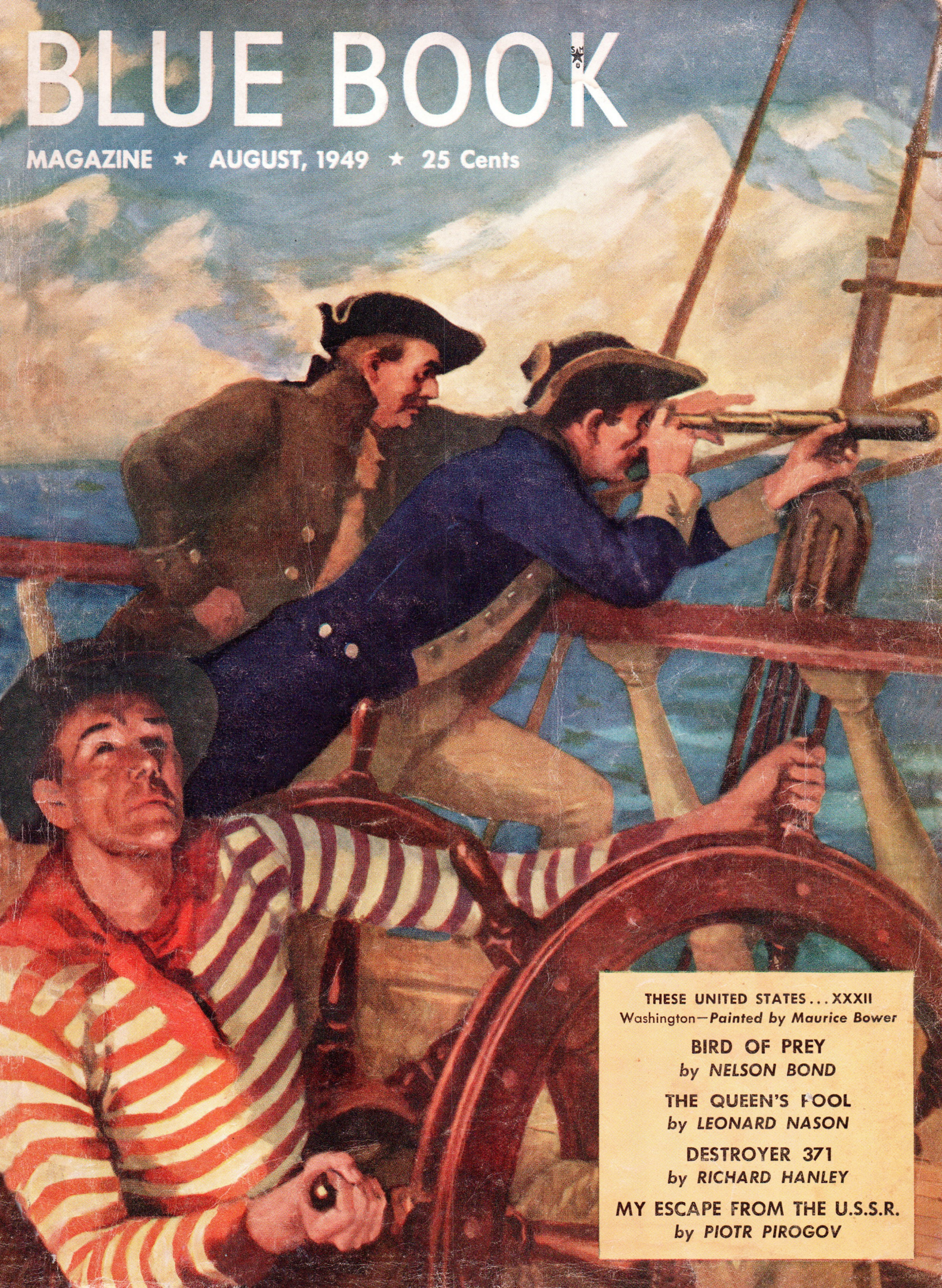


BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE ★ AUGUST, 1949 ★ 25 Cents



THESE UNITED STATES... XXXII
Washington—Painted by Maurice Bower

BIRD OF PREY
by NELSON BOND

THE QUEEN'S FOOL
by LEONARD NASON

DESTROYER 371
by RICHARD HANLEY

MY ESCAPE FROM THE U.S.S.R.
by PIOTR PIROGOV



THESE UNITED STATES....XXXII—WASHINGTON

River of the West

THE COLUMBIA RIVER, in Washington, takes its name from a United States ship, as famous in her day as was the *Constitution*, for to her had fallen the honor of first carrying this country's flag around the world. In September, 1790, a bare month after her return from this adventure, the *Columbia*, refitted, and under the same commander, Robert Gray, left Boston on a fur-trading mission to the Northwest. On May 11, 1792, seeking trade, Gray sailed the *Columbia* through "foaming waters and seething breakers," across the bar into the mouth of the river which up to then had been no more than a name on the maps, the "*River of the West*." His venture gave America her first claim to the Oregon country, the vast, rich Pacific coast region, west of the Rocky Mountains, north of California, and south of Alaska.

In 1805 Lewis and Clark arrived on the Pacific coast, by way of the Snake and Columbia rivers, to strengthen the American claim. During the

years immediately following, private American interests vied actively with the British for the possession of "Oregon." In 1811 John Jacob Astor of the American Fur Company founded Astoria. From 1824 to 1846 Dr. John McLoughlin of the Hudson's Bay Company ruled the Northwest with justice and wisdom from Vancouver, lending a helping hand to American settlers. An agreement between the British and the United States, to occupy the territory jointly, operated smoothly until 1846, when the pressure of a strong provisional government of American settlers, as well as the Democratic Party slogan, "Fifty-four Forty or Fight," and other influences induced the British to accept the forty-ninth parallel as their southern boundary.

In 1853 the Oregon settlers north of the Columbia successfully petitioned Congress for the right to organize as a separate territory. Washington territory, thus created, prospered and increased with additional land grants, which it sought to insure

with statehood. Finally, after twenty-two years of active campaigning, on November 11, 1889, Washington was admitted to the Union.

At the time of the Klondike mining rush in 1897, Seattle became the gateway to Alaska and the Orient. Today it is still the chief port of the State, but shares its load with other important cities on Puget Sound, such as Tacoma, Everett and Olympia, all providing direct American shipping points to the ports of Asia and Alaska.

In the production of lumber, Washington has been first every year, except one, since 1905. Agriculture is the chief occupation of the State, and it leads the nation with its annual apple crop.

Gray's discovery, the Columbia River, controlled by a great series of dams, including Bonneville and the Grand Coulee, is the greatest single source of power in the United States, perhaps the world. The country to which Robert Gray's courage first gave us claim has more than proved itself worthy.

Readers' Comment

The Spice of Life

VARIETY is truly the spice of life, and BLUE BOOK seems to be fulfilling its announced intention of giving the best, the newest, the different to its readers. A male's magazine? Sure it is, but the women love it too (just read the letters to the editor each month!), and fathers praise it for its beneficial effects on their youngsters.

There seems to be something eternal about it that makes the magazine appeal to persons of both sexes and all ages—something I consider typical of our way of life. I think that something is Change, advancing to new and better horizons. Stories of the past, the present, even the future, always changing, constantly searching for new and better material, BLUE BOOK seems to be truly symbolic of the progressive spirit existing in America today. —CHARLES E. FRITCH

The Pacific Articles in Book Form?

ASSAULT this typewriter with two stiff middle fingers, not to heap praise upon one of the outstanding magazines on the news stands, but rather to make a suggestion.

Having served in the Pacific with a Seabee Unit, I have been following your latest series of biographical history in this area. They have been fine reading, and at last we who were in the enlisted ranks are understanding the reason for sudden changes that were a mystery to all at the time.

I personally would appreciate it if this series could be printed and bound, and purchased at a nominal fee. There must be thousands of your readers who would also be interested in such a copy.

Thanks for all the many hours of good reading that you have supplied me over a fifteen-year period. Keep up the good work. —LEN WILD.

Full Strength

WHEN I want good reading, full strength, I go to BLUE BOOK, and my only gripe is that it doesn't come out weekly. I try to fill in the gaps with cartoon mags, we're-going-to-fight, or we're-not-going-to-fight, buy this bra and don't-read-just-study-the-photo magazines — but I come away hungry.

In BLUE BOOK I have found a magazine unafraid to conjecture the orders and disorders of the future. Skilled in making the past human and alive.

I read stories of the war that are not "war stories." I read tales I would be proud to have written. I read—and never seem to get enough. Keep it up, editors and writers.

—LACHLAN MACDONALD.

BLUE BOOK

August, 1949

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

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Four F-90 jets—bolts of blue murder—streaking down the long corridors of the North. Blue Flight was trying it again.

THE knock was discreet, or so it seemed. Sergeant Copice went easy on the knuckles, because it takes little to split tight cold flesh when the mercury is dawdling at seventeen below. A one-fingered mitten protected his left hand, and a leather flight jacket zippered to his chin aided somewhat in keeping his head erect and produced an absurd distortion of military posture.

That's how Sergeant Copice first noticed the khaki jacket swaying on the wall opposite the Colonel's desk. A scythe-keen draft piercing the insulation vitalized the garment with a vague flutter of animation.

It was a fine jacket, made of expensive material. Well worn but neatly pressed, and gay with regulation insignia. On the left breast gleamed a pair of command-pilot wings and three strips of active service ribbons. They weren't Pentagon or Grosvenor Square ribbons, either.

"Jeepers to Christmas!" Sergeant Copice squeaked over his collar. "What in the name of God is that?"

There was feigned reverence in his eyes, and roguish respect in his fingers as he lightly stroked the cloth and smoothed out an imaginary crease in a pocket flap. He turned and awaited an explanation.

