordon, "but I suppose I'll have to look."

The gangster produced a map of the city and unfolded it on the desk. He took a pencil and traced a line around an era of about thirty-six square blocks. Then he marked a cross near the center of the plot. Gordon, watching, saw that the cross marked the location of his own garage.

"Here is the location of your garage," said the gangster, placing the tip of his pencil on the cross.

"So I see," nodded Gordon. "What of it?"

"There are six other garages inside of this square I have drawn," continued Torrigiano. "If the rest were to go out of business, how much money would it mean to you in the course of a month?"

"You have said enough," said Gordon grimly. "What you want to know is how much I will pay as tribute to Buck Loring, provided he runs the other garage-men out of the territory and leaves me with a monopoly on the business. Am I right?"

"You've sized it up," admitted the hoodlum.

For several minutes Frank Gordon sat in thoughtful silence. Puffing slowly on his cigar, the gangster waited.

"I'd like to talk to Buck Loring," said Gordon presently.

"Buck sent me," Torrigiano retorted, scowling.

"I know it," answered Gordon calmly. "That's why I want to talk to Loring."

There was silence for several minutes while the two men eyed each other intently. Then the gangster's eyes wavered.

"I'll call up the chief and ask him if he wants to talk to you," said Torrigiano.

"I'd rather call him myself," declared Gordon. "What's the number?"

Again there was a clash of eyes. Then Torrigiano growled a number which Gordon repeated into the desk phone a couple of moments later. After a short wait a woman's voice came over the wire.

"I want to talk to Buck Loring," said Gordon.

"Who is speaking?" inquired the female voice.

"Tell him it's Frank Gordon."

There was a short wait and then a deep, gruff voice came rumbling over the wire.

"Hello, Buck," said Gordon. "Filippo Torrigiano is here at my garage with the old shakedown proposition. I want to have a talk with you."

"All right," answered the gruff voice. "Talk ahead."

"I don't want to talk over the telephone," demurred Gordon. "I'll drive around to see you if you'll tell me where to come."

"I'm at my apartment on Sherman Drive," answered the gang chieftain after a moment of silence. "Come out in about an hour. I'm just having my breakfast now."

"I'll be there," declared Gordon, hanging up the receiver.

"Well?" queried Torrigiano.

"I've made a date to talk with Buck," snapped Gordon. "Now you can get out. I'm busy."

When Torrigiano had gone, Gordon sat in frowning silence for several moments. He glanced up at the office clock.

"Nearly eleven," muttered the young garage-owner. "Breakfast-time for hoodlums! Honest mechanics have been on the job for three hours and more. Hell of a note!"

It was exactly noon when young Gordon entered an ornate apartment building on Sherman Drive. The place, Gordon well knew was a veritable palace of crooks. In its thirty spacious apartments the lord of gangland and his lieutenants, with their women, lolled in luxury—paid for with the proceeds of criminal activities of all descriptions.

Pressing the bell marked *Loring*, Gordon waited. In a few moments a small man with black eyes set too close together appeared in the hall and approached.

"You Frank Gordon?" asked the henchman.

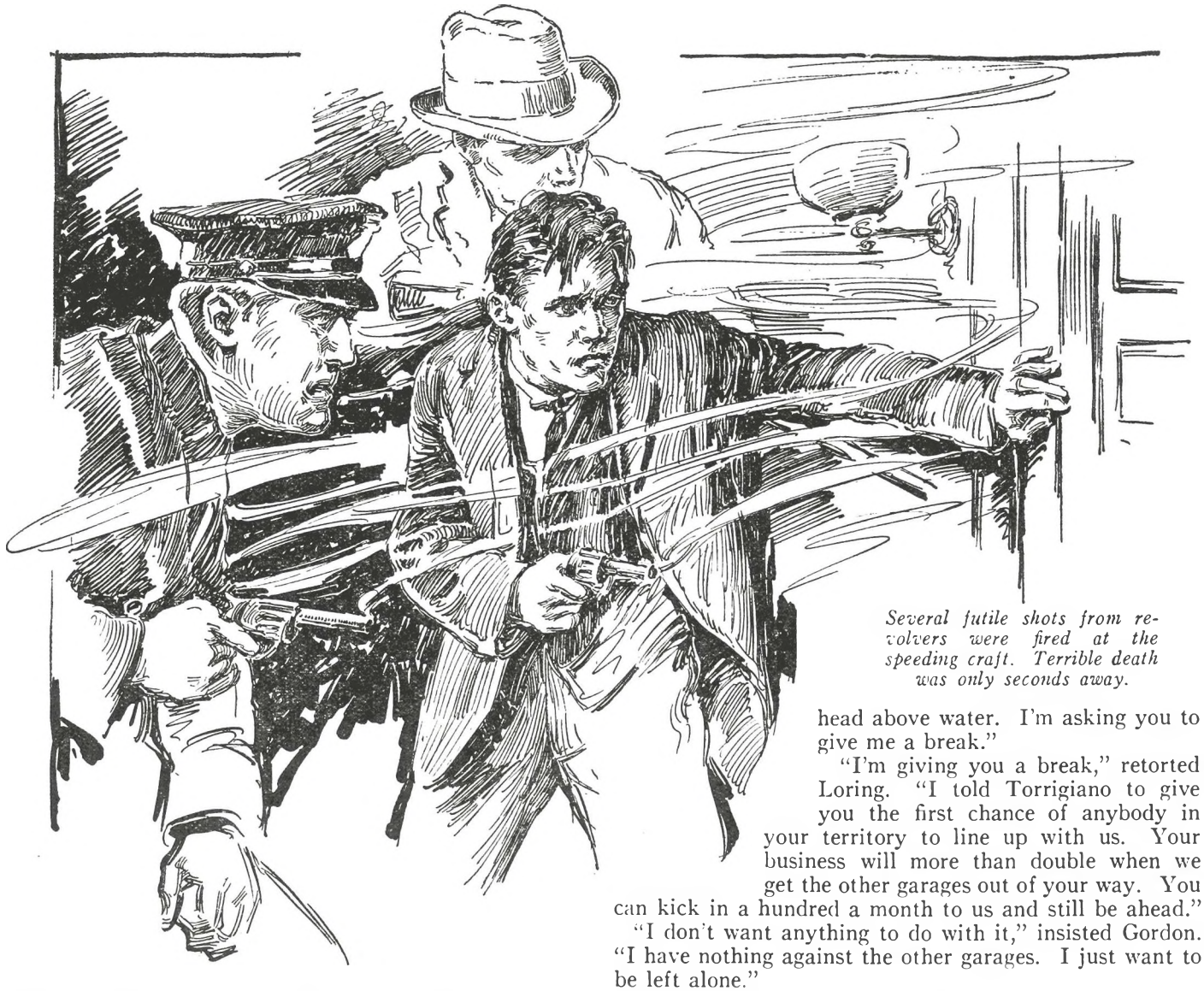
"Yes. I have a date with Buck."

"Got to frisk you for a rod," said the gangster.

Gordon nodded and the fellow proceeded to make a swift, deft and thorough search of the garage-owner's person. He found no weapons.

"Go ahead," nodded the searcher. "Third door on the right."

Frank Gordon entered the room where the boss hood-



*Several futile shots from revolvers were fired at the speeding craft. Terrible death was only seconds away.*

lum waited. Loring was a big man and his gross body told of overindulgence among the fleshpots. His face was the beefsteak red of the steady drinker. His pale blue eyes were piglike set in pouches of fat. He looked up at the tall lean figure of his caller. Gordon stood meeting the gangster's gaze unflinchingly.

"Well, Gordon," grunted Buck Loring, "what's on your mind?"

"I've come to ask you to lay off me," answered Gordon crisply. "Don't you think you owe me that much?"

"How do you figure that I owe you anything, Frank?"

"Didn't I go to prison for two years for transportation and possession of booze that belonged to you?"

"That was tough luck for both of us," answered Loring. "You went to the Big House—and I lost a truck and three thousand dollars' worth of liquor."

"I didn't make any squawk," said Gordon.

"Neither did I," replied Loring. "And I had your old job waiting for you when you got out."

"I didn't want it," declared Gordon. You know damned well that I never knew it was booze I was hauling for you from that fish-house. You made a goat of me. I took my medicine and checked it off to experience, but I wouldn't work for you or any other racketeer again for a thousand a week. I worked in the garage down at the Big House and finished learning my trade. When I got out, I figured on going to work as a mechanic. But my wife, Grace, had inherited a couple of thousand dollars, so after we were married we put it into this garage that I'm running. We are still in debt to beat the band. I need every penny the place will bring in for the next three years to keep my head above water. I'm asking you to give me a break."

"I'm giving you a break," retorted Loring. "I told Torrigiano to give you the first chance of anybody in your territory to line up with us. Your business will more than double when we get the other garages out of your way. You can kick in a hundred a month to us and still be ahead."

"I don't want anything to do with it," insisted Gordon. "I have nothing against the other garages. I just want to be left alone."

"Don't be a sap, Gordon," growled the racketeer. "You'll either play with us—or get out of the territory. In the first place, you can handle a truck for me and make more money in a week than your garage will make in a month. If you don't want to do that, you'll have to line up. That's all."

"Listen, Buck." Gordon's voice had an ominous tone. "I want no dealings with your mob or any other. I'm not going to drive a booze truck and take any more chances with the penitentiary. And I'm not going to be shook down by you in order to go on running my garage. That's flat. If you won't be a white man, it'll have to be a fight. And I'm giving you fair warning. If you do anything to my place, I'll hold you personally responsible—and I'll square accounts with you if it's the last thing I ever do."

"Wait a minute," snapped Loring as the young garageman turned on his heel. "You got a nice wife, aint you?"

"You're damned right," answered Gordon, halting.

"Think she'd like to be a widow?"

"Are you threatening to put me on the spot?"

"I might have to," answered the gangster calmly, "unless you quit being a damned fool. And all your wife's money is in the garage. With you and the garage gone, she might have to sling hash—or do something worse. Think that over. All I'm asking you to pay is a hundred dollars a month. That's your insurance—insurance that nothing will happen to your place, and that your business will be doubled or more."

"I have done all the thinking necessary," replied Gordon quietly. "And what I just said goes. You lay off of me—or I'll see that you wish you had."

A black scowl of anger spread over Loring's evil face. He leaned forward in his chair.

"Get out," snarled the racketeer. "I'll send Torrigiano around to see you again in the morning, just to show you that I'm a square shooter. If you don't put your name on our list, it'll just be too bad. You'll not get another chance."

Gordon departed. There was a dark look on his not unhandsome face as his flivver rolled southward in the direction of his garage.

"Insurance," he muttered to himself presently, "isn't such a punk idea." He swung the car around a corner and headed toward the loop. An hour later he left the offices of a large insurance firm. In his pockets he carried policies for the limit allowed on his garage property and one for five thousand dollars, accident and life.

"Listen, Grace," said Frank Gordon to his wife when they had finished their evening meal in the little flat which had been their home for the five months since their marriage. "I'm going to have trouble with Buck Loring's gang. I'll try like blazes to come out on top, but you keep these—in case anything happens." He handed her the envelopes containing the policies.

There was silence while the young wife inspected the policies. Tears were in her eyes as she laid the papers on the table and looked up at her husband's sober face.

"What is the trouble, Frank?" she asked.

Gordon told her of the events of the day, omitting nothing. His wife listened in silence until he had finished. Then she rose and went around the table to seat herself on his knee.

"Frank," she said, looking into his eyes, "I wish you'd drop it. We could go away from this town. There—"

"Please, Grace," he interrupted, "—I'm not going to run from Buck Loring—and I'm not going to pay tribute to him. I'd rather die fighting."

"You won't change your mind?"

"No." There was grim finality in his answer.

"Then I'm going to tell you something," declared his wife. "Buck Loring tipped off the Federal men himself, the time you were caught with that truck-load of booze! He wanted me—so he got you out of the way. He only hired you in order to frame you. After you were in prison, he—"

"Never mind telling me any more," Gordon stopped her. "I suspected what you have told me."

"Well," said the young wife, "I wouldn't listen to him. He finally gave it up and took up with that manicurist."

"Let it drop," begged Gordon. "I'll deal with Loring from here on."

"All right," she answered. "I only told you to make you realize that Loring is dangerous and capable of anything. I'll say no more, since you are determined. And you need not have taken out that insurance. If Loring's gang should kill you, I'll have no need of the money. They will hang me for murdering Loring."

"Grace!"

"No use to argue," she said firmly. "It's as much my fight as yours. I mean just what I said. If Buck Loring kills you, I'll kill him. I see your point. We've got to fight—and *we* means both of us."

AT ten o'clock the following morning, Filippo Torrigiano walked into the office of Frank Gordon's garage. Two minutes later the pockmarked henchman of Buck Loring alighted on the back of his neck on the cement sidewalk in front of the place.

"That's my answer," cried Frank Gordon, standing with heaving chest and flashing eyes in the doorway. "Take it to Buck Loring!"

An ugly automatic revolver suddenly appeared in the hand of the gangster who lay sprawled on the sidewalk. As the weapon began to spit leaden death in his direction, Frank Gordon dodged to safety behind the brick wall. The gun ceased barking and Torrigiano began scrambling to his feet. Then a gallon can of lubricating oil, flung with all Frank Gordon's strength, came from the doorway and caught the rising gangster in the chest.