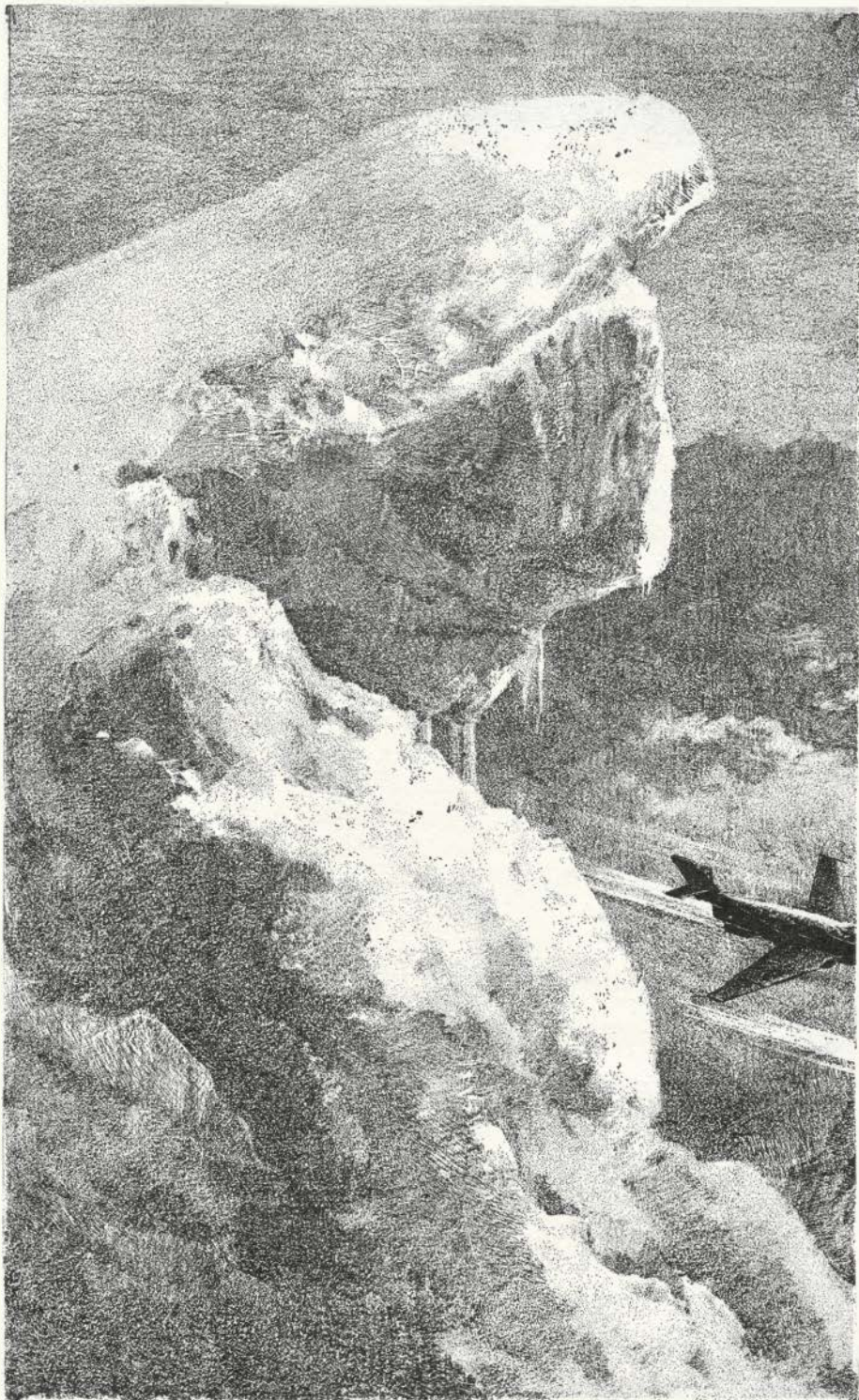
"Musty records will disclose," Colonel Blaine Horrocks responded, placing the tips of his fingers together, "that officers of the air arm of the United States once wore such habiliments, Sergeant. A little beyond your barren memory, perhaps, but nevertheless regulation attire for military men who had slipped the surly bonds of earth."

Sergeant Copice bowed in reverence and partially closed his eyes. "It's coming back, Colonel. Some of it is quite clear now. They also wore pants that were pink and hats that were—what was the word?"

"Rawnychy. Regulation, mind you, but with just a dash of studied carelessness."

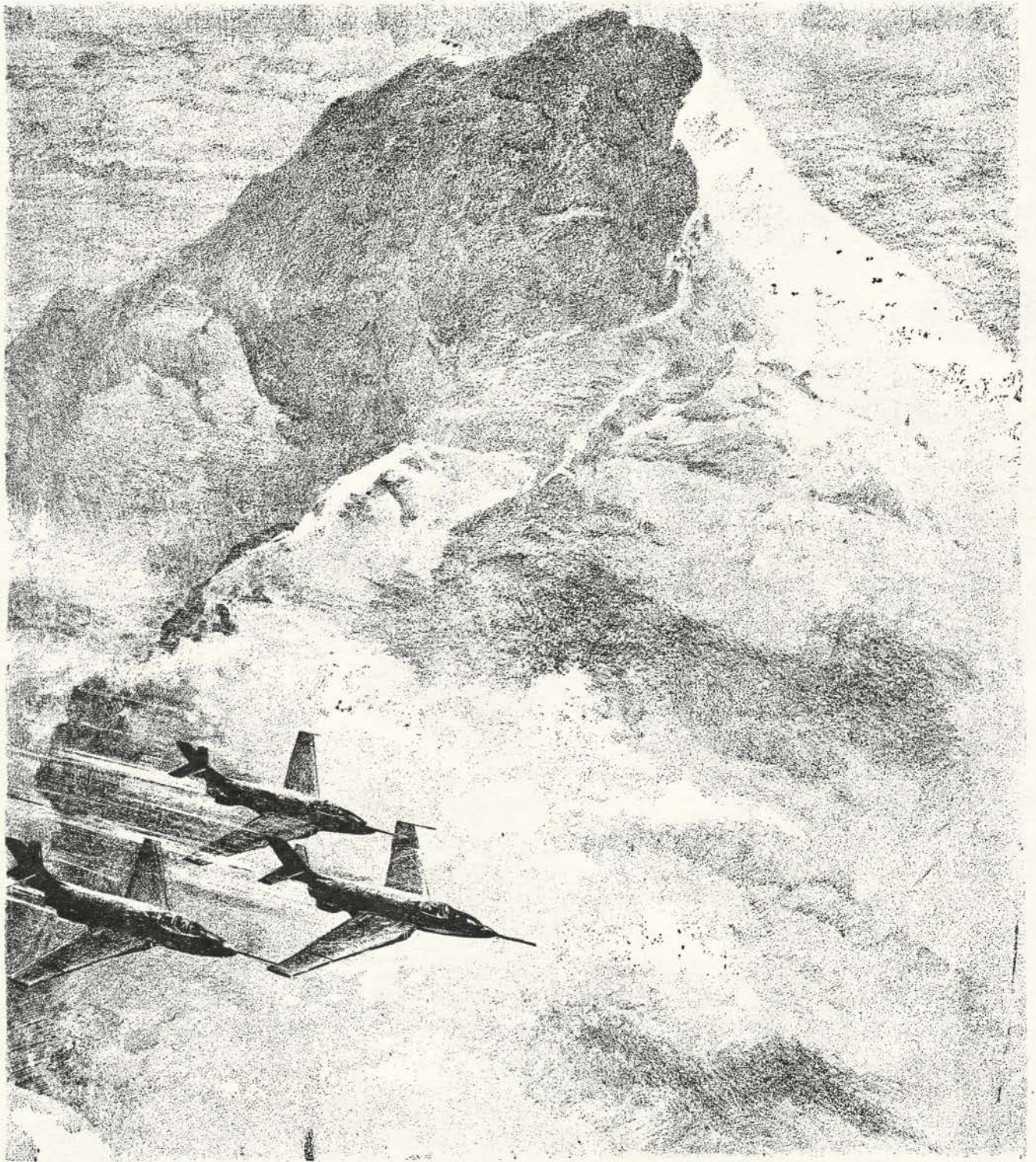
"There was a large field with stuff called grass on it. You could walk from one building to another without parkas or snow-packs. Water ran from faucets, and you could take a shower under canvas. I mean you could take all your clothes off," Copice added like a schoolboy painfully reciting Horace.

"Quite often the sun shone. A fragmentary feature, but when it rained, one might walk through a small village." Copice's eyes took on a new



THE SEAT

THESE NEW JET PLANES ARE SO FAST THAT A PILOT IN TROUBLE CAN'T BAIL OUT. HE HAS TO BE SHOT OUT, SEAT AND ALL, BY AN EXPLOSIVE CHARGE. OVER ALASKAN MOUNTAINS THAT EXPERIENCE IS SOMETHING REALLY SPECIAL.



OF THE MIGHTY

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

Illustrated by HAMILTON GREENE



"Throw her around when you get up there. . . . It may be the last time you fly an F-90."

gleam. "There were cottages with thatched roofs, and small flowers smiled from the caves and window boxes."

"Would the Colonel please proceed just a few yards farther down that road?" the Sergeant pleaded, obviously a shaken man.

"A small patch of grass over which swung a creaky signboard. A long warm bench outside where one might quaff Worthington and quietly converse with the yeomen of old England. It wasn't good ale, but the air was like wine."

Sergeant Copice aroused sinew and muscle. He drew himself to attention: "May I ask one question, man-to-man, sir?"

"I must remind you, Sergeant, that you've about exhausted your quota for this month. However—"

The Sergeant jerked a gloved thumb toward the gay blouse: "Just what the hell is this all about?"

Colonel Horrocks allowed memory free rein while his hands pawed at a slim stack of papers. He relaxed wide-legged in the mellow warmth of the old Black Lion. Low oaken beams stained with tobacco smoke of decades could be reached by an upraised arm. Ancient harness brasses polished to gleaming jewels decorated the great arched timber over the bar. Rows of pewter mugs presenting the gun-metal gleam of usage were ranked against the mirror, and the glow of quiet hospitality flowed through it all.

A man of thirty-five should never come back from his first war.

"Washington has decided," he explained dully, "that the most efficient squadron in the Alaskan Fighter Command will be transferred for European service within a month."

"Would that mean anything, sir?"

"In basic English, it means that either 334 or 327 Squadron will go to

Great Britain for what is known as integral training."

Copice placed a sheaf of papers on the Colonel's desk and rasped a sigh. "Well, it's a pretty jacket, that, but here's the flight-training reports. Blue's still wet-nursing Lieutenant Sothern. I guess that puts the zinger in for 334."

The Sergeant took another look out the Colonel's window. Snow swirled and built up angled drifts against the framework. A big booming Sno-Go churned down the runway opening a gash for the jet fighters. Copice started for the door, turned and inquired with a nostalgic bleat: "Colonel, did you prefer Worthington to Bass?"

"Get out of here, you malt-minded oaf!" the Colonel roared.

THE F-90 jet fighters of the Alaskan Command had been carrying out routine exercises along the Arctic Circle for more than six months. The base was situated as far north of Fairbanks as human endeavor and mechanized equipment permitted. In the summer they fought insect pests and fog. In the winter they battled subzero temperature and blizzards. The cold immobilized muscles and all normal ambition. Snow hampered every honest effort, and smothered most features of the training routine.