As Torrigiano toppled backward into the gutter, a flying leap landed Gordon astride his prostrate enemy. The young garage-man's brown hand tore the weapon from the gangster's grasp and flung it away. During the next three minutes the swarthy hoodlum received about all the punishment a man can take and remain conscious. When Gordon rose, his battered victim lay moaning in agony.

"Now, get up and get out," snarled Gordon. "And remember, next time I see you I'm going to beat you to death."

Two young mechanics employed by Gordon had rushed to the scene of battle. Their employer turned to them with a tight-lipped smile.

"It's all over," he said. "Go on back to work."

The mechanics went. Gordon stood in the doorway and watched until Torrigiano had staggered to his car and driven off.

"Anyhow," muttered the garage-man, as he turned toward his office, "I got first blood."

GORDON stayed at the garage that night until the regular closing time, eight o'clock. He sent his two employes home at five. When he had locked up for the night, he walked two blocks down the street and ate his dinner in a little café. From there he called his wife and told her that he would spend the night at the garage. There was a stifled sob in her voice as she said good-by, after begging him to be careful.

Back in the office, Gordon settled himself to spend the night in his swivel chair with one eye open. The back of the garage was securely locked. If Loring's men were going to toss a bomb,—their favorite means of terrorizing,—they would most likely toss it through one of the huge glass windows in the front of the place.

A rifle, taken from a locker in one corner of the office, lay across Gordon's desk. It was his intention to put a lot of steel-jacketed bullets through any car from which a bomb was tossed into his garage that night—provided he survived the bomb.

Frank Gordon's garage stood in a newly built-up section on the northwest edge of the city. It was a one-story frame building, occupying an entire fifty-foot lot. After eight o'clock at night there was little traffic on the street which ran before it. Whenever he heard the sound of an approaching car, Gordon would become instantly alert. He would grasp the stick of his rifle and wait in tense readiness until the auto had passed. Thus the time slipped past until a few minutes after ten o'clock.

Young Gordon had just lighted a cigarette, glancing at the office clock in the flickering light of his match, when it happened. There was a deafening explosion. The building trembled and then seemed literally to tumble about its owner. The shock upset the chair in which he sat and flung Gordon to the floor. In a moment he was on his feet. He stumbled across the room and pressed the electric-light switch. There was no answering flood of light. He felt his way into the garage, to stand bewildered in the flickering glare of flames that were springing up along one side of the wrecked building.

In a moment Gordon realized what had happened. He remembered the dilapidated car which had been driven into the place by a man in overalls about half an hour be-

fore closing time. It was such a car as could be bought in any used-car lot for fifty dollars or less. The driver had remarked that he was leaving his carpenter tools in the back of the car. That "tool-box" had been an infernal machine. If the aged car had been placed in a stall nearer the office, the blast might have been fatal to the watching owner. Mentally, Frank Gordon kicked himself—but it was too late. Buck Loring had put it over. Gordon turned and raced for the fire-alarm box, half a block distant.

The fire apparatus arrived in less than five minutes after Gordon turned in the alarm, but the garage was doomed. Gasoline tanks, started to leaking by the terrific explosion, had instantly turned the place into a furnace, fed by other tanks that blew up as the flames roared about them.

Frank Gordon reached home at midnight and told his wife what had happened. The game little woman listened and comforted him as best she could. She reminded him of the insurance policies.

"Yes," nodded Frank. "I'm sure glad I thought of that. You go on back to bed. I want to think."

His wife left him alone as he wished, but she did not go to sleep. She lay in their bed, staring at the ceiling and doing some thinking of her own. It was more than an hour later that she emerged from the bedroom and seated herself on the arm of the chair in which Gordon sat, slumped in mental travail.

"I've an idea, Frank," she said.

"What is it, dear?"

"Didn't you say there were six other garages in the territory on which Loring offered you a monopoly?"

"Yes?"

"Then, listen!"

For the next ten minutes Frank Gordon listened to the plan that had formed itself in his wife's desperate mind. He grew more and more excited as the plan unfolded.

"Grace, you're a wonder," he cried, when she had finished. "I believe you've hit on something bigger than you realize. Watch your boy friend go into action."

He rose and went to the telephone. He kept the instrument busy for nearly an hour, his wife hunting numbers for him in the directory while he talked.

At half-past two o'clock the owners of the other six garages concerned were gathered in the living-room of the Gordon flat. Two of the garages were owned in partnership, so the gathering numbered eight men beside Frank Gordon. They had lost no time in answering the summons that had routed them from their beds. They were a good-looking bunch of men, the oldest being under forty and the youngest a red-headed chap of twenty-seven. They listened attentively while Gordon told them of the proposition that had been put to him by Buck Loring and what had happened after he had turned it down.

"Any of you fellows may be next," Gordon concluded. "I've got a plan to put a stop to Buck Loring's deviltry—if all of you will join me. Do you want to hear it?"

The assent of the gathering was grim and unanimous. Gordon went on to outline the plan Grace had suggested. Again there was attentive silence.

"I'm with you—from hell to breakfast," declared the red-headed youngster whose name was Paul Gaffney, when Gordon had finished. "It's time the honest people in this town got together and did something to stop these hoodlums."

"Count me in," said another—and another.

"And me," growled a fourth.

So it went. The gathered men all cast their votes for the plan. Frank Gordon's eyes sparkled with delight as he heard them endorse the scheme. He shot his wife a grateful glance.

"Fine," cried Gordon. "All of you load up with insurance first thing in the morning. We should be through with our preparations by noon, but all of you stay away from your offices until one o'clock. Leave word with your help that you will be in at that hour. I'll be planted here beside my telephone from that time on."

The garage-men, all nodding or voicing understanding and agreement, departed to resume their interrupted rest. Frank Gordon and his wife hugged each other in delight.

"Darling," cried Gordon, "it's going to work! We'll throw a monkey-wrench into the gears that it will take Buck Loring a long time to dig out."

"I hope so," said his wife. "And now we'd better get to bed. Tomorrow may be a busy day."

"*May* be?" chuckled Gordon. "It *will* be!"

At half-past one o'clock the following afternoon Filippo Torrigiano walked into a garage four blocks from the spot where Frank Gordon's place of business had stood. It was the place owned by the red-headed Paul Gaffney. A girl, Gaffney's sister, sat behind the office desk.

"Where's the boss?" demanded the swarthy, pockmarked henchman of Buck Loring. Torrigiano's evil face still wore the marks of the mauling he had received at the hands of Frank Gordon.

"Back in the workshop," answered the girl. She had been instructed by her brother. "I'll call him."

In a few moments young Gaffney walked into the office. Torrigiano stood waiting before the littered desk.

"You Paul Gaffney?" inquired the hoodlum.

"Yes."

"I want to have a little private talk with you," said Torrigiano, with a meaning glance at the girl.

"Trot along home to lunch, Kate," said Gaffney.

The girl departed at once. Gaffney picked up his telephone.

*"You know damned well that I never knew it was booze I was hauling for you!"*

"Excuse me a minute," the young proprietor said to Torrigiano. "I've got to put in a hurry-up order for a tank of welding gas. A job just came in and our tank is empty."

Torrigiano nodded and Gaffney gave a number into the telephone. It was Frank Gordon's number and Gordon's voice answered shortly.

"Hello," said Gaffney. "This is Paul Gaffney speaking. I need a tank of gas right away. Got a job waiting. Rush it right over."

"Got you," answered Frank Gordon's voice.

Gaffney hung up the receiver and turned toward the waiting hoodlum. The order he had just given over the wire had been a signal arranged at the confab in Gordon's home. "Now, Mister,"—Gaffney, grinned,—"what's on your mind?"

Torrigiano proceeded to put much the same proposition to young Gaffney that he had laid before Frank Gordon on that occasion now more than forty-eight hours past. Gaffney listened with interest. Now and then the red-headed youth asked a question—demanded a full explanation of certain points. Torrigiano, sensing that he had found a customer, was obligingly verbose; thus Gaffney gained what he was after—time.

At a few minutes past two o'clock, eight men walked into the office where Gaffney sat listening to Loring's henchman. They were the other garage-owners of the district—led by Frank Gordon. Torrigiano, twisting in his chair, bent upon the arriving men a scowl in which surprise and consternation were mingled.

"Well, fellows," grinned Gaffney, "here he is. I've already heard his sweet little proposition."

Torrigiano, recognizing Frank Gordon at the head of the visiting group, suddenly reached for the gun which he carried in a shoulder holster. Paul Gaffney went into action. He plunged across the desk in a headlong dive. The next moment Gaffney, Torrigiano and the chair in which the gangster had been sitting, were a tangled heap on the floor. Frank Gordon plunged into the mêlée.

Presently Torrigiano, disarmed and covered by his own gun in the calloused hand of Frank Gordon, stood before his captors. The hoodlum's face was pasty with fear.

"Well, Torrigiano," said Gordon quietly, "I promised you that I would beat you to death the next time I laid eyes on you. I'm sorry that I can't keep my promise. I'm only going to beat you within an inch of your life. Before I do it, I want you to meet the gentlemen you have been promising to put out of business."

THE gray-faced gangster swept a baleful glance around the circle of garage-men. He wore the air of a cornered rat.

"Now we'll go out back where there is room," continued Gordon. "You and I are going to have a little boxing-match."

"Listen, Gordon," cut in Paul Gaffney, "this is my garage. I should have the first crack at this job."

"Your garage is not an ash heap," answered Gordon, his eyes meeting those of the red-headed youth. "I'll attend to Mr. Torrigiano."

When his captors ushered the hoodlum into the rear of the place, they found eleven more men waiting. The other eleven were the most trusted of the mechanics from all the threatened garages. They had all enlisted willingly, eagerly, in the cause of their employers. They were a husky bunch.

"Did you fellows bring the trucks?" asked Frank Gordon, nodding to the newcomers.

"We did," answered a stocky chap in a suit of greasy brown overalls. "And they are spotted and ready."

"Good," answered Gordon. "You are just in time to watch a little petting-party between myself and Mr. Filippo Torrigiano. Gather about—and keep out of the way."

In a large open space in the rear yard of the garage, the gathered men formed a large ring, in the center of which stood Torrigiano and Frank Gordon. There was terror and desperation in the eyes of the hoodlum as they swept the circle of grim faces about him.

"All right, you rat!" snapped Frank Gordon. "Look out for yourself. I'm the only one you have to fight. The others are just here to watch. If you can whip me you can walk out of here without being bothered by anybody else. Try to get away!"

A BATTLE followed that will never be forgotten by those who saw it. Frank Gordon was six inches taller than his opponent, but the hoodlum was twenty pounds heavier than the garage-man. The gangster fought with the desperation of a cornered coward. Torrigiano, however, was a gunman—not a pugilist. Also, he was not in condition to equal that of Gordon. Nevertheless, it was a fierce and bloody scrap from the moment it began. Frank Gordon bored in with grim determination and thudding fists to tender spots on the big gangster's person with maddening regularity. Torrigiano also drove his big fists home with punishing effect. It was hammer-and-tongs, and no quarter. It was too furious to last long. The hoodlum's breath began to come in whistling gasps. He hadn't the stamina to stand up to the punishment which Gordon kept passing out.

Ten minutes after the beginning of the battle, Torrigiano's battered and bloody figure lay stretched unconscious. Frank Gordon, panting and sweat-drenched, stood over his fallen foe.

"All right, fellows," panted Gordon. "Get some ropes and truss him up. I'll call Buck Loring."

Gordon turned and strode into the office where he picked up the telephone and called Buck Loring's apartment. The men at the back of the garage had carried Torrigiano inside and were busy binding the defeated gangster hand and foot. Presently Gordon heard a woman's voice on the wire.

"Let me speak to Buck Loring," he requested.

"Who is speaking?"

"Frank Gordon."

There was a wait, during which Gordon pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his perspiring face. Then Loring's gruff voice came over the phone.

"Hello, Buck," said Gordon grimly. "This is Frank Gordon. I have just finished a little interview with Filippo Torrigiano out at Paul Gaffney's garage. Your clerk is in pretty bad shape. If you want him, come and get him. Don't send anybody else. You'll only get him if you come yourself. We'll keep him here for you exactly one hour from now. If you don't show up in person by that time, we'll do more things to him—and he'll probably tell a lot of things you won't want told."

"I'll be there," snarled the racketeer chieftain, adding a vile epithet.

"Good," answered Frank Gordon as he hung up the receiver.

When Gordon returned to the back part of the garage, Torrigiano, still unconscious, lay tightly bound on the garage floor. His waiting comrades greeted Gordon with inquiring looks.

"He promised to come," said Gordon, smiling grimly. "Let's get ready."

Buck Loring turned from the telephone and spoke to two of his henchmen with whom he had been in conference when the call from Gordon came. He gave the two men

terse and imperative instructions. They rose and left hurriedly. Loring turned back to the telephone. There was a look on his face that boded no good for Frank Gordon and his friends.

The lord of gangland spent some twenty minutes at the telephone. Then he left his apartment and, accompanied by his usual bodyguard, entered his showy, bullet-proof limousine which stood at the curb. He growled instructions to the chauffeur.