Colonel Horrocks had driven his squadron with savage determination. Whenever the runways could be plowed, he kept his jets flying. Gunnery, tactical maneuvers, long-range scouting programs, were devised and gravely attempted. What efforts were completed in the face of the roaring gales were usually canceled out by the lackluster performances of Lieutenant Erin Sothern, the No. 2 pilot of Blue Flight. To Horrocks that was puzzling, because when they had been

flying Lockheed F-80s at Andrews Field outside Washington, Sothern was the hot-rock pilot of the outfit. Up here in Alaska, flying the newer and more efficient F-90, Sothern was the millstone about the necks of No. 334 Squadron.

In formation Sothern was a menace. What air gunnery he had attempted was so feeble that no one had the heart to record the figures. On precision bombing he usually dropped his rack smack into the first crevasse he spotted. All his aërobatic dexterity was behind him, and any youngster for some slick camera-gun shots for his training record always selected Lieutenant Sothern for his target. Sothern couldn't fly an F-90 well enough to evade the lens of a two-dollar Brownie.

All this was repeated and rehashed in Captain Foyne's training report on Blue Flight. It was all there in facts and figures. Horrocks looked up from the despondent details to the dress blouse on the wall. The chance he would be wearing anything like that within a few weeks in Britain filtered away like the puff of a drift-marker.

The papers splayed as he shoved them away. Blaine Horrocks suddenly felt old. A dragging weight clung to his shoulders. Not the weight of years, but the drag of experience. Too many years of gnawing responsibility that muffled the tunes of music which can skirl through the frame of one whose senses are not dulled by the crush of command. His hands were parchment-dry and cold. The icy blue of his eyes was filmed over with despond, and the planes of his rugged face dusted with loneliness.

Outside, the roaring Sno-Go took another cut at the curling drift blocking the runway. With any luck Blue Flight might be able to get away. Who knows, Erin Sothern might shake out of it!

The long bow of Horrocks' memory hurled a shaft of yearning across a continent and spanned an ocean. He cogitated on the basic value of nostalgia. Would it be the same in Britain? Would the fields be as green as he remembered? The lanes beyond the village as enticing? The gillyflowers as sweet? Were Janice Buckmaster's eyes the same periwinkle blue—her voice as gay and musical? Her smile as welcoming and warm?

It all came back with the possibility of returning to Britain: That last night before the meager fire in the saloon-bar of the Black Lion.

"There isn't much I can do now," he said to the girl in field boots, whipcord breeches and tweed jacket. "I've nothing to offer—compared to what you've known."

"I think I understand," she said. "There has been a lot that was good in it. I've no regrets, at any rate." She stared at the puny glow in the grate. "It has been something I shall always remember."

He knew she meant she had always been able to take the rough with the smooth. There had been plenty of rough in the past few years. Two brothers had gone down in Hurricanes during the Battle of Britain. The man she was to marry had been left with the valiant rearguard that made the glory of Dunkerque possible. Her father had been buried under tons of masonry during an air raid while attending an agricultural conference in London, leaving Janice to carry on and oversee the work at Harleston Farm. The war was always snatching her men, severing the joyous cords that brought the warm throbs to her heart.

She suddenly sat up straight: "I can't go to America. The old country needs me. Will you stay here and help take over? Harleston's a good farm. We could make a go of it. Together we couldn't help but put it over. All that, and ourselves."

"Now you're propositioning me!" he gasped.

"I'm just fighting for what I've had, what I've known. What I want for the rest of my life."

"It wouldn't work, Janice," he said with slow decision. "I don't have that kind of courage."

She stared into space and then agreed: "No, I don't suppose it would work."

The depth of her brave smile engulfed him. "You make me feel like a louse."

She placed her hand firmly on his shoulder. "Don't ever feel that way. I'm going now. Don't get up. We'll shake hands here. This is how I want to remember it all."

Horrocks remembered all that. The way she smiled bravely when she held

out her long brown hand. Her firm grip sealing the friendship, and her bold contempt for sentimentality, as she strode to the door. Two days later Horrocks took his Thunderbolt fighters home. . . .

Why the devil couldn't young Sothern fly as he had at Andrews Field?

He turned and rifled the papers again. It was only a matter of completing their Arctic training on schedule. The maintenance mob had done their job. They'd solved the problem of pre-heating the jet motors so they could get every ship into the air without undue delay. The new hydraulic fluid had beaten the subzero temperatures. They had had no landing-gear or aileron-boost trouble to speak of. They hadn't wiped off one aircraft. Only young Sothern stood between them and their escape from the Arctic wastes, the constant danger of weather, the perishing temperature. Any reasonable effort on Sothern's part would take them back where 334 Squadron had seen its greatest glory and enjoyed physical comfort.

When a man's thirty-five, he relishes a lot of warmth—of some kind.

FOUR F-90 jets took turns roaring down the snow-banked runway, bodkin-beaked projectiles of military might, their dartlike simplicity fantastic in contrast to the piled-up ramparts of an Arctic defense point. Bolts of blue murder streaking down the long corridors of the North.

Blue Flight was trying it again. An advanced formation exercise designed to hone the reflexes to a miracle keenness, a test of eye coordinated to muscle—a grim game, its goal to develop instant response to an etherborne order. A mad course of precision-flying through the high winding galleries of the Arctic Circle.

Four men strapped and fastened to the internal structure of supersonic missiles, the death-chairs of national defense. Desperate dicing with craggy chance through treacherous turbulence within suicidal space. An instant of mechanical failure, a breach of formation discipline, just one of a hundred possible flicks of human error, and the full penalty was imposed. It was a spectacle of indescribable beauty tabbed with the highest fee for the fiddler.

Erin Sothern flew No. 2 in the diamond element, a position demanding instant response to Captain Foyné's orders. Once the fantastic snap-the-whip business began, the rest were committed to follow. The orders were predicated on the direction, width or typography of the particular crevasse they were negotiating. If Foyné made the right decision, if his judgment of distance was correct, if he could defy snow-blindness and evade the white-

sheathed claws protruding from the cañon walls, they would get through and complete the exercise.

If not—

There was plenty of time for Erin Sothern to ponder on this as they climbed through the tattered skeins of mist for their operating altitude. They were supposed to be intercepting a formation of enemy bombers coming in from over the cap of the globe. It was presumed this imaginary attack would take full advantage of the crevasse cover to evade the prying feelers of radar; to strike through this confined chute and thus nullify much of the fighter defense.

None of this really worried young Sothern. It wasn't the tight formation or the precision required to negotiate the long pass. It wasn't the speed that tightened the blood-drenched knot of fear. It had nothing to do with missing a signal and possibly side-slipping into the No. 3 man when they snapped into line-astern to roar through a narrow fissure.

It started with the haunting creaks within. Spook-boxes, the men called them, because of the eerie chatter hissing and grunting from the booster pumps, push-pull rods and the sibilant complainings of cables stretched over the guides of dry pulleys. One never sensed all these secondary operations aboard a propellered job. The pound of banked cylinders, the high-decibel whirr of flailing props, always drowned out the mere murmurings of less officious mechanism. Aboard a jet there was no exterior blanket of sound to muffle the internal operations, and with each mile of flight and with every foot of altitude, they multiplied the collective misgivings.

This enveloping silence pointed up the creaks and squeaks that came up from the torture seat whenever Erin Sothern changed his position. There lay the great dread: The stricture pinioning his arms and legs when he needed every responsive movement. It was always there, giving out with guttural warnings every time he depressed a rudder pedal or eased around to check his position in the formation. It was constantly evident from the minute he climbed in and rolled the canopy shut. It always lurked in two stubby cylinders. It put harsh music to the cold fear of thudding malfunction over which he had no control.

BUT Foyné realized nothing of this as he led the knife-winged pack toward the long tortuous pass. To Foyné, it was a joyous game of follow-the-leader, and he was always astonished to realize that grown men were paid to participate in this gay adventure. It was far beyond his understanding that anyone might conjure any fear concerning it. He still had no idea what made a jet job fly. That



Two puffs of smoke jetted from the cockpit, followed by the grotesque figure of a man in a sitting position—as

it did, and with such boisterous gayety, was sufficient.

Their sharply defined shadows raced with them across the white-blanketed glacier and staged bewildering maneuvers as they rocketed across the bleak undulations of the craggy walls. Ahead, the peaks baring their granite shoulders through white ceremonial robes of snow set themselves to define officially the limitations of this aerial exercise.

Two ponderous guardians of the pass crowded out of line seemingly to obtain a better view of the onrushing jets; narrowed the high hall of heaven to a few feet more than wingspan width, and Foyne called for a stacked-

up line-astern approach. This meant that Sothern was to ease over and take a position above and behind Foyne's back-staggered fin, while the No. 3 man dropped down clear of Foyne's tail-pipe blast and followed through. It was simple and sure, just so long as the wing men remembered whether they took the upper or lower position.

If either faltered, two jet fighters slithered into each other, and—

But Erin Sothern had no fears for any such mishap. He knew what was expected of him and felt no concern in his ability to execute his part of the maneuver. It was the nerve-shredding creak beneath the seat that robbed

him of the delicacy of touch and taunted him again to make the grim decision.

He drew the F-90 up, treadled the rudder over. The jet eased around and went into a tight turn. The No. 4 Tail-End Charlie saw Sothern's ship tilt over and whip past him.

Sothern had chucked it again!

"SOTHERN'S back, sir," Sergeant Copice reported from the doorway. "He says he'd like to see you."

"What was it this time?" Colonel Horrocks asked with no particular venom. Just the resignation of an ancient.

Copice shook his head sadly.



Sothern was propelled clear.

"Let him wait five minutes. I want to think."

"I'll bet a buck them little yellow flowers are up already, smelling like talcum powder," Copice said.

"That's what I want to think about. May will be on the hedges, and violets in the ditches."

"Only—Lieutenant Sothern's in the war-room, when he should be in the air," the Sergeant added.

"Send him in. We can dream, can't we?"

Sothern had a fine face in spite of the dull weary resolve in his gray eyes. He stood erect, like a man tensing for the sting of a knout. He was of reasonable height, with neat compact

shoulders and a fine pair of slim legs. His elbows drawn neatly to his sides brought out the narrow hips in spite of the bulk of his coverall. His lower lip trembled as he stared past the bowed head of Colonel Horrocks.

"Well, what was it this time, Sothern?" Horrocks inquired without looking up from the papers before him.

"Same thing, sir. That seat."

HORROCKS wiped a weary hand across his eyes and swung his chair to avoid those pleading eyes.

"Have you really thought all this out?" Horrocks asked kindly. "I mean, what it all means?"

"Yes sir. It's not right for me to fly with the others when I feel this way. I could be a menace."

"You're a good pilot, Sothern. Your book reads as if someone fixed it up for promotion. I can't believe you'd let a thing like this take you out of the play. After all, you've seen it operate from a test rack with a dummy. That's what it was designed for."

"I just don't trust it, sir. I sense it happening every time I shift in the seat. I expect it from the minute I fasten my straps. It's always there beneath me. It ties me in knots. I quake with every move, expecting it to—"

"But it can't, as long as you have the canopy closed. It can't operate unless you yourself pull the trigger!"

"That's the way it reads in the poop sheet, sir," young Sothern replied. "But we experience all sorts of malfunction. Why can't we have trouble with—that seat?"

"I think I know what you mean," agreed Horrocks. "Do you realize that 334 hasn't lost a ship since we came to Alaska? We *have* had turbine trouble, but the kids have always brought them in. We had two cases of aileron-boost failure, but they worked out and came back. We have had to shut off because of tail-pipe temperature, but somehow they got them back to the runway. I'm rather proud of all that, Sothern."

"Those are matters one can cope with—with any luck," the youngster answered, "but if that seat goes—"

"Those seats were put in as an additional safety factor. Everyone else seems to be thankful—or at least accepts them." Horrocks rose to his feet and began striding up and down the cold room. "Why not worry about your turbine breaking up and cutting your tail off? Why not fret about carrying fragmentation bombs? Suppose some ass fueled you with gasoline instead of jet-engine mixture? That has happened, you know."

"I have no explanation for it, sir. It's just that I can't overcome this feeling about it. I—I came in to request a transfer. Anything, anywhere,

any type but one fitted with those seats. I hope you understand, sir."

Horrocks ignored the request and went on: "Just suppose that instead of the special liquid we use, some dopey crew chief filled your hydraulic line with the regular stuff. Just suppose—" Horrocks stopped and went back to what Sothern had suggested. "You want out? You'd quit flying jets?"

"I'll even volunteer for Muroc, and fly rocket types, just so long as they have regular seats."

"And if you got into a jam, how would you get out?" the Colonel stormed. "You can't evacuate a fast jet without help. Don't you understand, Sothern? You can't get out!"

"I know that, sir. I knew that months ago. But that's how it is."

Horrocks sat down and allowed the heater to toast his knees. He shuffled through Sothern's papers again, and capitulated: "I'm going to regret this, but if that's the way you want it—"

"It's only fair to the others, sir."

Horrocks looked up slowly. "You'll be available in the morning, eh? I want to get in some camera-gun tests to complete the squadron training records. There's a possibility we might be shipped to Britain for integral training with the RAF. Right now, it's between us and 327."

Erin Sothern quaked, and spoke through clenched teeth. "I'm sorry I let you down, sir. Very sorry."

"Think nothing of it," Horrocks managed a smile. "I can fix that. I'm not above a little squadron skulduggery if it means getting out of Alaska. You'll be on the line at 09:00 hours, then. I won't keep you upstairs long."

Sothern should have known. Horrocks making with the pen to fix up a report just wasn't Horrocks, but at that minute Erin Sothern was incapable of primary analysis. "Then you'll see what you can do for me, sir?" he asked with little-boy anxiety in his eyes.

"I think I can fix you up with just what you need. . . . I mean just what you want," the Colonel said with some throaty effort.

AFTER Sothern had gone, Horrocks picked up his phone and called Staff Sergeant Brock, Blue Flight's crew chief. His orders were explicit.

"But you'll be working at about fifty-below up there, Colonel," Brockie protested.

"Possibly. But it will be warmer than that where you'll go if you open your trap about this."

"I don't get it," Brockie tried again. "He's the swellest kid in the outfit."

"That I know. I just want to keep him here."

"He'll be here," Brockie answered. "We'll have him under a slab for keeps this time tomorrow."

The Colonel hung up and sat looking at the blouse swaying in the draft. After some quiet reflection, he got up, took the garment from its hanger, folded it neatly on the top of his desk and then tossed it across the room. It fell in a heap on a foot locker.

"Oh, to be in England, now that April's here!" he quoted with quiet venom.

It was about twenty-two below when Colonel Horrocks and Sothern met in the hangar the next morning. An icy wind hissed along the cañon of snow piled along the runway and needled through the Arctic cloth of their winterized equipment. Brockie dropped down from the clec-track he used to haul the fighters out of the hangar, and shuffled over to the Colonel.

"Everything just like you said," he yapped out of one side of his mouth. "I checked the seat and replaced the cartridges."

"That's all right. I'll take the rap, if any."

"They's a lot of hoop-là buzzin' around we might go to Europe for some special training. Anything to it, sir?"

"Not now," Horrocks said placidly, and kicked snow from his flight boots.

"I kinder thought not," Brockie said, and went over to start Sothern's jet.

"We'll rendezvous at twenty thousand over the field," the Colonel explained to Sothern, who was moving up and down like a bundled-up ghost. "I want you to throw her around plenty. We got too many of those sitter tail-shots. I want some tight-angle and thirty-degree deflections. Throw her around when you get up there."

"I'll do my best, sir."

"Right! Give me a show. It may be the last time you fly an F-90."

"You have something in mind for me, sir?" Sothern's eagerness was pitiful.

"I worked out a couple of ideas. Let's go!"

"I'll give you a show, sir. I'll get you a good strip. I'll try to forget about the—"

Horrocks allowed Sothern to get away first. Once their jet plants opened up and began tearing calico, he followed the youngster down the perimeter track to the end of the long white runway. A crisp sheet of sunshine glared off everything, and the wheels crunched like a man shuffling over cold cinders.

Horrocks heard Sothern talking to the tower for a clearance, and he prayed they'd have no radio malfunction with all the rest of it. While Sothern tore down the runway, Horrocks adjusted his heater, wondering whether he'd ever sense normal mus-



"It's the same thing. That seat!" answered Sothern

cular reaction again. His ankles were rock-stiff and his shoulders encased in a block of ice. The frigid air fingered through the panels and clamped its talons on his legs and wrapped cold chains around his belly. He gradually realized how easy it would have been to "work" Sothern's test sheets and get the nod to go to Britain. All that could be wangled. It was just a matter of snapping his transmission switch and giving Sothern a recall order. He could antedate a transfer request on Sothern, and there would be no need to fake his training-card. No. 334 could wind it without a crack-up.

That was a solution, but it wouldn't do young Sothern any good.

He snapped the transmission switch and called the tower: "Horrocks . . . 334 Squadron. Give me a clearance, please."

"Tower to Colonel Horrocks. Main runway clear, sir. Your take-off 09:24 hours."

His legs were cold lead all the way up to his thighs. He checked the panel and allowed her to ease away on her own, and then punched the landing-gear button. The winged bullet ripped its way into a sharp climb, leaving the field a toylike layout from which arched the red roofs of Nissen huts and the spindle-shanked control tower. Beyond that it was nothing more than a criss-cross design molded in a box of white plaster with a lath.

They were both up there circling at twenty thousand before Horrocks remembered to check his camera gun-sight. He decided to call Sothern for one last check before he went after his pictures.

"Horrocks to Sothern . . . Horrocks to Sothern. Over."

"Sothern to Colonel Horrocks . . . Receiving you clearly, sir. Over."

"Let's go. Give me something to shoot at. Everything buttoned-up and snug?"

"Don't worry about me, sir. I feel quite all right. My controls seem a trifle heavy, but it's probably the cold. It'll work out."

"I'm sure it will," Horrocks agreed. "I'll make my first pass from above. After that, give me the business. Roger out."

Sothern circled while the Colonel gained another thousand feet and then realized he no longer felt fretful about the seat. He sat more erect and took in his belt another notch. He glowed with a new determination to show Horrocks he still knew how to fly an F-90. If this was to be his last show, he'd make it a beaut!

Just so long as Horrocks didn't give him that hanky-panky about it being a safety device. He began to wonder about the squadron going to Britain. He twisted in his seat, and the mechanism squeaked again, but the Colonel's first pass was starting, and there was no time to consider the possibility of being crushed into pressed meat.

Sothern snapped her over hard and then drew the stick back until it clinked against his belt buckle. He grinned when he sensed the Colonel had missed him by yards. He kept on top rudder and held her in the tight turn, and then found himself slamming straight for the camera ship.

There was one for the book! The Colonel was supposed to be fattening his gunnery book on a stupe, but in one pass the stupe was in a position to blast his C.O. smack out of the sky.

He watched Horrocks flounder into a reverse turn, and accommodated him by swinging into a position that offered a sitter shot.

"Never mind that stuff," Horrocks growled over his set. "You pulled a sweet twist that time. Make it rough for me. I've got all day. Let's go!"

THEY went at it hammer and tongs from there on. Horrocks decided to see how far the kid would go. He used every wile and trick in his book, but Sothern was performing like a gadfly. He was making the F-90 do more antics than Horrocks knew were in the bus. Had they been playing for keeps, Horrocks knew he'd be piled up in a battered wreck by now.

Horrocks caught himself blundering into blind errors in his effort to put a bead on the kid. The old delicacy of touch he had enjoyed over Bremen, Hamburg and through Normandy just wasn't on tap. He first blamed it on the cold, but gradually realized this joker was making a monkey of him—and making him like it!

Like it? Horrocks had never seen such flying. And this was the kid who

wanted out! A pilot with the finest sense of aërobatic timing he'd ever engaged, being scared off by a device intended to give him a reprieve if anything went haywire.

Then Horrocks remembered what he was up there for. He was about to start another pass from above when he noticed that Sothern was making no attempt at evasion. It was the first real sitter shot offered, but instead of pressing the camera button Horrocks snapped his transmitting switch and called: "What's the matter, Sothern? What's wrong?"

Sothern came around in a slithering turn that bore none of his previous skill. The F-90 was leaping blindly like a quirted stallion. She lunged and jerked as if flailed by a bullwhip.

"I'm in trouble, sir," Sothern responded. "All controls seem to be jammed. It's not just aileron-boost, sir. Flippers and rudder appear to be locked."

"Try trimming the wick and see if you can get the flaps down," Horrocks suggested. "That might help."

He circled and watched the frantic efforts of Sothern under his Plexiglas canopy. Horrocks knew he was fighting a lost cause. If the flaps wouldn't come down, there was no way of killing the speed. That jet plant would run hog-wild at this altitude. That was the way Horrocks had planned it.

He followed the target plane around and clocked her. She was hitting well over 450, and it would increase as she went down.

"Your hydraulic line's out," Horrocks explained. "It's frozen up. That I know," he added. "You got one move left, son."

"I'll try her a few more circuits," Sothern reported. "I guess I've had it, sir. The whole system is out."

"What's your air-speed now?"

"Well over 470. I can't get out at that speed."