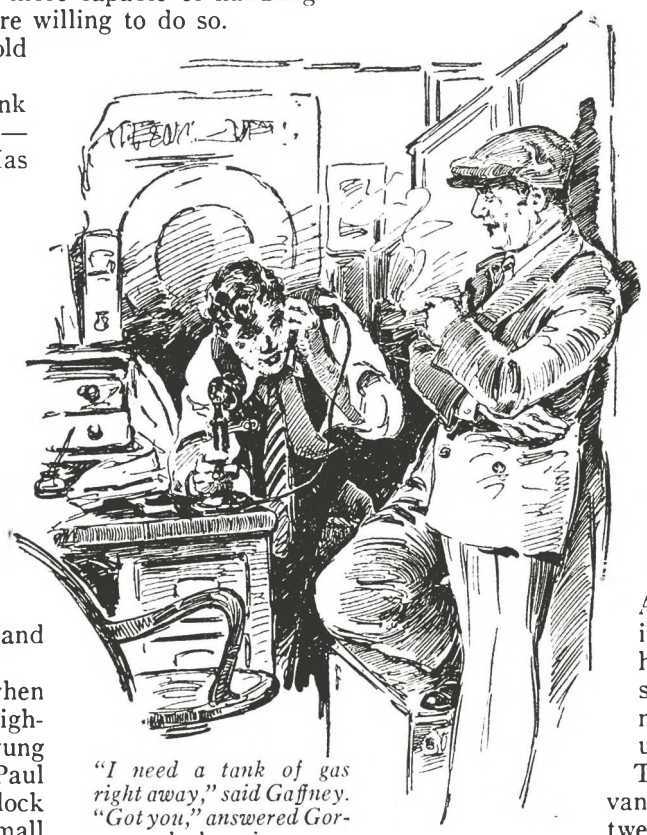
Back in the Gaffney garage, things were happening. Working swiftly, the gathered garage-men drove every car in the place outside, parking the vehicles along the curbs at least a block from the garage. In fifteen minutes the garage was emptied of autos. The bound figure of Torrigiano still lay in the center of the floor. Next, the garage was closed and locked. The allies gathered in the alley behind the building. It would have been hard to find another score of men who looked more capable of handling a large bunch of trouble or more willing to do so.

"Maybe Loring will get cold feet," suggested Paul Gaffney.

"I think not," replied Frank Gordon. "I know his temper—and I stirred him up plenty. Has everybody got a gun?" His eyes swept the gathering as he asked the last question.

There were nods and murmurs of assent from all. Several produced weapons by way of answer.

"All right!" Gordon nodded. "Put them away until you need them—if you are sure they are loaded and in good working order. You men who are going to handle the trucks, get to them. Gaffney, take eight men and post them west. I'll take the rest east. Everybody get in their spots and sit tight."



*"I need a tank of gas right away," said Gaffney. "Got you," answered Gordon's voice.*

Barely an hour had passed when a caravan of four huge, high-powered bullet-proof cars swung into the street upon which Paul Gaffney's garage faced. The block was lined on both sides with small stores and shops, forming one of the suburban shopping centers so plentiful in outlying parts of the city.

The four sinister cars sped along the street with engines humming smoothly. There was not more than ten feet between each car and the one following. Each vehicle contained three men besides its driver. The ugly nose of a machine-gun poked itself out either side of each car as they drew near the Gaffney garage. One man in each auto held in his hands an ugly object about the size of a small head of cabbage. Windows of bullet-proof glass on the side next to the garage were lowered as the autos approached their goal.

Then the leading car came even with the doomed building. The man with the bomb hurled his missile with deadly accuracy through the plate-glass window into the small office. There was an ominous roar and the building trembled as thick white smoke billowed out of the wrecked front.

Suddenly all of the cars leaped ahead in response to quickly opened throttles. The motors roared defiance through opened cut-outs. Three more bombs were hurled in quick succession into the wrecked garage, to explode with deafening crashes. Away sped the vandal autos. In each, two pairs of cold, sinister eyes behind the sights of machine-guns watched for any sign of interference with the getaway.

Then the interference came—in a most unexpected form. From the mouth of an alley, a ponderous truck came plunging directly into the path of the leading gangster car. The big truck was loaded with three long joints of sewer pipe that rested on a trailer some twenty feet behind. The truck shot into the street and stopped with a grinding of brakes, blocking the path of the fleeing car completely and solidly.

The driver of the truck and the man who had been riding beside him leaped from the truck the moment the powerful emergency brakes jerked it to a halt. Drawing guns, the pair dodged behind the steel body of the truck.

It was too late for the first car to avoid a collision. The gangster at its wheel swung the speeding auto to the left and applied his brakes, but his efforts were vain. The big car crashed into the rear portion of the stalled truck, crumpling like a paper box from the impact.

The second car of the string fared little better. Its driver succeeded in reducing his speed to about twenty miles an hour before he swerved to miss the leading car and piled his own up against the extended steel sewer pipes. The other two drivers succeeded in stopping their vehicles and made frantic efforts to turn in the other direction. It was too late. Another giant truck had turned into the mouth of the street behind them. It was loaded in the same manner as the first. The marauding hoodlums were bottled up in a half block of street.

Then, from doorways and other vantage-points along the half block, twenty men in the greasy garb of garage-mechanics began to blaze away at the trapped autos. Realizing their predicament, the gangsters made no move to abandon the safety of their bullet-proof cars. They resorted to the machine-guns and streams of hissing lead began to spray the street and the fronts of the buildings. The ambushing garage-men drew back into protected places and rapidly reloaded empty guns. With the first lull in the death-song of the machine-guns, however, the comrades sprang to their posts and the fire from their revolvers drove the hoodlums back into the autos and held them trapped there.

Police sirens were heard approaching. In another moment, riot squads with tear bombs were on the scene, putting an abrupt and sobbing end to the fray.

Fourteen handcuffed gangsters were taken away to cells. The driver and another in the first car to collide with the truck were dead. The barricading trucks were backed away to admit arriving fire apparatus, but Paul Gaffney's garage was a total loss. So was the charred carcass of Filippo Torrigiano, which firemen carried from the débris.

It developed, however, that the wily Buck Loring had kept clear of the net. He was not among the captives.

Down at police headquarters, the garage-men told their story to the authorities and newspaper-men. Frank Gordon and Paul Gaffney made sworn statements, charging Buck Loring with being responsible for the destruction of their garages. They told in detail of the proposition that had been made to them by Torrigiano, acting for Loring.

The papers told the story with a gusto. They described the organized effort of the garage-men to protect themselves and detailed the events of the day. It was apparent that the press and the law-abiding public were wholeheartedly behind the militant garage-owners.

A dragnet was thrown out for Buck Loring, but that wily rascal had gone into hiding. All efforts to find him failed. A score of his henchmen, brought in for questioning, refused to talk.

That evening the allied garage-owners gathered in the Gordon flat. They were jubilant at what they had accomplished, yet quiet. All seemed to realize that the fight was far from finished. The five unharmed garages were under guard. A careful search had been made of all strange cars brought in for storage. It was the intention of the comrades that the trick by which Frank Gordon's garage had been destroyed should not be repeated.

"Well, fellows," said Gordon to the gathering, "we hit a telling blow today. I have a feeling that we have started something that will put the grafts of this burg's racketeers on the blink. Just the same we must keep our weather eyes open. Buck Loring is still at large—and he's a snake-in-the-grass to be feared! Our places are under a double guard, our own men and the police. Our next move is to triple that guard and put another power on the trail of Loring. First thing in the morning, every one of you call at the office of the insurance company where you took out your policies today. Point out to them the danger in which they stand of having a loss to pay on those policies —unless Buck Loring's gang is run to earth. That will bring them into the scrap on our side."

"Man," said Paul Gaffney, "that is sure one bright idea. Those companies have a world of money and influence behind them."

"Yes." Gordon nodded. "And don't think they won't use both in this business, once we make it clear to them. This is a test fight. If we win, the other rackets in this city can be killed in the same manner. It means the end of successful extortion by men like Buck Loring. By the same token, Loring and his kind know it and will fight accordingly."

HOW true were those words was proven five minutes later as the garage-men were leaving the Gordon flat. Their leader and host escorted them to the door, where he stood while the others crossed the small porch and moved toward the sidewalk. It was just dusk. The neighborhood was quiet, except for a ukulele being strummed by a youth who sat with a girl in an auto parked a bit down the street at the opposite curb. The girl was behind the wheel, crooning the tune the boy was coaxing from the instrument.

Just then another car swung around the corner into the side street and the beam from its powerful lamps illuminated the car in which the couple sat. Frank Gordon gave a hoarse cry.

"Scatter!" he yelled. "Down!"

Even as the warning left his lips, Gordon dodged behind the frame of the door and drew his revolver. Police permits to carry arms had been given all the garage-men before they left headquarters.

The strumming on the ukulele had suddenly ceased, to be replaced by the deadly sputter of a machine-gun which the serenading youth had suddenly lifted and trained on the group of mechanics. The quiet dusk was changed to a bedlam of sound through which hissed a stream of murderous lead.

There was no doubt that Frank Gordon's warning had saved several lives. The comrades had scattered and flung themselves on the ground just in the nick of time. Frank Gordon's automatic spat defiance from the shelter of the doorway and in another moment the prone figures on the lawn and along the sidewalk had drawn guns and were plugging away at that car from which the machine-gun was spitting its venom.

The girl at the wheel grasped it and the roar of the car's powerful motor joined the din. There was a howl of gears and the car leaped away from the rain of bullets being unloosed by its intended victim. The rattle of the machine-gun ceased abruptly.

As the vandal car disappeared around the corner, the prone men scrambled to their feet and began to check up. One man had a bullet through his left arm. One of the leaden missiles had plowed a shallow furrow along the right thigh of another. The others had escaped injury. The wounded men were hustled into the house and a doctor was called from his home two blocks distant.

"Darned lucky that car swung its lights just in time for me to see that guy sticking that pepper-box out of the window of the auto," remarked Gordon.

The faces of the others were stern as they nodded agreement with their leader. Police and reporters were soon on the scene. The morning papers carried the story with headlines and photographs.

SHORTLY after ten o'clock the following morning, the heads of seven of the city's largest insurance companies had been reminded of the fact that their companies carried policies insuring nine men against accident and death for an average of seven thousand five hundred dollars per man. They also learned that they had issued policies totaling more than eighty thousand dollars on seven garages—two of which already were total losses, with the ink little more than dry on the policies. When it was pointed out to these seven gentlemen that the rest of the recently insured men and garages stood in grave danger of death and destruction at the hands of Buck Loring and his henchmen, they got exceedingly busy.

Within an hour the executives were in conference. Before noon what Frank Gordon had prophesied had come to pass. The wealth and power of seven great insurance companies had been thrown into the fray on the side of the garage-men. The nine comrades went into conference with the seven worried executives, suddenly awake to the menace that hung over their companies.

As a result of the powwow, the garage-men all agreed to wear bullet-proof vests furnished by the insurance companies. They also consented to permit a bodyguard, paid by the insurance people, to be placed over them in addition to extra police protection which had been promised as a result of the attack of the previous evening.

An hour later the allied garage-men sat in the office of one of the garages. Outside, the assembled bodyguard and numerous police patrolled the building on all sides. The garage-men grinned at each other. There was a certain humor to the situation, despite its gravity.

"At least," observed Frank Gordon, "we've started something. Buck Loring is getting a run for his money. We've driven him to cover—which is several points in our favor."

"Yes, damn him," growled the man whose injured arm was in a sling. "And we ought to be able to keep him in his hole until he rots there. We have the newspapers and the police and the insurance companies with us."

"You forget to mention the most important ally of all," answered Frank Gordon—"the public."

"That's a lot of help to run a few garages," grinned Paul Gaffney.

"It ought to be plenty," opined one of the others.

"I wonder," said Frank Gordon. "As I told you, Buck Loring is not going to give up easily. Let's get our heads together and see if we have overlooked any bets."

On the edge of a small suburb, little more than two miles from the garage where the comrades were gathered, stood a huge old house of brick. All its windows and doors were boarded up. Its owners, so it was said in the village, had gone to Europe for a long stay.

In a comfortably furnished room in the basement of that structure, Buck Loring had taken refuge with one trusted lieutenant, a rogue called Pick Stewart. A telephone stood on a table in the middle of the room. Above the table hung a shaded electric light. The fugitive gangster was at the telephone, listening to a report from a henchman in the city.

"The whole lot of them have gone to the Stilson and Mace garage," informed the hoodlum. "I trailed them there. There is a young army of cops and dicks moping around the place, all packing rods. A riot squad with machine-guns is parked in a car at each corner of the block.

"You got the car marked?" asked Loring.

"Yes."

"Then get it spotted and get in the clear. Call me as soon as it's over."

The racketeer chief hung up the receiver for a moment. Then he picked it up again and called a number. He waited, scowling blackly until a voice answered.

"Hello, Jake," growled Loring. "Is Sparrow ready?"

"All set, Chief," came the answer..

"Tell him to get going in a hurry before they move," ordered the racketeer. "They are in the Stilson and Mace garage on Dire Street. Curly is spotting the marker right now. Get busy!"

In an old farmhouse ten miles north of the city, the man Loring had called Jake turned from the telephone and spoke to a slender blond man with shifty eyes and a wide, loose mouth. The slender man was "Sparrow" Swanson, pilot of a plane in which he carried booze and narcotics from Canada for Buck Loring. The man called Jake repeated the instructions Loring had given him. The shifty-eyed pilot snuffed out a half-smoked cigarette and the pair hastened from the house by a rear door. In a moment they had started the motor of a speedy monoplane which stood in a level meadow at the back of the house. The plane was freshly painted blue and bore no identifying marks.

Swanson climbed into the cockpit and inspected a sinister object that hung over the side of the fuselage by a small hemp rope. It was a bomb, slightly larger than a gallon bucket.