"Now you know why we put in those seats. What are you waiting for?" Horrocks was pleading now, and checked his camera gunsight. "Get that damned canopy back. You still have a chance."

"I'm up to 500, sir! No one can get out doing 500."

"Get that canopy rolled back, you blasted fool! Pull that release bar. What you got to lose?"

Horrocks moved off and then turned back. His legs were sweating now, and his fingers trembled with a muscular response of a virtuoso. If the kid would only pull that release bar—just once!

"There's nothing to be afraid of, son," he pleaded again. "Before, you were scared it would operate prematurely and crush you under the canopy. Now you got a chance to see whether it will work at all. It's the only sure thing you have left."

There was a long streak of quaking silence. Then Sothern came through: "I'll take your word for it, Colonel. I don't believe it, but if you say so—"

"I say so. A million guys will want to know, too."

Horrocks brought his needle-beak on the speed-lashed fighter and waited. Then two blue-black puffs of smoke jetted from the depths of Sothern's cockpit. They were followed by the grotesque figure of a man in a stiff sitting position. Sothern was propelled clear of the cockpit and arched away safely, avoiding the knife-like fin.

At that instant Horrocks thumbed the camera tit.

Sothern fell away, kicking clear from the ejector seat. He waited before opening his parachute. He hit safe within a mile of the main runway.

It was just as Horrocks had planned.

Sothern was brought in aboard a weasel. There was a red welt across his cheek because he had forgotten to unjack his helmet phones. The blue-

nosed fighter piled up on the glacier flat ten miles away, and with it crumbled 334 Squadron's hopes of getting to Britain.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Sothern when they took him into the war-room. "I did my best to get her out, but—"

"Forget it," Horrocks smiled. "I feel better about those seats, too. I know damn' well they'll work if you need one. Wait until you see that gun picture!"

"They're perfect!" young Sothern beamed. "All you have to do is— By the way, sir, could I get a chance to try the pass formation again this afternoon? We've still got some weather left."

Horrocks' smile was interpreted as consent, but the Colonel was thinking that perhaps Washington would trade a cracked-up F-90 for an actual shot of the pilot escaping with the aid of an ejector seat.

"It's an idea," he said, and tried to remember Janice Buckmaster's address in Britain.

RECENT RULINGS

Hempstead, N. Y.: Horses have to have headlights and tail-lights when they go out at night.

* * *

Lewes, England: Just because a husband happens to be rude to his mother-in-law is no cause for dissolving a marriage.

* * *

Marshalltown, Ia.: It is grounds for divorce in Iowa if a Southern girl calls her husband a stupid damned Yankee.

* * *

Montgomery, Ala.: It is illegal to call anyone "Adolf Hitler" or a skunk.

* * *

Albany, N. Y.: It is all right for ladies to show their legs on the tennis courts, but men must hide theirs.

* * *

Washington, D. C.: It isn't disorderly conduct to argue with a policeman while he is directing traffic, but it isn't good sense either.

* * *

London, England: In Great Britain it is against the law to show winged angels on the screen.

Columbia, S. C.: Cops do not have to chase away bees from people's houses.

* * *

Chicago: Even if a man is separated from his wife, when he finds her with the "other man" he has a right to beat up his rival.

* * *

Los Angeles: You cannot be convicted on a charge of wife-beating if you are not married to the woman whom you are accused of beating.

* * *

Liverpool, England: It is against the law to operate an invalid's chair while under the influence of liquor.

* * *

Tokyo, Japan: Even an Imperial Prince cannot get a free railroad pass.

* * *

Portersville, Calif.: Horses can be parked by parking meters as well as autos.

* * *

St. Louis: A wife has a legal as well as moral right to rifle her husband's pockets while he sleeps.

—HAROLD HELFER

BIRD OF PREY

THIS is not a nice story. This is a grim and dark story; and if it is fine tales of high adventure you would be reading, and they dealing with grand strong men who do meet the buffets of the world with a flashing blade and a ready wit and a roar of laughter on their lips, then you had best be turning these pages to a happier romance prepared for your entertainment by someone who has naught on his mind but the telling of such gay tales. For this is a strange and, it may be, an unpleasant story. But it is most terribly a true one. . . .

From the green hills of Eire came my Uncle Michael to dwell with us in the red-brick city of Philadelphia. He came in the dung-reeking hold of a cattleboat one hop and a skip and only a part of a jump ahead of the Black-and-Tan, to the City of Brotherly Love, for it was there my father, his brother, had made his home and his livelihood since a decade of years. There too he had fathered and raised his family of five lads, for it is the way of the O'Hallorans, if mayhap a wee sorrow to the women they do make their wives, to run largely to boy children. Why this should be, I do not know. The biologists speak sagely of chromosomes, and of cells called x and y . Let these matters be their concern. I know only that the O'Halloran children run for the most part to males, and that when rarely a colleen is born to one of our name, it is a cause then for great celebration, for much dancing and singing and drinking, and perhaps even for a darkling shred of suspicion.

But let it pass. I had not meant to speak here of my Uncle Rory and Aunt Kathleen, and of that handsome young boarder to whom in later years my uncle took so strangely violent a dislike. This tale is of Michael O'Halloran, who came from the Emerald Isle to live with us in the red-brick city of Philadelphia.

That we were all of us glad to see him is a thing that needs no questioning. That we were still glad to have him with us after a spring and a fall and the greater part of a year is another matter entirely. My father, yes. There was never the time he was not proud to have a bed in his home for his brother. We children, too, were the happier for his presence. For he

was not a worldly man, my Uncle Michael; but he was a man who knew much about the things which are the marvels of this world, the things which are important to the young. To walk with him in those patches of woodland which in the year 1919 still girdled even the great cities was a wonder and a revelation and a joy, because my Uncle Michael was wise in those ways of which the average man knows nothing.

The trees were his friends; by their green he could name them in the season of leaf, and by their bark in the wintertime. He showed us how to grind the coarse crust of the shag-bark hickory between our palms and make of it a redolent, magic powder; "fairy dust," he called it. He could cut a slim fingerlength of willow, slip its smooth skin from the green wood beneath slick as an eel's hide, cut a sliver from the wood and properly notch the bark, then put both together again to make for a lad the loveliest whistle as ever the ear might hear. From the green-bleeding bole of tall spruces he dug us thick chunks of savory gum to chew, and from the thin, white, peeling skin of the silver birch he made us the finest parchment rolls young pirates could ask, whereon to draw their maps of buried treasure.

THE plants, too, were his intimates; and there was no shrub but that he knew its faults or virtues. He taught us which bright berries might be eaten and which not; made us familiar with the healing power of the slender witches' hazel, and the fine strong aromatic flavor of sassafras, that brewed to a tea will ward off night-mares and baldness. He had the green touch, had my Uncle Michael; and even in that thwarted square of pebbly clay which was the back yard of our row house did he succeed in growing (to my mother's delight and to the everlasting amazement of our neighbors) a miniature paradise of color.

So with wild things that grow with sap for blood. But his province was the knowledge, too, of breathing things; and it was from my Uncle Michael that we lads learned early the ways and haunts and secrets of the animals. For he knew how to find by its rift in the hedge the secret lair of the groundhog, and the tangled bramble patch was no maze to him who

knew by an unfathomable instinct where the hare would dig its burrow. He could point out the tunnel of the shovel-pawed mole humping its wee blind way beneath the grassy layer of earth's skin; he knew in which trees nested the gray squirrels and the red, and it was from him we learned why these two hated each other with so deadly a ferocity.

All this and so much more. The birds would come at his call, and the fish answer his lures when those of others dangled untouched in the water. He could tell of the weather tomorrow by the look of the moon tonight or the vagrant shifting of yesterday's wind. These were all a part of the tremendous and enviable knowledge held by my Uncle Michael.

Of course all these things were good, but they did not cut much ice with my mother. For he was a man who knew the wonders of this world, was my Uncle Michael, but he was not a worldly man. And it is a sorry truth to tell that after a time his living at our home became a burden on us. For my father was far from a wealthy man, and when there are five healthy, young bodies to feed as well as the head of the house and his good wife, and they not one of them lending ear to queer modern fiddle-faddle on the virtue of vegetable diets and green salads and suchlike slimming nonsense; when there are these mouths to feed, then an extra one, no matter how delightful the words of wisdom that do be flowing from it between meals, becomes a cause to furrow the brow when the cost of the food is considered.

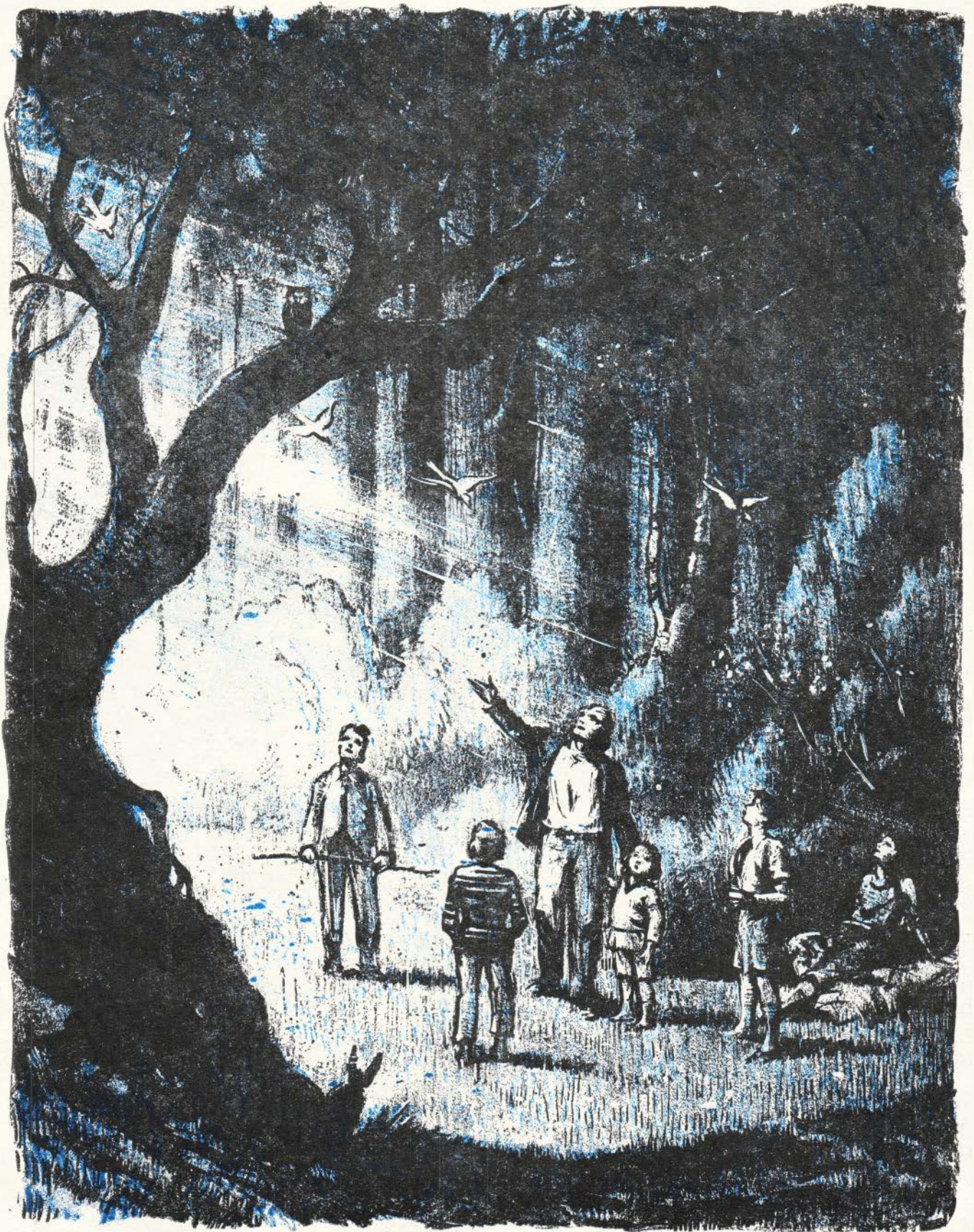
"'Tis not, Tim, that I dislike your brother," my mother would plead, "nor that I diswant the man in our home. But the carter's horse must pull its own weight. And when the man cannot even hold a job—"