"Don't forget," shouted Jake as the plane began to move. "Fly low and don't miss!"

The confab in the garage was drawing to a close. It was nearing two-thirty. The alert watchers up and down the block were sticking grimly to the business in hand. However, they saw nothing suspicious about a small car of ordinary make that drove up and parked at the curb before a grocery-store directly opposite the garage in which the comrades were gathered. The driver of the car went into the grocery, where he bought a loaf of bread. He emerged from the grocery, tossed his loaf of bread into his car and walked to a drug-store which stood on the corner, several doors distant. There he climbed on a stool at the marble fountain and ordered a malted milk. The men guarding the garage and its occupants could not see the large white cross painted on the top of the parked auto.

To the eyes of Sparrow Swanson, speeding his plane southward above Dire Street, that cross was plainly visible. It told him that the building directly across the street was the target for that twenty pounds of destruction which hung over the side of his car. The rascally pilot grasped a sharp claspknife in one hand in readiness to cut the rope which held the bomb. The other hand on the stick eased the speeding plane down to an altitude of little more than a hundred feet. With throttle wide open, the plane dived at the long wide roof upon which the deadly missile was to fall.

The blue plane was not more than ten blocks distant and coming like a bullet when the men guarding the garage first sensed their danger. For a moment the defenders were frozen with astonishment—and in that moment the blue buzzard had covered half of the remaining distance to its goal. The watchers could plainly see that bomb hanging over the side.

Swooping down to a height from which a miss would be impossible, the plane plunged on. The pilot's arm reached over the side of the fuselage and the keen edge of the shining blade was ready to sever the slender rope. There were cries of alarm and horror from the men below and several futile shots from revolvers were fired at the speeding craft. Terrible death was only seconds away from those men gathered in that garage office.

*Ten minutes after the beginning of the battle, Torrigiano's battered figure lay stretched unconscious.*

Then two men leaped from one of the riot cars, parked less than a block north of the garage. The blue plane was almost directly above them as they gained the pavement. Both those men had been members of the A. E. F. They knew how to handle the automatic rifles which now flew to their shoulders, but they had been too late getting into action. The plane was over the garage before they could bring their rifles to bear on the blue target.

The keen blade in the renegade pilot's hand flashed and the rope parted. Men along the street cried out in terror and turned their eyes away or closed them. Those near the doomed building fled frantically. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder, the two men with the automatic rifles opened their belated fire on the blue ship. But the bomb was dropping.

Despite the short range, the missile missed its target by fifteen feet, landing in the alley behind a ramshackle building which

stood next door to the garage. Then the stream of bullets from the automatic rifles found a mark as the blue plane nosed upward to gain safety from the coming explosion. The renegade craft lurched, twisted and ceased to climb. Then the bomb struck and rocked near-by buildings with its blast. A geyser of dirt, chunks of masonry and other debris leaped into the air and engulfed the blue buzzard. In another instant the tattered craft had crashed to earth where it burst into flames, having landed squarely on the small wooden building in which the neighborhood butcher's bologna was smoking.

When the garage-men rushed from the building where they had so narrowly escaped death, they found their guards gathering. Strong men were trembling with the reaction. It was five minutes before they could grasp what had happened.

"I told you," said Frank Gordon, "that Buck Loring would not give up easily. It looks like we'd have to have a guard patrol in the air."

Across the street, the man who had parked the car with the white cross on its top, entered the vehicle and drove away unnoticed in the excitement. Six blocks away he entered a phone-booth and telephoned a report to Loring.

THE evening papers carried the story of the narrowly averted catastrophe, together with the information that rewards totaling nearly half a million dollars would be paid for the information leading to the capture of Buck Loring. The city was now thoroughly aroused. In addition to the rewards offered by the insurance companies, dozens of other groups and organizations offered rewards. The newspapers all posted big sums. The cause of the handful of garage-men had suddenly become the cause of more than two million people. The power of organized crime was beginning to appear a puny thing against the forces swinging into line to oppose it.

The nine determined men who had planted themselves resolutely before the juggernaut of gang rule suddenly found themselves the heroes of the city. Hundreds of citizens volunteered to guard them and their places of business. Funds were made up and offered to them—which they refused and saw added to the price on the head of Buck Loring. Driven by public demand, there was such a round-up of the city's undesirable characters as had never been known before; there ensued an exodus of hoodlums and police characters which purified the moral atmosphere to a remarkable degree.

Despite the huge rewards, the net failed to close about Buck Loring. It finally became the belief of most that the former lord of Gangland had fled not only the city, but the country as well.

"Bunk!" said Frank Gordon to his eight comrades. "Keep your iron vests buttoned and your weather eyes peeled! As long as Buck Loring is at large we are all in danger. I know him of old. He has not gone far—and he'll spring some devilment when we least expect it. The moral is: Expect it all the time."

In his hide-out in the basement of the old house, Buck Loring listened in black silence to the report of his henchman concerning what had happened to Sparrow Swanson and the blue plane.

"Listen," snapped the racketeer when the fellow had finished. "You get in touch with Morg Bates, Shorty Janner, Professor Rholf, and Bones Hopper. Morg Bates knows where to go. Just tell him I said the five of you were to meet me and Pick Stewart there tonight. Don't say a word to anybody else—get there as fast as you can."

Turning from the telephone, Loring sat for several moments in frowning silence. Then he lifted angry, bloodshot eyes to his rat-faced lieutenant.

"Gather up the junk, Pick," growled the racketeer. "We're fading out of this for a little while."

A damp, board-walled tunnel connected the basement with the old barn which stood behind the house. Through this tunnel Loring and his lieutenant presently made their way, carrying three suitcases and a small bag. In the barn, which was boarded up fast with the exception of one big door now padlocked on the inside, stood a big closed car. The pair placed the suitcases in the car and then opened the garage door.

The big car with Pick Stewart at the wheel and Loring lying back in the rear seat with his hat-brim covering his beefy face, was soon rolling northward through the open country.

Late that evening, at a small stand in the outskirts of Madison, Pick Stewart bought the evening papers. As the car rolled northward Buck Loring, by the light of the dome lamp, read the stories which the news wires had carried out of the city. The story was by now absorbing the interest of the nation.

Having scanned all the papers, the master hoodlum muttered a curse and flung them angrily from the car. He was forced to acknowledge that he would never again extort money from the honest people of the city which had suffered his criminal exploits to prosper for so long. The staggering size of the rewards for his capture also gave him pause. For a few moments he wondered if he dared even to keep the rendezvous with the five men he had ordered to the northern hide-out. After some thought he decided it would be safe, but he would take pains to bind them more firmly to himself as soon as they arrived. During the next four hours, while the car sped northward, Loring sprawled on the cushions laying evil plans. He would never again be able to operate brazenly and profitably in that town—but he meant to even the score with the men who had brought his house of cards tumbling about his ears. His fierce hatred centered itself upon Frank Gordon. He would wreak vengeance on Gordon, if it was the last act of his life! Then, too, there was Grace—Gordon's pretty little sweetheart who had scorned his advances and waited for Frank to finish his prison sentence, so they could marry.

IT was midnight when the five rascals Loring had summoned from the city arrived at the hide-out, an abandoned logging camp in a wild and unsettled portion of northern Wisconsin. The gang chieftain and Pick Stewart had been there for an hour. Loring immediately called a conference. A bottle of liquor went the rounds; then Loring took the floor.

"Boys," said their chief, "I don't need to tell you that those garage-owners have made the old town too hot to hold any of us for a while. They have put our racket on the hummer. We are all going to clear out of this country and have a good time on the other side of the ocean for awhile. But first there is one more job we have to do. That gang has got to be wiped out. We will never let it be said that they ran us out of the country and lived to tell about it."

There was silence from the listening men as Loring paused to light a cigar. When the weed was going, he stooped and drew a black bag from beneath the table. Placing this before him, he opened it and proceeded to stack great rolls of currency on the table. The eyes of the other six men glistened with greed, but they kept silence.

"There," said Loring impressively, "is a hundred grand in good cash money. We are going to split it even. I had you fellows come up here because you are the only ones I wanted to take with me. This money is only a drop in the

bucket. I have been getting fixed for a time like this, for years. I have three million bucks put away up in Canada, in good safe securities. That money is drawing three thousand a week interest; we can all live the life of Riley for a long time on that dough! More than that, I've got the road all greased for us into Canada whenever we get ready to go. Once up there, we split the big stake and clear out for Europe."

The gathered hoodlums licked their lips and watched eagerly while Loring divided the money on the table into seven equal stacks. He handed one stack to each of the men and put the remaining bundle into his own pocket.

The wily rogue knew from the expression on the ugly faces before him that he had accomplished his purpose. The three million dollars in Canada was a myth. As a matter of fact, it was but little more than half a million—and Buck Loring had no intention of sharing it with any of the tools before him. The money he had handed them, however, was very real—and they had swallowed the rest eagerly.

"Now," continued Loring, "we will lay our plans to settle the hash of that bunch of damned fools who ruined the racket. There will be no slip this time. We will work everything out perfectly. There is no danger that we will be discovered here. I bought this place two years ago under a phony name. Said I wanted it for a hunting and fishing camp. We can take our time getting things in shape. There are four of you who I have kept under cover on purpose. You have never been suspected of working with me. You four will come in handy now. This is the plan I have in mind. . . ."

*"You may be cameramen—and you may not," said their surprising hostess. "I'm taking no chances."*

Three weeks went past. The newspaper hue and cry grew more quiet, but did not die. The rewards for Buck Loring's capture stood, and even grew a little—but no trace of that master hoodlum was found. The garages run by the comrades continued to operate and prosper. Construction was pushed on the new buildings of Frank Gordon and Paul Gaffney. The city, purged of a great part of its criminal element, breathed a prayer of thanks and settled down to work.

But Frank Gordon did not relax his vigilance, nor allow his comrades to do so. The insurance companies withdrew most of their men from guard duty as they became more and more satisfied that Buck Loring and his gang had fled for good.

"Now is the time for us all to stay wider awake," Frank Gordon told the other garage-men. "Search all strange cars that are left in your shops and keep your night watchmen on the job. Take no chances."

Then the blow descended. It was half-past ten on Monday night. Frank Gordon had just gone to bed when the telephone in the living-room rang. Frank grabbed a dressing-gown and went to answer.

"Hello," came a voice which Gordon recognized instantly. "This is Buck Loring. If you hurry you can get close enough to hear the other five garages run by your pals go up in smoke. It is now ten-thirty-two. At ten-thirty-five the balloon goes up. We put a car in each garage this afternoon. Each of those cars carried a spare tire—stuffed with dynamite and containing a little dingus that will set it off promptly at ten-thirty-five. Try to stop them!"

Loring's nasty laugh came over the wire, preceding the click that severed the connection. Frank Gordon stood for a moment as one stunned. He did not doubt for a moment that the racketeer chief had told the truth. His knees felt weak and sweat gathered on his brow. His eyes sought the clock on the living-room mantel. It was ten-thirty-four. The nearest of the threatened garages was four blocks distant. If he went out on the veranda, he might hear the explosion. He sprang across the room and threw open the door. Then, warned by something like a sixth sense, he flung himself sidewise. Before he struck the floor, the sputter of a machine-gun split the night stillness and angry lead was tearing holes through the half-open door and thudding into the plaster on the rear wall of the living-room. As he fell, Gordon felt a stinging sensation in his right shoulder, like the touch of a hot iron. A bullet had just grazed the flesh.

"Frank, Frank!" screamed his wife. He heard the patter of her bare feet on the floor.

"Stay back, Grace!" he called frantically. "I'm all right."

The rattle of the gangster's weapon ceased and there came the sound of the vandal car speeding away in the darkness. Rising cautiously, Gordon kicked the splintered door shut and dashed to the telephone. In a moment he was reporting to police headquarters. While he was talking, the combined sound of five explosions came across the night, telling him that the garages of his allies had met with disaster.

The hue and cry now awoke anew, with even more vigor than before. The papers screamed the story and printed pictures of the Gordon flat and the five destroyed garages. The police and hundreds of citizens, eager to collect the mounting rewards, literally combed the city and the country for miles around. The radio broadcast the alarm and the wires hummed with it. Strangers on the highways were arrested by hundreds and held for investigation. But the much-sought Buck Loring was not apprehended. The telephone-call to Gordon's flat was traced to a public booth in a railroad station, but no person was found who had seen the fugitive racketeer in that vicinity. The earth seemed to have swallowed up Buck Loring.

The insurance companies faced their loses with chagrin and the fear of more to come—and put more pressure on

the authorities. Stunned by the disaster that had overtaken them despite their caution, the other garage-men seemed to lose heart. They damned the man responsible, but seemed unable or unwilling to do anything else about it. Only Frank Gordon seemed spurred to even greater effort—effort which nevertheless seemed fruitless.

ON the second morning after the destruction of the garage and the attempt on his life, Gordon went downtown for a conference with detectives of the insurance companies.

A half-hour after his departure, a car drew up at the curb in front of the Gordon flat. Two men got out and walked to the front door. One of them carried a black leather case. The other rang the doorbell. In a few moments the bullet-riddled portal was opened by Frank Gordon's wife. She regarded the callers with wide level eyes.

"Good morning, Mrs. Gordon," smiled the man who had pressed the bell. "We are with the Cosmopolitan News Reel. Could we persuade you to pose for a few feet of film beside the place where the bullets struck the wall of your home?"