"Now, Molly," my father would say, "do you not be blaming him out of hand, but strive for a little patience with him. For 'tis new to this country he is, and not yet has he learned our ways."

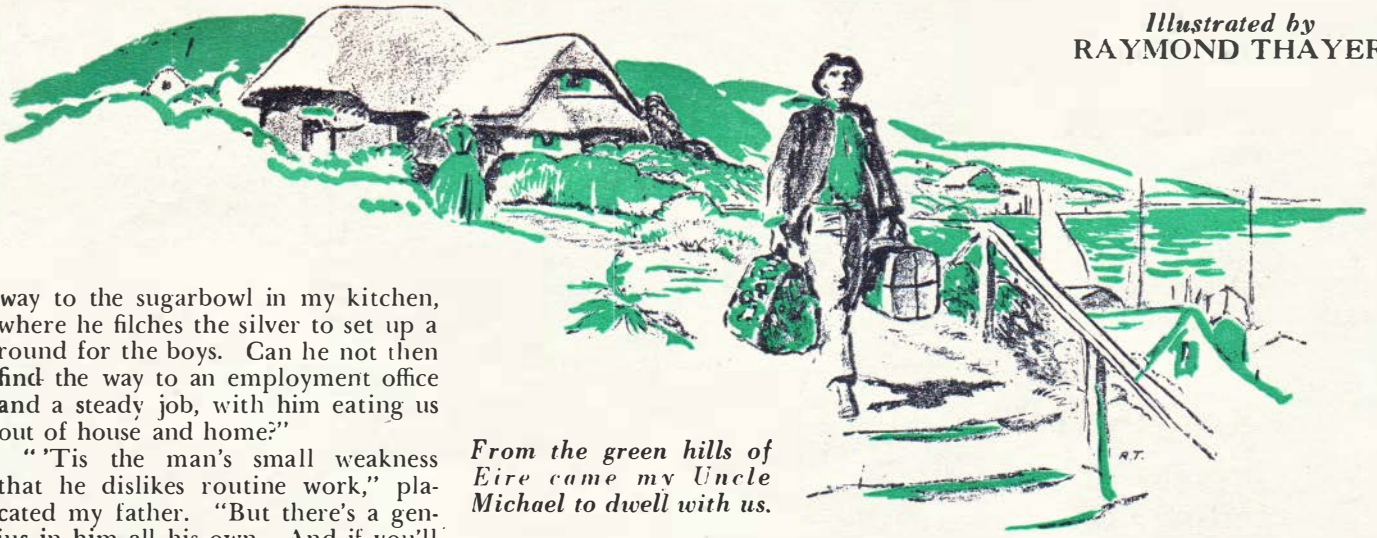
"He knows the ways to the fishing streams," my mother retorted, "and the whistling ways to the hills, with the boys at his heels like a pack of young savages. And the way to Clancy's bar on the corner he knows, too, and the

A STRANGE AND DEEPLY MOVING STORY BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE BOOKSHOP" AND "MR. MERGENTHWIRKER'S LOBBIES."

by NELSON BOND



He was not a worldly man, my Uncle Michael; but he knew things which are important to the young.



way to the sugarbowl in my kitchen, where he filches the silver to set up a round for the boys. Can he not then find the way to an employment office and a steady job, with him eating us out of house and home?"

"'Tis the man's small weakness that he dislikes routine work," placated my father. "But there's a genius in him all his own. And if you'll but be patient—"

"Patient! And have I not been patient these more than fifteen months? Tim, *bach*; dear Timothy," wailed my mother, "sure and it's myself would be the last to come between you and your own blood kin. But the man must find work. Not only because of the expense—which God knows we can ill afford—but because it's the day long, the week round, that he's underfoot in the house, and me not able to get a lick of work done for the endless yammer of him filling the lads' heads with superstitious nonsense."

BECAUSE this last, you see, was another grievance, and no small one, that my mother held against Uncle Michael. For as he had learning of the things of nature, so had he also understanding of those things which some declare unnatural. And it was not to my mother's liking, though it was greatly to ours, that he would sit by the hour and tell us tales of those creatures and folk who invisibly inhabit this world with the race of man.

All manner of tales, both gay and grim, would he tell us of the ways and doings of the Little People: the diligent brownies, mischievous pixies, and the fairies bedecked with their gossamer wings. He would speak—and why not, having seen them?—of the tricks of the kelpies and nixies, of the curious games Pigwiggins play in their magic rings on a midsummer's eve. He had once grasped the bottle-green coattails of a leprechaun, had my Uncle Michael; and it was the sorriest mischance and a great bewailment to him that of overeagerness his fingers had slipped. Else, he told us with a sigh and a shake of the head, it was not himself that would be this day a penniless man, and him slyly lifting a poor dime or two from the sugarbowl now and again to slake his parching thirst. But had he held tight to the squealing little cobbler, then his would have been three wishes along with that pot of gold which is

*From the green hills of
Eire came my Uncle
Michael to dwell with us.*

buried in a place known to each whiskered little bogie.

He told us enchanting stories of the gnomes and imps and fibbertigibbets; gay creatures, each of them, and friends to man, if maybe a mite mischievous. Yet others there were that were not so friendly-like; and it'd make the small hairs at the back of our necks rise and creep he would, with his tales of the plotting of goblins that do lay their own changeling spawn in the cradles of honest folk; of the wailing of gray banshees in the ominous shadows of nightfall. Spine-tingling tales of the Women of the Shee, whose keening in the twilight is the telling of future trouble, and of the Bird of Prey, that terrible and monstrous white bird who comes to the bedside of dying folk to bear their souls away to a questionable peace in the heaven of Tirna nOg.

To us, the hearing of these tales was a delicious and trembly sort of delight, the more so because we knew the stories to be true. For had not my Uncle Michael seen these things with his own eyes? But to my mother, who held no truck with his nonsense, it was a great annoyance that my Uncle Michael should make our hides crawl with their telling. And in simple candor, there was much justice in my mother's complaining. For this was the March of 1919, and if you are old enough to do so, you will recall that in that first post-war springtime there were jobs and aplenty for any man who had a will to work. There was a crying demand for goods scarce for these three long lateliest years, the construction of new houses was booming, and wages were fantastically high. For also in that spring of 1919 was sweeping this country along with all others that second wave of the Spanish influenza which left untouched scarce a household in the nation.

It was a horror of the flu, as much as anything else, which made my mother uncommonly irritable. For

there was this great trouble to that Spanish influenza: that not yet had the doctors solved the mystery of its germ, and all too many times the flu but paved the way for graver ailments yet: for failures of the heart, and for pneumonia. It struck with suddenness, and with a reckless hand that spared nor high nor low. And so when there are people tumbling in the streets and being carted away to over-crowded hospitals in hastily summoned ambulances, when on the streets old friends wave a cheery greeting to you, then walk into their homes never to be seen again save at the wake, and then lying cold and strange and waxenly unreal in their coffins: then it is that with five young sons, and they all of school age, any mother is like to find herself wrinkling a mite more at the forehead and silvering at the temples.

Like the others of our schoolmates, we took the precautions of the day. We wore to our classrooms white oblong masks of sterile gauze tied bandit fashion over the nose and mouth, and tied about the back of the head: we carried medallions and wore tiny bags of the asafetida about our necks. But the precautions were not enough. There was no day but that several of our playmates were missing from their desks. Some were to return days or weeks later, paler and thinner and older in the eyes; others were not ever to return.

So my mother was worried, and being worried, was fretful, and being fretful spoke more sharply than was her way against the happy-go-lucky sloth of my Uncle Michael. So sharply indeed, that at the last her words were no complaint nor admonishment, but an ultimatum.

"Brother or no brother," one evening she told my father, "I am weary of his everlasting loafing. One more week, and one week only, will I give him. If in that time he has not found

a job, and a job that he can hold, then it's out he goes, and a good riddance to him."

"But Molly—" said my father, sorely troubled.

"A week," repeated my mother.

And there is no doubt in my mind but that she meant it; that at the end of a week's time she would have made good her threat. But before that week was up happened that which caused her to forget her impatience with Uncle Michael, and indeed, all other things of trifling importance. For in that time it was that her second son Dennis fell ill of the influenza. . . .

Now in this day of miracle drugs, and of great clean-corridorred hospitals, and they awesome with the very last word in every modern scientific medical device, such things are handled in a way as not to throw a household into chaos. But thirty years ago the life-saving penicillin was naught but a blue mold on the drying crusts of yesterday's bread. And in those days, too, were the hospitals so crammed to overflowing that the sick were best cared for at home. So into the back bedroom went Dennis, there to lie in a room darkened with drawn shades, while his father and four

brothers were barred from the contagion of the isolation ward.

They five, so. But not my mother, who was in and out of the room a hundred times a day; now to take a fresh, fearful reading of the clinical thermometer, now to change the soaked sheets and pillow cases, again to bathe the poor burning body in alcohol applied with hands that for all of their Monday-wash coarseness were astonishingly soft and tender, or to administer those elixirs and powders with which the inadequate medical science of the day strove to combat a plague about which it knew next to nothing.