"Certainly," smiled Grace Gordon, after a moment of hesitation. "Just come in and wait a minute while I fix my hair a little."

She stepped back, leaving the door open. The men entered and closed the door. Mrs. Gordon's back was toward them as she hurried in the direction of a door that led to the rear of the flat. Then she whirled and the astonished men found themselves looking into the muzzle of a rifle. The weapon had been standing beside the front door and the woman had picked it up as she stepped back and invited the men into the house. She had kept it concealed by holding it in front of her as she walked away from the men. The closing of the door had been her signal to face them. The gun was steady in her small hands and her trigger-finger was tense.

"Both of you put your hands up, quick," she commanded.

The black case dropped to the floor and the men obeyed without hesitation. There was something in the young woman's tone that forbade them to tempt Providence.

"You may be camera-men—and you may not," said their surprising hostess. "I'm taking no chances. Keep your hands up and walk into that closet over there."

With a jerk of her head, she indicated a closet near the front door. It was a small place for the hanging of guest wraps and such, and not more than three feet square. The door stood open. The two men crowded into the closet, their lifted hands almost touching the ceiling. Their captor kicked the door shut and twisted the key that was in the lock. She stepped back, still covering the door with her rifle and knelt beside the case which the one man had dropped. In a moment she had it open. It contained no camera, but a blanket, a small tarpaulin and a coil of small rope. The woman's lips tightened and she cast an angry glance at the door behind which she had locked her captives. She rose and went quickly to the telephone.

"Hello, Frank," she cried, five minutes later when she had reached him at the office of the insurance company. "I have two men locked in the cloak-closet. I believe they are Buck Loring's men." She went on to explain what had happened.

"Be careful, dear," cautioned her husband when she had finished. "I'll come home as fast as I can drive."

He arrived less than fifteen minutes later. His wife sat in a chair with the rifle trained on the door of the closet prison. Frank Gordon breathed a sigh of relief as he took the gun from her hands.

"Shall I call the police?" inquired his wife.

"No," answered Gordon in a low tone, his eyes resting thoughtfully on the green bag and its contents. "Not yet, anyhow. I've a hunch that you have a full-grown fortune locked in that closet—if we play the cards right."

Keeping keen watch on the closet door, Gordon moved to the telephone. Presently he was talking to Paul Gaffney.

"Listen, Paul," Gordon said to the red-headed youngster. "I think we are about to bring in Buck Loring. Gather up the others of our crowd and get them to my house in a hurry. We started this together—and we'll claim the reward together. Don't waste time asking questions. Get the gang here quick—and tell them to bring their guns."

Turning from the telephone, Gordon motioned his wife to a corner of the room and walked to the closet door. Standing to one side of it he tapped on the panel with the end of the rifle-barrel.

"You in there," he called. "Where is Buck Loring?"

No answer.

"All right," declared Gordon, after a minute of silence. "If you have to be made uncomfortable before you'll loosen your tongues—we'll do it."

Still no word came from the imprisoned men. Gordon turned and beckoned his wife to his side.

"Go down to the storeroom," he whispered to her. "In that box of stuff that belonged to your father, there is a bellows which he used to smoke his bees when taking the honey. Get it and stuff it full of old rags."

His wife departed on her errand and Gordon stood with a grim, tight-lipped smile on his lean face. His eyes and the muzzle of the gun never left the door. Just as Mrs. Gordon came back from the storeroom, Paul Gaffney and the other garage-men arrived. They bent questioning looks upon Gordon as they filed into the living-room.

"Two of Buck Loring's men are in that closet," Frank told them, indicating the door with his gun. "They came here to kidnap my wife, but she outsmarted them. You fellows scatter around the room and cover that door with your guns. I'm going to persuade those hoodlums to tell us where we can find Buck Loring. If they should fire a shot through the closet door, cut loose and riddle them."

The other men distributed themselves according to instructions. Frank laid down his gun and took the bellows from his wife. Opening the little trap in the bottom of the bellows, Gordon set fire to the rags with which it was filled. In a few moments the instrument was ready, emitting a stream of thick, pungent smoke from its nozzle each time the handles were pressed. Gordon stooped beside the door and began to force the rag-smoke through the quarter-inch crack beneath. A few moments brought results.

"Hey," cried a choking voice from behind the door. "For God's sake, cut it out!"

"Where is Buck Loring?" demanded Gordon grimly.

"Will you let us go if we tell you?"

"You are in no spot to bargain," snapped Gordon. "You'll tell us, or get some more smoke."

NO answer came—but Frank imagined that he could hear whispers in the closet. He began pumping more of the thick smoke through the crack.

"My God, stop it!" begged a gasping voice. "We'll tell you."

"All right," said Gordon. "I'm going to open the door. You step out of there with your hands up. There is a flock of guns trained on the door. Any monkey business and you'll stop a lot of lead."

"Open it—quick!" gasped the spokesman of the captives.

With a glance at his comrades to see that they were all

on the alert, Gordon threw open the door. Two men staggered from the smoke-filled closet. They were gasping for clear air to ease their tortured lungs. Tears streamed from their red-rimmed eyes. They held their hands aloft. Swiftly Gordon relieved them of weapons and pushed them into chairs. The rag-smoke was filling the room.

"Open the windows, you fellows who are near them," ordered Gordon. He picked up the bellows and went to the door, outside of which he deposited the unique instrument of torture.

"Now, you rats," snapped Frank as he again faced the two hoodlums. "We will treat you decently, if you don't fool with us. Where is Buck Loring?"

"He's in the basement under an old fish-house on the lake shore, just north of Edelston. It is—"

"I know the place," interrupted Gordon. "The guys that run it are crooks in Buck's pay. The fish business is a blind. He uses the place as a dock for speed-boats running booze from Canada. Are there any other rats with him in his hole?"

"Yes," answered the man. "Four."

"Is that where you were going to take my wife?"

"Yes," growled the man.

"All right, bozos," said Frank crisply. "We'll look into that cellar. You'll stay here with three of the boys to look after you. If you have lied to us, we'll come back here and smoke you to a crisp."

TEN minutes later, a car was speeding northward, carrying six determined garage-men. They gripped their guns and thought of the reward they would collect and the satisfaction they would derive from running to earth the man responsible for the destruction of their garages. Gordon, at the wheel, knew his way. He had unwittingly hauled several loads of booze away from that old fish-house during his brief employment with Loring.

There was but one road by which an auto could cover the last two hundred yards of the approach to the fish-house. At the entrance of the street, Gordon halted the car.

"We'll go the rest of the way on foot," he said. "Follow me! When I stop in front of the place, the rest of you scatter around it quick. There is only a front door onto the street and a big back door onto the dock. I think the windows are covered with heavy steel screens. We'll figure out the next move when we have surrounded the place."

On the corner across from where the comrades' car had stopped, stood a small building which housed a cheap restaurant of the sort to be found in such districts. Through a grimy window of this place a man with dark, dissipated features watched the garage-men get out of the car. He stepped to a button on the wall and pressed it three times. The café was Buck Loring's lookout station; the button rang a bell in the fish-house. Having flashed the alarm, the swarthy hoodlum hurried from the café by the back door.

Hurrying down the narrow road at the heels of their leader, who carried the high-powered automatic rifle he had brought from his home, the garage-men reached the weatherbeaten building squatted by the lake shore, that was their goal. Just as Frank Gordon halted before the building, there came the starting roar of a powerful marine motor from the rear of the place. The roar rose and smoothed out into a steady rhythm.

"Quick!" yelled Gordon, racing for the back of the building. "They've been warned somehow. They're getting away in a speed-boat."

It was true. Halting on the small dock which extended over the lake from the rear of the fish-house, the six garage-men saw a long, low speed-launch heading out across the water. It was already more than a hundred yards from the dock. In it were five men. Even at the distance, Frank Gordon recognized the gross figure of Buck Loring. There was a medley of shots as the garage-men began popping away hopelessly at the receding craft.

Frank Gordon dropped to his knee and the butt of his rifle snuggled into the pit of his shoulder. His cheek pressed the polished stock. In a drawer at home lay a silver decoration which testified to the fact that Frank had qualified as an expert rifleman in Uncle Sam's army. Steadying the rifle in an expert manner, Gordon drew a fine sight. He judged the range to be about two hundred yards—and he knew that rifle well.

*Crack!*

The rifle spat with sharp anger. The man at the wheel of the fleeing boat swayed and slipped down out of sight. In falling, he dragged the wheel over to the right. The splendid boat answered her rudder like a lady and swung sharply. One of the three men in the stern rose and scrambled toward the wheel. The boat was now presenting her side to the watchers as she continued to swing in an arc.

Frank Gordon's cheek once more pressed the rifle-stock. There was another report. The man who was reaching for the wheel of the launch flung up his hands, spun half around and went overboard. The three gangsters in the stern of the craft suddenly slid down and were lost from sight below the gunwales. They were terrified by that marksmanship. Still on his knee, Gordon watched with narrowed eyes, ready to discourage with a steel-jacketed bullet any attempt to man that wheel.

With the powerful motor wide open, the trim craft skimmed the water as it swung unerringly shoreward. In less time than the telling takes, the boat had shot itself almost entirely out of the water on the trash-littered mud beach, less than a hundred yards from the dock from which it had fled. The garage-men were racing along the beach with drawn guns—all except Frank Gordon, who stood tense on the dock with his rifle at ready.

Buck Loring and his henchmen surrendered without further battle. It was a proud and excited crew of mechanics who turned over the prisoners at police headquarters. Newspaper-men mobbed them with note-pads and cameras.

A FORTNIGHT later Frank Gordon came home with a check representing his portion of the reward money. He handed it to his wife, grinning silently while she stared at it wide-eyed.

"Gee, Frank," cried his wife. "What will we ever do with so much money?"

"I'm going to run one of the best-equipped garages in the city, as soon as the building is finished. While it is being finished, we'll go on that honeymoon trip we couldn't have when we were married. You name the places you want to see."

"If I name them all," she laughed, "we'll never get back."

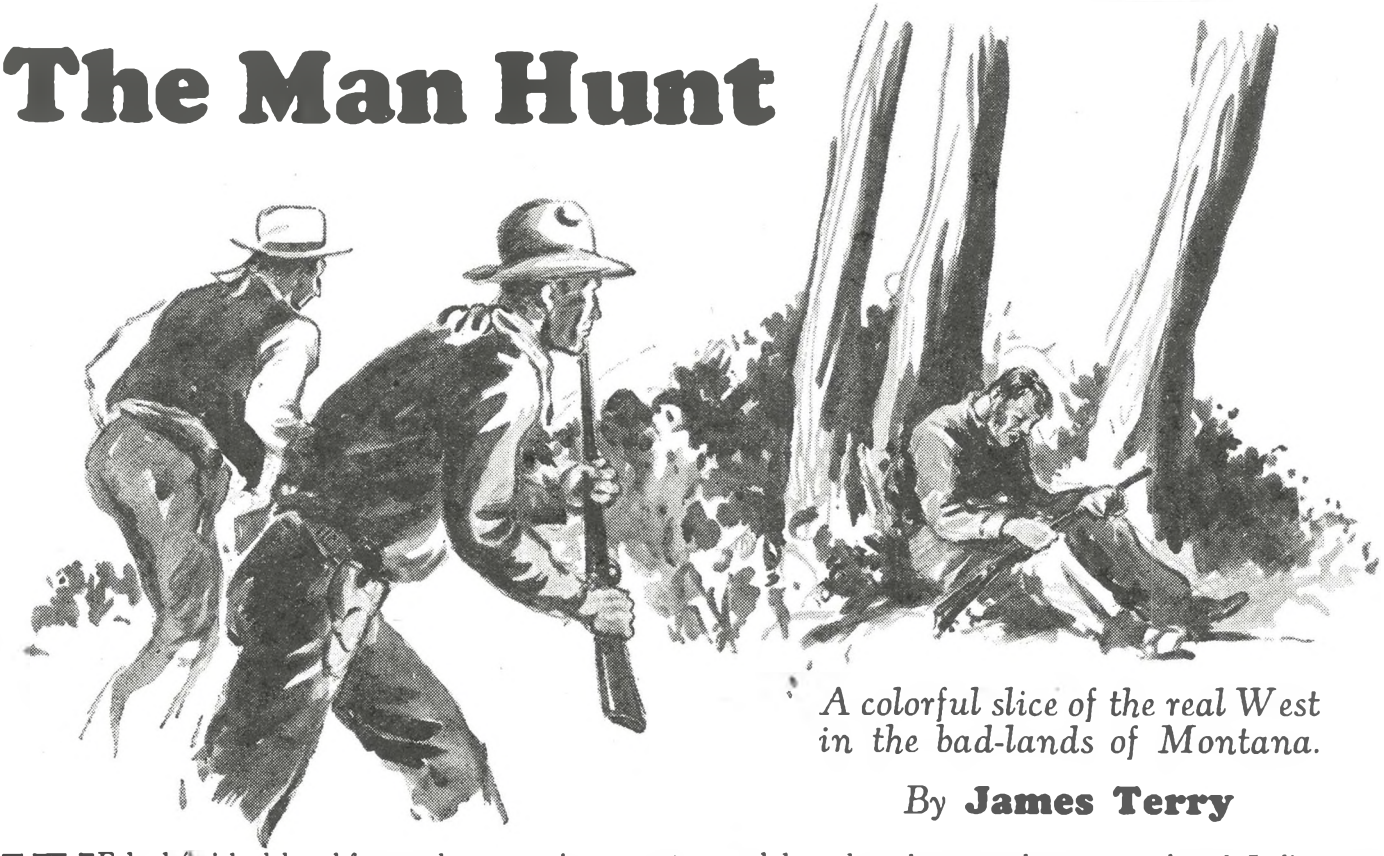
"Then go easy," Frank grinned. "We are still young; we can go every year—with the start that check gives us!"

THE END

**Next month, in "The Day of Doom," Seven Anderton shows a whole city embroiled in the warfare against gang rule.**

# REAL EXPERIENCES

## The Man Hunt



*A colorful slice of the real West in the bad-lands of Montana.*

*By* **James Terry**

WE had finished breakfast and were roping mounts from the "cavy." The morning sun was painting the red Montana hills in a riot of color as a group of nondescript riders rode through a notch in the landscape and approached our outfit. We knew by the way they sat their horses that they were not cowboys nor Indians.

There could be but one answer—a Sheriff's posse. They rode up and dismounted. They were about twenty in number; they had been riding two or three days, were not used to riding horseback and most of them were indoor men. We did not need to be told that—they rode stiffly in the saddle and dismounted as soon as possible; they walked as if they had been shot through both hips, and their toes showed scratches where their spurs struck when walking; besides, some of them had the skin peeled from their nose and cheeks. Bill Hostetter was leading.

Sheriff Hostetter was a political accident—a saloonkeeper swept into office through dissatisfaction with the party in power. He was a big beefy man with plenty of courage but little "savvy"—no man for that office.

The posse now with Hostetter was a sample of the kind of men he generally had along, and the words of an old rider who first recognized them that morning, neatly expressed the sentiments of all of us:

"That's Bull Hostetter with another white-collar posse!"

Hostetter told us quickly what he wanted. A rogue named Krell had broken from his cell in the jail of an adjoining county, brained the jailer, brutally murdering him, and then freed all of the prisoners. Only two—a man waiting trial for horse-stealing and a young lad in for a misdemeanor—had gone with Krell. The horsethief had been recaptured; a mob had taken him in the courtroom and hanged him from the courthouse window.

Posses from several counties were combing the country for the other two and they had been sighted in the "breaks" of the Missouri River near where we then were located. The Sheriff wanted two men who could trail—trackers—and he selected me, and a quarter-breed Indian named Chris Edmunds. We protested vigorously at first, for we had no desire to be mixed up in it. He dismissed our protests with a wave of his hand and deputized a young cowboy by the name of Dell Roberts, who had expressed a desire to go along. Roberts was a native of the country.

We caught horses that would lead good from the ground, and inside of an hour were examining a line camp where the fugitives had spent the night. We took the trail from there and as it led us into the bad-lands we decided it was about two hours old. Both men were afoot and one of them carried a rifle, the butt of it showing plainly in the clay soil. This was a short-grass country but there was excellent cover in spots, there being thick patches of scrub growth of pine and cedar on the slopes and thick aspen thickets covered the bottom lands. There also was sagebrush, greasewood and wild-rose bushes plentiful everywhere. Twenty miles away was a section of the country almost as notorious as the Hole-in-the-Wall of Wyoming—when a fugitive reached it, officers usually gave up.

Edmunds and I told Hostetter to keep the posse together at our back and to keep a close watch ahead of us and we would watch the trail, while young Roberts led our horses.

For about four hours we followed the trail that took us into the wildest country in the State. We were sure by the speed the fugitives were taking, that we had been sighted. We cautioned the Sheriff several times to try to keep his men more quiet, but without effect. They rode or walked along about fifty yards behind us in a semicircle, talking and laughing and taking frequent drinks from the many bottles that seemed to be among them.

We halted to look over the ground ahead and to allow the posse to come closer. One of the outlaws had slipped in climbing a small embankment and the soil showed damp where it had been disturbed, a sure sign that the hunted ones were not far away. Edmunds looked all Indian as he fixed his smoky orbs on that telltale sign.

His blue black hair hung in strings down into his eyes and his nostrils quivered like a race-horse as he studied a thick patch of trees that perched on the top of the slope.

"Chris, what would you do if some one was crowding you right here?" I asked him.

"I'd smoke the hell out of them rubes back there, 'n while they hunted their holes, I'd pull out over the hummock there," he answered.

"My idea exactly," I agreed. "Only—they might take a notion to put the trackers out of commission first!"

I started to walk back to talk to the Sheriff, and as I passed Roberts, I told him to get onto lower ground with the horses and to take his rifle off of his saddle. He started to carry out my orders opposite to the way they were given. I have often wished I had not spoken to him at all.

As I was passing him a little downhill from where he stood, he reached over his horse's neck and pulled his rifle free from the saddle scabbard. At the same time he was looking uphill toward the cedar-covered summit. There came a *smack!* as a swift-moving projectile struck something solid, closely followed by the whiplike report of a high-powered rifle. The shot came from the timber above us and as I dived into a dry wash near by, poor Dell rolled almost on top of me. One look at him was enough. The shot had struck him in the eye and passed out through the back of his head. He never knew what hit him.

There was only one shot fired from the timber; and all but two men of the posse took cover, as might be expected. The two exceptions were the Sheriff and one of his crack riflemen. The rifleman saw a movement in the timber; he aimed and fired as deliberately as if he had been on a rifle-range. Hostetter stood beside him and emptied his rifle into the cover. Then the rest of them got up and for fully thirty minutes a hail of lead rained over our heads.

Edmunds had somehow got down to where I was, and we did nothing at all but hug the ground and hope that those fellows were as good marksmen as Bull claimed. After a while we tried to stop them by word of mouth, but being out of sight and afraid to stick our heads up, we did not have any luck. Chris finally crawled down the draw and signaled the Sheriff to cease firing.

We told him we thought the outlaws were dead or had pulled out, and offered to explore the timber ourselves. We did not believe that anyone was in the place either alive or dead, but we wanted to find out, and to get a shot at the man who had killed Dell. Cautioning the Sheriff not to allow a shot fired until we returned, we mounted and made a big detour to take the place in the rear.

Before we entered the timber from the rear we found the tracks of a man running full speed for the rough country near by. A glance at the country showed us that it would be useless for us to follow him except afoot. It also showed us that the two men had separated or else one of them was still in the timber, either killed or wounded. Fearing to leave our horses, as we had at first intented, I consented to hold them while Chris scouted. He left his rifle and hat with me and slipped away without a sound.

We were directly opposite the point from which the shot had come and I tied the horses' heads together, then hid in a clump of cedar, expecting a long wait. A few moments later I heard some one approaching noisily. I was thoroughly startled and cocked my rifle. The noise stopped. A minute later, some one laughed behind me and I looked around at Chris' black head peering around a bush. He had heard me cock my rifle and as the noise had come from a different point than where he left me, he had quickly slithered around to my rear. Good thing he wasn't the outlaw! "Come on," he said, mounting his horse with no effort at concealment. "Feller deader 'n hell!"

We rode back the way we had come and with the rest of them walked up into the timber.

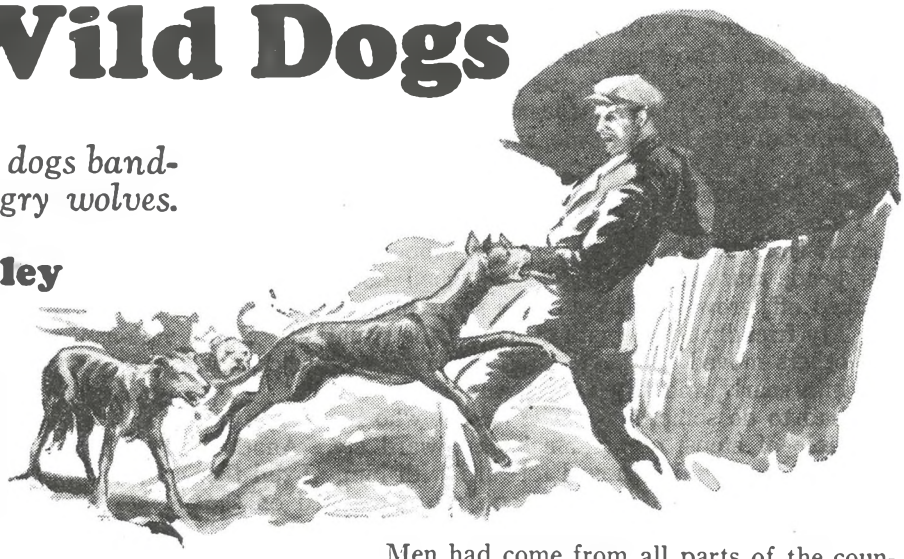
Krell, the bad-man, was sitting between two small cedars in a lifelike posture. He was shot into rags; across his knees was a light shotgun, but a shot from a heavy-caliber rifle had hit it near the breech, rendering it useless.

Hostetter released us and with the taciturn 'breed I rode moodily back to the wagon. Never again was any officer able to get me to serve in a posse.

# Beset by Wild Dogs

*In a boom town the homeless dogs banded together like roving, hungry wolves.*

By **George Hinckley**



I DROPPED off a freight train in Petersburg, Virginia, in the fall of 1916. I had never been South before. My parents had been killed in an accident a few years before and I had had to leave school and go to work. I had tried all kinds of jobs, such as office-boy for a hardware manufacturer and grocery clerk in the shipping department of a store, but had never seemed to get anywhere. I wanted to do clerical work; I couldn't see any future for myself in just manual labor.

I had heard of the boom in Hopewell, Virginia. Here munitions were being manufactured for the Allies, and Hopewell had sprung up like a mining-town. Large salaries were being paid to untrained workers, since the living conditions were bad and it was hard to get trained people to leave their homes. The town was raw and new. Men had come from all parts of the country; many of them were adventurers and that type always goes where money is loose. The danger from the munitions and the unsettled conditions made for reckless spirits. It seemed a good place to get started.

I had heard that Hopewell was a short distance from Petersburg. I went into a cheap restaurant to spend my last quarter on a meal and to find out how to get to Hopewell. I was disappointed when told it was over fifteen miles, but I was assured that trucks and cars were go-

ing there all the time and I could easily get a lift. Maybe I looked too tough—but I couldn't get a ride from anybody; my clothes were shabby, wrinkled and dirty from riding a freight for a day and night, and I needed a shave.

Anyway I tramped the whole way from Petersburg to Hopewell and it seemed like fifty miles to me. It was much colder than I expected it to be in the South at that time of year. I had to keep my hands in my pockets and walk hunched over, which is a tiring way to walk. Plodding along in the cold, and growing hungry again, I pictured in my mind a warm, friendly town with lots of lights and excitement.

Actually Hopewell was the most desolate spot I'd ever struck. There were practically no lights; the rough streets were dark and deserted and the houses were one-story wooden shacks with tar-paper roofs. I walked down what I took to be the main street and out toward the plants, looking for a place to sleep. I couldn't find any warm spot around there so I decided I'd better get away as I didn't want to make my first appearance as a bum. I started through the back streets looking for a pile of lumber or half-finished house where I could sleep until daylight. The only sound was the echo of my steps on the rough planks used for sidewalks.

THEN I heard a peculiar sound which seemed to come and go.

At first I couldn't just place it; then it grew steady and seemed to be coming nearer. It sounded like small feet pattering on the board sidewalk behind me. I whirled around. A pack of vicious-looking mongrel dogs were coming toward me—they were not over twenty feet away.

As they drew closer, a chill of fear went over me. I could see that these were not ordinary dogs—they looked mean and wild; their eyes were gleaming, and their teeth bared. I heard deep growls coming from them, and I realized that in this town of shifting population and few families these dogs had probably been for a long time without masters. They had banded together in a roving hungry pack!

My first reaction was to run, but I realized it would be the worst thing I could do. By then the dogs had surrounded me. Too frightened to do anything, I had probably taken the wisest course in holding my ground. I could see that there were at least six or eight of them. One of them advanced toward me, sniffing at my pants-leg, and growling. The others seemed to be waiting on his next move. This one was undoubtedly the leader.

I knew instinctively that I must control this dog to save myself from attack. Hesitatingly I rubbed my hand over his head, murmuring, "Good dog, good dog!" But he backed off, growling deeper, with something of a snarl in it. My friendly move had not helped the situation. Now the others moved about me, with growls that were changing into snarls, and they began sniffing at me too.

I had to do something. The leader, who had retreated a couple of steps, now came back toward me. Another powerful-looking dog moved forward with him. I did the only thing I could think of—kept my eyes glued on the leader. I could feel that he was hesitating to attack. I started backing away slowly, not letting my eyes waver from him. The other dogs grudgingly made way, sniffing as I passed.

They drew together in the pack again and came after me at the same pace I was moving. I went about half a block. The leader was crouching, his lips drawn back, and I could see he was trying to gather his courage to spring. I took a desperate chance. I stopped and thrusting my arm toward him, I snapped in the deepest and roughest voice I could: *"Get away!"*

All the dogs halted. The leader was still tensed, trying to overcome the old dominance of man and use the natural instincts of the beast in search of food. The other powerful-looking dog, who had kept abreast of the leader, now moved forward. I sensed that he was more curious than vicious. Now I noticed that he was better kept than the others and I decided to pin my hopes on the chance that he had recently had a master.

As he drew near I made another friendly advance. I reached out and patted his head, saying with an attempt at warmth in my voice, "Hello, boy!" He looked at me, cautious, and half friendly. The leader snarled.