And this was a task which despite her willingness would have been altogether too great for her had there not unexpectedly come to her aid another pair of hands. For it was in this hour of need that my Uncle Michael came through to prove his place in our household.

He it was who, forsaking his woodland walks and his gabfests with his cronies at Clancy's saloon, sat for long hours in the sick lad's room, moving closer to the bed to narrate in his soothing voice beguiling stories whenever it appeared that the patient in his fevered fretfulness might be able to understand some portion of what

was being told him; he it was who most anxiously watched the grip of sickness tightening on Dennis, for he saw in its every stage the way this creeping disease attacked the boy's body.

HE watched his patient through those first days of the fever, diligent to keep the soaked lad covered in his bed when in delirium Dennis would claw back the blankets and comforters in unreasoned impulse to struggle from his bed; later, when drugged languor took the lad, withdrawing to the window-side, there to rock slowly back and forth, musing and thinking his own thoughts, unspeaking and silent, sucking on the cold bit of his wee pipe, and it untouched by match lest the pungent fumes of tobacco annoy the ailing lad.

He it was, too, who more closely than any other watched with grave anxiety as the thin red thread of the thermometer mounted daily ever higher and higher to that dangerous point which the doctors call the crisis. Pneumonia? Perhaps that had developed; the doctor did not say. But Uncle Michael knew that very soon would come that moment when one of two things must happen: either the straining body must prove itself strong



Uncle Michael told enchanting stories of gnomes and imps and fibbertigibbets; gay creatures, each of them.



My mother was in and out of the sick-room a hundred times a day.

enough to fight the germs attacking it, or those tiny invaders must have their own way and claim the conquered body as their booty.

So he waited and watched; and curiously enough, not all his watchful eying was of the sick lad himself, but an equal time or greater would my Uncle Michael sit beside the small window of that shaded room, rocking back and forth, back and forth, peering ever and again from around the lifted corner of the blind into the daylight or darkness outside as if in search of something.

So a third day passed, and a fourth, and dawned the fifth. And on that day there happened a strange thing: For my mother was in the sickroom changing again the damp and fever-smelling sheets of the patient, and my uncle was at his usual post by the window. Then, as my mother tells it, a great grunt broke from the man, and she turned to see him lowering that corner of the shade which but a moment since he had lifted. He rose from his chair, a curious dark look in his eyes, one of a thoughtful doubt not wholly free of fear. Then with a slow determination he pressed down the sash of the window.

"Michael," began my mother, "what—"

"'Tis blowing up sharper," he said. "The cold air might harm the lad. I'll be back in a minute, Molly." And he turned and walked swiftly from the room. She heard him rummaging about the house, first in his own bedroom, then in the basement. When he returned a few minutes later, he carried in his left hand a stick of

kindling; in his right he held a knife with a murderous long blade. He settled himself again at his post beside the window, essayed a brief smile in my mother's direction, and mumbled a thin apology.

"It does get weary, the sitting," he said. "I thought a wee spell of whit-ling to let the hands think—"

My mother nodded absently. "As it pleases you, Michael. But a bit of paper on the floor for the shavings?"

And there he sat that livelong day, beside the lowered window. But they were precious few shavings that fell from that strip of wood. My Uncle Michael spent most of those hours sweeping that long and gleaming knifeblade back and forth, in a tempo to match his rocking, on a whetstone he had carried from the kitchen.

IT was so he sat at teatime when the doctor bustled in, all nerves and shadowed eyes and the smell of perspiration dried on clothes worn overlong. It is little blame to the man that he was brusque and edgy and irritable. These were fretful days for a man of medicine, and on this day he had seen much sorrow.

"Well?" he greeted. "How is our young patient today?"

My mother ventured diffidently: "About the same, doctor. His temperature is up a wee bit. But he hasn't been quite so restless."

The doctor's practiced hand fingered the patient's pulse while its mate traveled from brow to temple and lifted a drowsy eyelid that he might gauge the lad's condition.

"Then we can only wait," he said. "Continue the treatments and wait to see what course the fever takes. It may be several days yet, perhaps as much as a week."

My Uncle Michael spoke from beside the window. "The lad," he said quietly, "will reach his crisis tonight."

The doctor turned, startled and surprised, to stare at him. "Really?" he snapped. "And who might you be to say so?"

"'Tis my brother-in-law, Michael O'Halloran," said my mother hastily. "My husband's brother, that is, lately come from the Old Country. He's been a great help to me, Doctor."

"I see." The physician glanced contemptuously at my uncle's unpressed trousers, at the scarred and gnarly clumps that were his hands, and at his day's growth of beard. "You're a medical man, then? Doctor O'Halloran it is, no doubt?"

"If you please, Doctor," agonized my mother, "I'm sure he meant no harm. It's just that he's so concerned, as are we all."

"'Tis no doctor I am," said my Uncle Michael, "but I'm telling you simple truth. The lad will come to his crisis tonight."

"Indeed, sir? And how do you know that?"

"Because—" began Uncle Michael—and stopped. He shook his head, and his lips tightened. "Just—because," he repeated.

"Now, it is a great shame," said the doctor with a bit of a sneer in his voice, "that you cannot give me more of a hint than that. For it is a vital piece of information you're withholding from the medical profession, Mr. O'Halloran, if of all men you alone can tell when this baffling disease is due to reach its crisis. It would save us much time and trouble, and we as busy as we are—" Again there was that derisive sidelong glance at my uncle's rocking-chair, and at the carpet slippers dangling from his feet, and at the little heap of shavings to which with a claspknife now honed to razor sharpness my uncle was adding slowly and mechanically and doggedly.

"Well, then," said the doctor, turning to my mother, "if your wise kinsman will not share his knowledge, we must assume that my treatment is correct. See that the lad gets his medicine regularly; feed him such liquids as you can get into him, keep him well covered and warm and supplied with plenty of fresh air. I'll be back at this time tomorrow. Good day to you. And to you, *Mister O'Halloran*," he crisped, and was off down the steps, his footsteps an indignant tattoo.

My mother busied herself with arranging the bedclothes until the front door had closed with a petulant slam. She was of no mind to be harsh with my Uncle Michael these days, and him the great help he had been to her in her hour of trouble. Yet there was an annoyance on her, and she was never the one to let her mind fester with an unspoken grievance.

SHE said at last reproachfully: "I would thank you, Michael, to hold your tongue when you're talking to learned men on things that do not concern you. 'Tis not for myself I say this, but for the boy's own sake, and him lying helpless here, in need of the best care a doctor can give, and not the haphazard attention of an angered man."

Uncle Michael mumbled: "'Tis sorry I am, Molly *beg*, little Molly. I was only trying to help. I didn't guess the man would take it amiss."

"But to advise a man in his own field—"

"Let him stick to his field, and me to mine. If his medical science cannot tell him the things that my sense tells me—"

Uncle Michael stroked a long white sliver of shaving from his pine strip. Then carefully: "Believe me, Molly, I know what I say is true. Doctor or no doctor, this midnight is Dennis' crucial time."

"And how," cried my mother, goaded finally beyond endurance, "and how could you be after knowing that? You that have not a grade-school diploma, let alone a letter to write after your name?"

"I know," said Uncle Michael heavily. "I have a way of knowing. Is that not enough for you, Molly? Must a man always be telling everything?"

"On matters of such importance, yes. If you know, then *how*? It's something about the lad, mayhap? The look in his eyes, or something he said? The flush of his cheeks or the feel of his flesh?"

"'Tis none of those," said my Uncle Michael. "'Tis—" He drew a long, uncertain breath. "If I told you, Molly," he said plaintively, "you wouldn't be believing me."

"Speak, man! What is it?"

AGAIN my Uncle Michael sighed heavily. His troubled eyes sought hers briefly, then turned away.

"'Tis the white bird, Molly. I saw him with my own eyes some hours since. I saw him hovering and wheeling and curving above this house like a great shining vulture, marking the place where he must come this night."

"White bird?" asked my mother, uncomprehending. "What white bird?"

"The Bird of Prey, Molly darling. The white bird of death that does becoming from the Blessed Isle to bear away the poor weakened souls of them that have ended their time on earth." He hesitated, scrubbing one coarse-knuckled hand with the palm of the other. Then gently: "Forgive me, Molly. I meant to say nothing to fret you. But 'twas yourself forced me to talk. Would to God I had not seen the bird and known him for what he is."

But if he expected dismay of my mother, then it was himself that got the surprise. For there was only outrage in her answer.

"White bird, Michael O'Halloran! Bird of Prey, indeed! Then it's on the fear of a silly superstition you'd be setting yourself up as authority against the men of learning? Now, *pogue ma hone* to you and your eternal tales of bogies and hobgoblins. 'Tis bad enough that for months you've been filling the children's heads with such nonsense. Do you not be plaguing me with more of the same, when there are great needy things to be done."

"I saw him, Molly—the great white bird with the crimson eyes and the slow strong wings of silver. 'Tis the fey in me that lets me see such things—"

"Fey? 'Tis the fool in you!" My mother flounced petulantly past him to unfasten and raise the window he had lowered some hours since.

"Enough of such talk," she said. "So 'twas *that* which caused you to close

the sash, and you telling lies that the cool, fresh breeze might harm the lad?"

"Molly, *bach*," begged my Uncle Michael, "Molly, darling, please lower the window again."

"Hush! Did you not hear what the doctor said? Plenty of fresh air."

"But the bird—it must be closed against him."

"As your mind is closed against wisdom? Tosh, Michael O'Halloran! Now leave be!" she said sternly as he reached for the upraised sash. "And do you not again be lowering it one inch, do you hear?"

"Or perhaps," she suggested, "you'd rather leave this room and this house and let someone with a clear mind tend the child?"

My Uncle Michael sighed and settled back into the chair from which he had half risen. "Very well, Molly," he said. "Have it as you will. I'll stay."

"And you'll not again lower the window?"

"Did I not give you my word?"

My mother said more kindly: "Very well, then. And Michael—do you not be thinking I mean to be hard on you. 'Tis a simple difference of opinion, is all. Our ways in this new land are not Old Country ways, and

it's to science and learning we look for advice rather than to the folklore and the stories of the old wives.

"And sure, brother Michael," she went on, more kindly yet, "it's overwrought and tired you must be like myself, at having sat these five long anxious days in one little room. Would you not now like to go out a short while and make an evening of it with the friends you have not seen for nigh a week?"