This second dog quite evidently was one who liked a master, but who had probably received some kicks lately and was suspicious. I must gain his confidence quickly, for the pack was becoming more menacing. Boldly I rubbed his head and murmured various propitiatory phrases that I had used on my dogs in the past.

SUDDENLY the leader snapped at the big and now friendly dog.

Everything for me depended on his reaction. To my great relief, the dog bared his fangs and gave a warning snarl. But my relief was short-lived. The leader made one mighty lunge at the dog's throat—his lust to kill had an immediate outlet.

The big dog whirled while the leader was in midair and caught the brunt of the blow on his shoulder, but the force of it knocked him off his feet. He rolled quickly over, snapping at the leader as he followed up his vicious attack. Almost before I knew what was happening, the rest of the pack rushed upon the fallen animal. I saw he did not have a chance if he couldn't get to his feet.

Without stopping to reflect, I grabbed the leader with both hands by the loose skin on his neck and jerked back with all my strength. He gave one quick twist out of my grasp and snapped for my hand. I pulled my hand away and felt his teeth rip my coat-sleeve. He gathered himself to spring at my throat.

All this had happened in a flash, but during it the friendly dog had gained his feet, before the pack could pounce on him. He leaped past the foremost and landed upon the back of the leader even as he started to spring at me. And then the others were on him. All I could see was a mass of whirling, threshing bodies. One or two yelled in pain. I knew my dog had not gone down yet.

Hastily I looked around for something to save him. I saw a loose plank, tore it from the sidewalk, swung it over my head and brought it down into the mass of dogs. One of them rolled over helplessly. Again and again I brought it down, trying to aim at the heads of those nearest me. Two of them slunk away whimpering, and then another rolled over. Fortunately it was the leader. Recognizing him, I started toward him with my uplifted board. He gave a yelp and limped hurriedly away. The two remaining dogs lost all their fight when they found themselves deserted, and they scurried away before I could belabor them with my weapon.

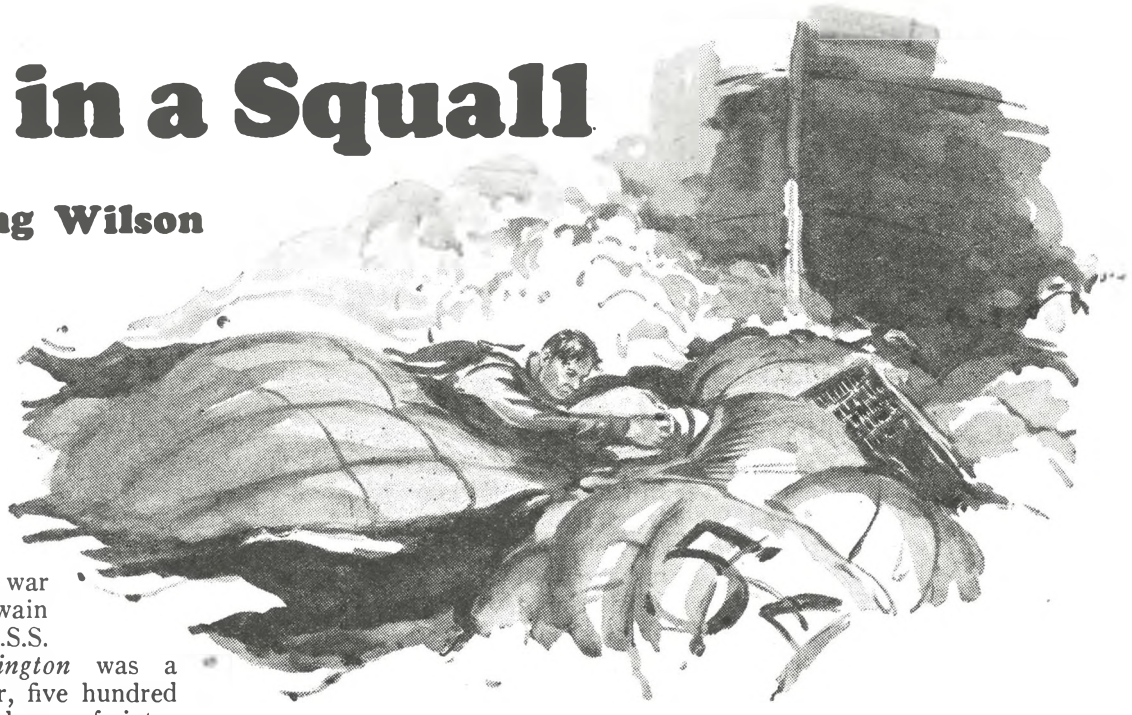
MY protector began to moan. I discovered he was slashed all over, and bleeding badly. Big though he was, I gathered him in my arms and walked back to the plant. I approached the one shack away from the main building in which I had seen a light. The night-guard was in there. I told him I must have attention for the dog. As it happened, he was a lover of dogs.

So the dog who saved me from a serious situation led to my first good job and you can bet he had a home, until he died two years ago. The rest of that pack were subsequently shot by the police.

# Aloft in a Squall

By **Irving Wilson**

*While watching for submarines, this observer was seized by a peril even more deadly.*



DURING the world war I served as coxswain on board the U.S.S. *Huntington*. The *Huntington* was a first-class armored cruiser, five hundred and two feet long, with a beam of sixty-nine feet and a speed of twenty-two knots. She carried a crew of twelve hundred men and officers, and was engaged in convoying troop-transports to France throughout the war.

During the early stages of the war, a catapult was mounted on our quarterdeck and several hydroplanes were taken on board to help us in our submarine warfare. All this seemed fine until we fired our big guns a few times. The concussion from the six- and eight-inch guns tore the wings off the planes, so they had to be abandoned.

Shortly after this occurred we acquired an observation balloon. This balloon proved to be very handy in the war zone. It was equipped with a long cable and a reel of telephone line, and whenever the weather permitted it was let up several hundred feet with an observer in the basket. The observer was equipped with powerful glasses; he could from his altitude scan a vast surface of water, and by means of his phones, could report anything he saw to the central control station located on the bridge of the ship.

On September 16, 1918, we entered the war zone with a convoy of five troopships.

Nothing out of the ordinary happened until early on the morning of the seventeenth, when a lookout spotted a peculiar wake coming toward the ship. The control officer immediately rang for full speed ahead, and took a zigzag course. The general alarm sounded and gun crews stood ready for action. Three sharp blasts of the ship's whistle warned the rest of the convoy and they broke formation and began every kind of zigzagging known to naval warfare. Traveling at full speed ahead the transports soon began to disappear over the horizon.

We remained in the vicinity, circling around and changing our course every few minutes hoping to get a shot at the sub or drop a depth-bomb on it, but the sub failed to show itself so the excitement was soon over, and we hastened to join our convoy.

After rejoining our convoy, the observation balloon was sent aloft with the observer and I was detailed to his phones on the bridge. Everything went along fine until about noon, when the observer phoned down and asked me to have the commanding officer order the balloon hauled in, as he was sure that a squall was coming up. I reported this to the commanding officer—but as the barometer seemed to be steady, coupled with the fact that we were positive the submarine was still in the vicinity, he refused to have the balloon hauled in.

About fifteen minutes later the observer again asked to be hauled in, as he was sure the squall was close. Before I could report to the commanding officer, the squall hit; and believe me, it was some squall! The balloon began spinning like a top and the ropes holding the basket to the balloon twisted together until the observer had to crouch in the basket. He was pinned in so tight that he hadn't a chance to use his 'chute. Then the balloon began to loop the loop and do about every sort of an aerial stunt possible. The phones were jerked from my head, almost taking my ears with them. All this happened in the space of a few seconds.

Men immediately manned the winch to haul the balloon in, but before it could be brought in very far, it collapsed and crashed into the water, with the observer pinned in his basket underneath the great bag. The ship was making about twenty knots and the cable still held the bag when it hit. The whole balloon, pilot and all, swung around to the stern of the ship directly over the great propellers which were still churning the water just below the unhappy pilot, threatening to suck him into the whirling blades almost any second.

In company with the officer of the deck and several others, I raced aft to the quarterdeck, grabbing a line as I went to render whatever aid was possible. We reached the quarterdeck just in time to see Pat McGonagel, a shipmate, go over the side with a knife in his hand. With powerful strokes he swam to the gas-bag, dived under it, and with superhuman strength managed to cut and tear the rigging of the basket away and haul the unconscious pilot out of the basket. His own life was in danger every second from those whirling propellers.

We threw McGonagel a line which he passed around his body, and still holding tightly to the unconscious pilot, he was hoisted aboard ship. The pilot was rushed to the sick-bay where he soon recovered.

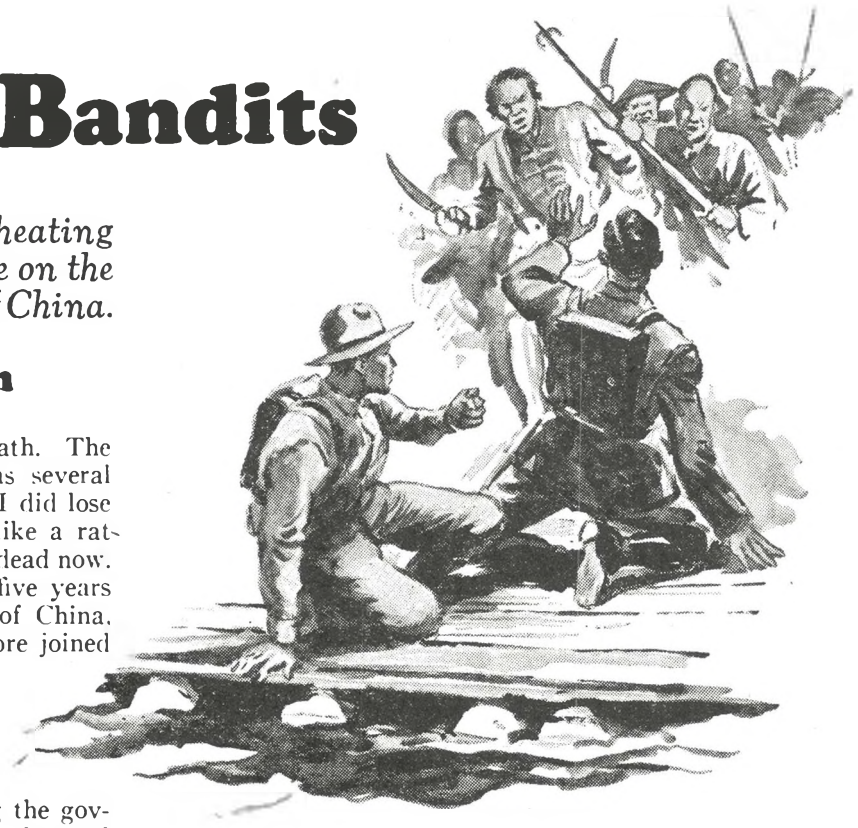
We ganged around McGonagel to pat him on the back and shake hands with him, telling him how proud we were of him, but he would have none of it, insisting that any of us would have done it the same and that it all happened in the excitement of the moment.

All well and good, but our commanding officer cited one "Patrick McGonagel, for extraordinary heroism above and beyond the call of duty." And shortly thereafter Pat was awarded the Medal of Honor—the highest that the United States can award any man.

# Boarded by Bandits

*This young man succeeds in cheating death—in a harrowing escape on the Canton River in the interior of China.*

By **Gunther Speth**



THERE is no thrill like that of cheating death. The time I came nearest to paying forfeit was several years ago on the Canton River in China. I did lose a part of my finger, but had I not torn free like a rat which leaves his leg in a trap, I would have been dead now.

At the time of which I write, I was twenty-five years old, and was spending a year in the interior of China, wandering about sightseeing. I had shortly before joined a party going down to the seaports.

In our party were five men besides myself, also the wife and daughter of a missionary. One of the men was of German-English descent and was born in China where he had much property. Another was an Englishman studying the government and the people. Two were Frenchmen, fur and jewelry salesmen, and the last man was a relative of the missionary's wife, who was a Hollander.

After we left the missionary settlement where I joined the party, we passed through a mountainous region by way of the river gorges. It was late in the fall, and almost every day it rained. The river was too deep and its bed too rocky to use a boat, so we followed along the shore. Six porters carried our luggage, and two more carried the missionary's wife and her twelve-year-old daughter Gerda in a chair slung from their shoulders.

As soon as we were over the mountains, the porters returned home, and we hired three men with their little donkeys to carry our luggage. The two servants of the woman continued with her, for they were from her settlement. All went well, though slowly, until we reached the ferry that was to take us across the river. Then we saw that many soldiers were camped all about it. The Englishman and the German went over to talk to them while we made camp. On their return they told us that the soldiers were county militia guarding the river-crossing against rebel troops on the opposite bank. Like similar soldiers in China, they lived by exacting payments from workers. Instead of paying the ferrymen to take us across, we must pay the soldiers, who then ordered the ferrymen to take us to the opposite shore. If we had paid the boatmen it would have been taken from them, and we would have incurred the anger of the soldiers—an unwise thing to do where only the soldiers have power.

That night we conferred for a long time before we decided to cross the stream. But the rains were becoming worse; if they kept up, in a few days it would be impossible to cross. Finally we decided to carry out our original intention, especially as we had already paid our passage.

The next morning we loaded our baggage, donkeys, and servants on the ferry and left the soldiers. The ferry was like a raft with big, half-rotten logs held together by split logs laid with the smooth side up. About fifty coolies, half-starved, half-naked wretches, were on the boat. They propelled it by two cables that extended from shore to shore. They would form in two gangs, one to each cable, lift them to their shoulders, and then walk toward the rear of the boat. The ferry would be forced away from the shore like a treadmill. There were fifteen men to a cable, and as each man reached the rear he would drop the rope, walk to the other end, and pick it up again. It was like an endless chain. The work was dirty, hard, and wet. The men had pads of hemp on their shoulder where the cable rested. They chanted a sing-song as they walked.

The missionary's wife with her little girl, and the man who was their relative elected to sit on the baggage at the stern of the ferry. The sun was out on the river, and it was very pleasant after the cold mountain passes. The rest of us went to the forward end of the ferry, and sat down on coils of rope. In the center were our servants and the donkeys. The German-Englishman had a light rifle with him—no one else carried any weapons.

Suddenly we noticed the Chinamen had stopped their singing. The boat was stationary in the center of the stream, which was quite wide, but neither deep nor swift. Herman—the German—with the Englishman, went toward the coolies to ask what was wrong. The leader said that the soldiers had given them nothing to take the foreigners across, and now it would be necessary to pay the ferrymen; otherwise all of us would be thrown in the river.

We did not have enough to pay the big sum demanded. The Chinese were actually starving to death, and were savage as wild beasts. All they made was taken from them by the soldiers, and few crossed the ferry now that no one lived in that county or dared to travel.

All at once they rushed us. We became separated from the women; one bunch rushed them, another the servants, and the largest group came at us. They brandished boat-hooks, sticks, and ropes from the deck. Many carried the huge chopping-knives that a Chinaman uses for everything. Herman shot the leader; by then they were so close that we had to go overboard. I tripped on a coil of rope and fell in the water. Being taken by surprise I swallowed a lot of the river water before coming to the top. Everybody in our party was now in the stream, including our servants. Those who had not jumped were thrown in.

I had come up under the boat, drawn there by the current. I grabbed a rope hanging down over the side and remained unseen long enough to cough up the water I had swallowed. The Chinese were all about the edges of the

boat, and threatening to kill us if we attempted to get back on again. One saw me, and jammed his iron-shod boat-hook against my hand, nailing me to the boat. I could not tear loose for the boat-hook had split my index finger, and was holding it there against the side. I drew myself up—though the Chinese were poking at me with poles, this time trying to kill me—and then dropped back in the water, with all my weight tearing on my finger. I was free. The blood poured out of my finger, for the end of it, torn off, was still pinned under the boat-hook.

My pack was still on my shoulders; we kept all our valuables with us that way so they would not be stolen. I managed to swim with the current until I reached a sandbar. Then I paused to see what had happened to the others. The Englishman and the German had swum back toward the stern of the ferry to save the woman as they came in the water. They managed to save the woman, but the current swept the child away from them, and they could not find her in the dirty water.

The sandbar I was on was quite a distance from shore. I was weak from loss of blood, and the pain cramped my arm severely. I was up to my chest in water, but managed to remove part of my pack. It was slow, painful work swimming to shore; if I had not occasionally felt other sandbars under my feet and got breathing-spells, I could not have made it. The Englishman came back in the water and with the help of the others carried me up on shore. I must have fainted, for I knew nothing more until the Englishman broke a bottle of iodine from his pack and poured it over the stub of my finger.

The little girl Gerda and our servants were the only ones drowned. The others had managed to swim to shore. We built a big bonfire on the shore from driftwood, and dried out our clothes. My arm was paining me badly by this time. The missionary's wife nursed me tenderly, and only by chance did I see her weeping bitterly for her lost child. She was one of the bravest women I have ever known.

The next day we followed along the shore until it rained. Then the creeks across the sand became so big we had to go into the woods where fallen trees would bridge them for us. Toward night we came to a small village which was inhabited. We had lost very little of our money, and here we bought food and shelter for the night. All we had with us were our clothes and three dispatch-cases or packs. The rebels we never saw.

The next day we hired some porters to carry the woman and myself to a village farther down where we could get a junk to carry us the rest of the way to Canton. We reached there late at night, and the next day were on our way down the river. At Canton I was carried to the Swedish hospital. The doctor had to remove more of my mangled finger, but thanks to the Englishman's prompt action I was not a victim of blood-poison. A few weeks later I left the hospital and completed my journey back to Shanghai.

# Lost in the Coal Mine

*A terrifying picture of work far underground, before modern labor laws were in force.*

By **G. O. Adams**

THIS occurred forty-seven years ago, when as a boy of eleven, I worked as a door-boy in the Hillman Mine at Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, before it was opened through to the surface via the Hillman Slope.

Working conditions fifty years ago may be interesting to workers in the coal-mines of today. At that time, we went down a perpendicular shaft eleven hundred feet to the fourteen-foot vein, then followed the zigzag course of the gangway on a continuous climb for about three and one-half miles to where we worked, about five hundred feet from the surface.

There was no age-limit in those days; neither were there such things as electric lights, carbide lights, electric donkeys, or telephones in the mines; as a matter of fact, the operators did not even furnish enough air to expel coal dust, powder fumes or sulphur fumes; and on account of the gas that accumulated, the miners on the night shift were compelled to use what the operators called safety-lamps, which was a lantern with a hook for a handle, and wire gauze instead of glass, with a light about as big as a rubber on a lead pencil—the cause of innumerable accidents to the miner, on account of insufficient light.

The principle of the safety-lamp was that the gas could go through the gauze and ignite, but flame being thicker than gas, the flame could not come out through the gauze and ignite the gas on the outside, and thereby destroy property or mules. You see mules cost money, while the miner could be replaced without expense to the operators.

The mules were worked in teams of from two to six mules, single file, so as to allow them to go between the cars and the rib, as the jagged side of the gangway was called; the first mule was called the lead mule, the next the first swinger, next the second swinger, and so on to the mule next to the cars, which was called the breeching mule. The lead mule carried a light on its collar.

ONE night about eleven-thirty, my driver and his two door-boys, with our team of mules, had set a string of cars on a siding; we finished our lunch of bread and cheese while waiting for the mules to finish their feed, before starting back with a string of loaded cars. We door-boys were nicknamed "Big John" and "Little John." I was Little John.

"Yes, sir," said Driver Evans, pointing to a heading about ten feet away, "that heading is the one that Fire-boss Williams fell down, and was injured so bad that he could not move; when he was found, he was being eaten alive by mine rats!"

Evans had previously told us about a mule falling down a heading into a pool of sulphur water and being drowned; he had filled our minds so full of floods, fires, explosions, and cave-ins, that both Big John and myself were edging away from the heading; we were wondering if that was really wind, or was it rushing water that was forcing itself against the main air door?

Then just at the time our minds were filled with thought of such scenes, Evans, with a forcible exclamation, said: "My light is going out!" At this remark, Big John and myself both looked at our lamps, and with dismay all three knew that they would soon be in the dark. Such utter darkness is impossible to realize by any one who has not worked in a coal mine, miles from daylight.

WHAT caused our dismay was that the lamps were filled and locked by the fire-boss at the foot of the shaft, and the fire-boss alone was the only one allowed to open them or light them; if he forgot to fill them then it was necessary for some one to travel three miles in the dark to the foot of the shaft, to get new ones.

I knew who would have to go—for I had worked in the mines longer than Big John. Just then Evans spoke. "Well, Little John, it's up to you to get us new lamps!"

He afterwards told how he could see me getting pale underneath the soot and grime on my face; and if I had known even a portion of the fear and horror that I was to face on this trip, nothing could have started me on it.

On account of the length of the lamps, which on me nearly touched the ground, Evans took off his belt, and securely fastened them around my waist, which allowed me the necessary freedom of my hands for traveling in the dark—placing one foot on the rail, sliding it along on top of the rail, shuffling the other foot alongside the rail, so as not to lose the track; holding one or both hands out in front, so as not to bump into a mine car, or mine door.

I had not gone very far—my mind still filled with the gruesome tales Evans had been telling us—before I began to notice things I had never noticed before. I had never heard so many, and, judging by the noise they made, such large rats as scurried out of my way; I had never before noticed the continual *drip-drip-drip* of sulphur water from the roofs and ribs of the gangway.

I had traveled for what to me seemed to be hours and many miles, but what was really about two miles, when I was brought up short and sharp, with the unmistakable sounds, that preceded a large cave-in. I listened for the accompanying roar of the fall of coal and slate, trying to locate the direction, and decided that it was at my rear. Knowing from experience that a large fall of coal and slate sometimes followed the roof of the gangway for some distance beyond the original cave-in, I proceeded to put as much distance as possible between myself and the cave-in. For greater speed I took my foot from on top of the rail, and placed it crosswise of the rail; in this position the rail, being in the hollow of my shoes, my foot would not slip off the rail so easily, and I could travel much faster.

When I had put about a quarter of a mile or so behind me, and was beginning to feel very tired and weak from the extra exertion, my foot struck an obstruction and I pitched headlong onto a pile of jagged lumps of coal, and knew I had stumbled onto a cave-in. Instantly the truth rushed over me—when I had changed my foot from the top of the rail, and placed it crossways, it elevated the toe on my foot, and in my haste to escape the cave-in, I had missed a switch, had made a half circle—a very easy thing to do in the dark—and the cave-in that I thought was in my rear, was in reality back of me but to one side, on another branch of the mine. So when I thought I was running away from it, I was really running into it. By this time I was scrambling, rolling, and tumbling over the big chunks of coal. Then my feet struck cinders and coal-dust; I knew I was off the cave-in, and started to run, forgetting in my haste and fear, to put my hands in front of me. I was brought up short with a sickening thud—I had crashed head-first into the rib of solid coal. If you should even strike your hands on the rib of solid coal, it would give you ugly cuts and scratches; so you can imagine the shape I was in. I was bleeding all over my hands and face.

Exhausted with fear, excitement and injuries, I lay for a while gasping for breath. Finally I got to my feet, and started hunting for the rail, but could find no rail. Then I knew I had wandered into some old abandoned part of the mine, and was lost, miles from my fellow employees.

If I was completely unnerved, surely I had occasion to be. All I remember of that period was of continually running back and forth, staggering, crawling and bumping into solid coal, until finally my feet flew out from under me, and I started sliding down a musty water-covered declivity—not very fast, but try as much as I could, I could not stop; after sliding for some time, something caught me temporarily, then let go—just as my feet flew out into space it caught again, and held me hanging in the air, with something hanging onto my waistband.

My previous terror faded into nothingness before the horrible position I was now in—hanging by this precarious hold; wondering if I would drop many feet, onto jagged coal and slate, or into a pool of water—in either case to die in an abandoned part of the mine, where no one would ever find me!

I could hear the *drip-drip-drip* of the musty water; it seemed to be ticking off the seconds that I had to live. Then another sound began that filled me with horror—surely it was the squeaking of enormous rats! I felt around to locate what held me, and for the first time noticed that the safety-lamps were still fastened to my waist, and I was hanging from the hook, or handle of one of the lamps. Just as I felt I was about to die from terror and loss of blood, I saw the reflection of a light. I thought it was a mine fire. This was too much; I struggled and fell into a void of unconsciousness.

I came to again, choking, aching all over, my face and hands smarting and paining, to see a mule driver whom I did not know, throwing coal-dust on my face and hands. He was saying, "It's all right, buddy—it's all right!"

THE driver took me, as soon as I was able to walk, to the fire-boss at the foot of the shaft.

"I was coming up the fourteen-foot level," he said, "when suddenly, my lead mule Black Jenny snorted, jumped around, and started back for the cars as though the Old Nick was after her, tangling up my swing mules—and I got caught between the breeching mule and the cars. After using some language on them that they understood, I got them calmed down, went to see what had scared her, and found this undersized runt of a door-boy lying on the track in front of a heading that comes from an old abandoned part of the Hillman vein; he was bleeding all over his face and hands, covered with musty sulphur water, his clothes all torn, and three safety-lamps all broken up, hanging from his waist. He was crying: 'Don't let them eat me up—don't let them eat me up!' What he meant, and how he got there, is beyond me! I gave him first aid by throwing coal-dust on the cuts and scratches to stop them from bleeding, and pasted a cud of tobacco on the larger cuts; then I half carried, half dragged him down here to you."

They finally got out of me what my errand was; I was sent home and the lamps sent by an older messenger.

Although I worked in the mines for eight years after that, I never went after any more safety-lamps.

# "SIX SECONDS DEAD!"

What would you do if you had been electrocuted—then brought back to life? How would you change your life if you had had a glimpse of death? That is what everyone wanted to know about the young criminal lawyer who had gone to the electric chair with the last words, "I did not kill him!" The nation clamored for news, but no reporters could reach him. He isolated himself in a prisonlike estate while rumor ran rife. Everyone thought there must be *one* thing which would bring him back to the normal life that had been snatched from him. That one thing makes a baffling, breathless mystery serial by that author of many striking stories — George F. Worts. "Six Seconds Dead," along with the continued adventures of the unconquerable Tarzan and the dramatic characters in "Devil's Salvage," the thrilling climax of Captain Putta's hazardous experiences with the Russian Reds, and short stories by Arthur K. Akers, Jay Lucas, Bud La Mar, Clarence Herbert New, Warren Hastings Miller, George Barton, Henry La Cossitt,—new to these pages but the author of a number of first-rate stories,—and others will appear in the—

## March BLUE BOOK Magazine

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