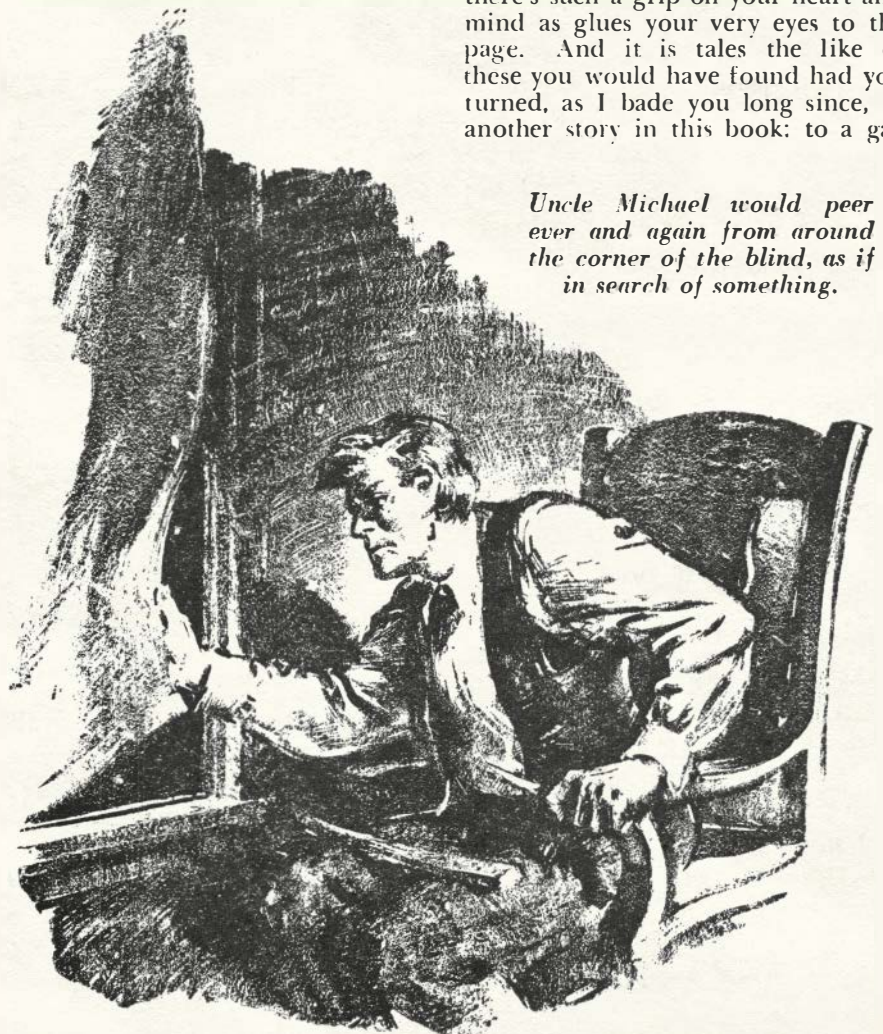
Uncle Michael shook his head quietly. "No, thank you, Molly. I'd rather be here with the lad."

"I know your heart's with the boy," said my mother, "but it's myself can be taking care of him until you get back. And it comes to my mind there's a bit of silver in the sugar-bowl that the groceries could be sparing—"

My Uncle Michael smiled a curious half-smile, but shook his head. And he would not go out that night.

Now, I do not know how best to end this tale. There is an end to it, but not one to be reached in the proper way of authors. For it's they that do build their tales carefully, with the suspense mounting word by word and each incident more dramatic than the last until at the end there's such a grip on your heart and mind as glues your very eyes to the page. And it is tales the like of these you would have found had you turned, as I bade you long since, to another story in this book: to a gay

Uncle Michael would peer ever and again from around the corner of the blind, as if in search of something.



tale of high adventure, perhaps, with a beautiful woman in it, and a strong and clear-eyed man, and them living happy ever after with their mouths meeting warm and sweet.

But there is not that kind of ending to this story. This story dwindles off in silence and unsureness, and I am the sorrier for it. For, more than yourself, I would like to be certain what happened that night in the room of the fevered Dennis.

This only do I know: that my Uncle Michael would not leave that room for a single instant of that night. There he sat and munched his lonely supper in the early hours of evening; there as darkness gathered he sat and rocked and chatted a brief while with my mother as she came to settle her son for the long night's rest; sat and chatted the while he stroked back and forth, back and forth, in tempo to his chair's slow rocking the wicked edge of his shiny whittling-knife. Then it was deep night, and the family was abed. All but my Uncle Michael. He would not turn in for yet a while when at past ten o'clock my mother brought him a cup of steaming tea. He was that wide awake, he said, that his nerves were like wee red ants, and would she leave the hall light burning, there's the darling, and be off to bed now and not worrying her sweet head about him?

My mother said softly; "'Tis a good man you are, Michael O'Halloran. Could I say now I'm sorry that ever I thought of asking you to leave?"

"Did you so, ever?" asked my Uncle Michael wonderingly. "Well, and 'tis sure I am you had your own good reasons."

"If I had, they're forgotten now," said my mother, gently brushing her brother-in-law's forehead with her lips as she rose to go. "You'll not stay up too late, Michael?"

"We shall see."

"It's still thinking of the white bird you are."

"Perhaps," said my Uncle Michael. "And then again, perhaps not."

"You're a good man," repeated my mother, "but a foolish one. The white bird is a myth, Michael; a fancy of foolish people. No harm will come to the lad."

Once again my uncle smiled that curious half-smile, and on his lips there was a tenderness and a tightness. "There at least we are agreed, Molly," he said. "No harm will come to the lad."

My mother went to her bed then. And of what happened after, there is no sure fact I can tell you. In later days she said that the sound which lulled her to sleep was the slow purring of my Uncle Michael's knifeblade moving back and forth



To Dennis it seemed they struggled in that window, they two,

on his whetstone. Later yet, at some unknown hour between midnight and dawn, she woke for the briefest of troubled instants with a curious feeling on her that in this house there was something amiss. So strong was this feeling, said she, that she sat bolt upright in the bed for a second or two to hear if there were movements in the house, but hearing nothing, went back to her sleep.

And the youngest of my brothers since has claimed that he too was awakened in the wee dark hours before dawn by a sound he could not then nor afterward describe. It was, he claims, a rushing sort of noise with a feel of heaviness about it, of darkness and movement and of dread. It frightened him so that for a time he lay in his bed atremble with a terror of something that he could not name. But then the feeling

passed, and being young, he fell again into a deep untroubled slumber.

So it is only Dennis who, if anyone, knows what took place at the open window of that bedroom on that dreadful night. And what may be believed of Dennis' tale is hard to say. For my Uncle Michael had guessed more rightly than the doctor. That night was indeed the night Dennis touched the crisis of his fever, and at such times the mind roams in a strange world of delirium peopled by creatures unlike any known to this earth. In this feverland of fancy dwelt Dennis that night, for in the morning my mother found him awake in his bed, clear-eyed and cool and demanding food and drink.

It was not until long afterward that he recalled and tried to tell of the wicked dream he had dreamed that night—a dream that came and



each silent and grim, each determined to his own way.

went in snatches. Of his Uncle Michael seated before the open window rocking ceaselessly back and forth, back and forth. Then of a curious whiteness at that window, a shining in the night that was not moonlight because there was no moon.

Then there was darkness outlined against that lighter form, and the dark shape was my Uncle Michael. And to Dennis it seemed they struggled in that window, they two, the one against the other, each silent and each grim, each determined to his own way, the one that it should enter and bear away from this house the life it had been promised; the other equally determined it should not.

And the strangest part of this dream, remembers Dennis, is that for all the bitter fury of that contest there was no sound loud enough really to be called such. There was

only the labored panting of my Uncle Michael, as like the great mad Jacob that it tells of in the Holy Book, he wrestled with a Being stronger than himself. Only, says Dennis, there was nothing angelic about *this* Being, for in its beaked visage there was only a frightful evil. Yet it too uttered no sound, and his memory of it is only that its great strong wings made a muffled thrumming as they beat against the casement or on the solid flesh of its antagonist.

Then it seemed the struggling bodies were perilously close to the window ledge itself. And at that time Dennis saw my uncle's arm raise once and twice and yet again, and with a clenched fist beat upon the breast of the white thing, till suddenly that clean shining expanse was no longer spotless but mottled with a dark and ugly stain. Then it was he heard

the only sound to be born of that curious struggle. For from the thing my Uncle Michael wrestled broke a sharp and plaintive rasping as of an animal that had never before known pain, and now in anger and surprise felt the unexpected bite of steel.

And of a sudden its great wings beat stronger and more swiftly, and the creature was in flight. So for an instant they teetered there at the precarious windowsill two stories from the ground. Then the both of them were gone, white form and dark, and a sudden giddiness assailed the ailing lad. His head reeled with a sense of dark oppression abruptly lifted; a cold sweat broke out on his brow and on his lips and on his no longer fevered body. And it may be he fainted, or it may be that he slept. Or it may be that it was all delirium, for this was the hour of his crisis, and with the morning he was well again.

AND my Uncle Michael? There is the matter that will never be explained. Some think that he was weary of this world and of the failure he had made in it; they point out that for days he had been brooding in the dark and melancholy way of men in middle years whose life is empty. My mother thinks it was the man's great heart that was his downfall: that in his stubborn determination to stay awake and watch over his nephew, he had been betrayed by sleep that would not be denied; that he had fallen into a troubled slumber, and doing so, had walked to his destruction.

For they found him in the morning lying on the hard earth two floors beneath the open window of the sick lad's bed-chamber. There was a stain of blood on the claspknife in his right hand, yet there was no prick nor wound on his twisted body; only some gouges on his arms and face as if great talons had clawed him. There was a curious half-smile of triumph on his lips. And in the cold fingers of his clenched left hand were two white shining feathers. . . .

So, as I said before, this is not a nice story. It is a grim and dark story, and a most unsatisfying one, for there is no certain answer to it. Of it you may believe what you will, and your guess will be as good as any man's. My Uncle Michael was a ley man, and it was his to see strange things invisible to most men's eyes. It may be that the legends are false. But I know what I believe, for with a dreadful clarity still I remember what I saw.

I think the great white bird *did* come to a house where death was fated, and took away a soul, as was ordained.

This I believe as surely as my name is Dennis O'Halloran.

A dramatic story of our Army in North Africa today, by the distinguished author of "Approach to Battle" and "I Spy Strangers."

by LEONARD NASON

IN the south of Morocco, red-walled below the eternal snows of the High Atlas, is the city of Marrakech, outpost of commerce of Imperial Rome, capital of empire before America was discovered. Generations of sultans have ruled there, each one trying to outdo his predecessor with the magnificence of his palace, and of his gardens, and of his artificial lakes. Now all but the last two of the palaces are gone; but the gardens and the lakes still remain, and the most beautiful of these is the Menara, in which is the Queen's Pool.

At sunset of a spring day two American soldiers, a boy and a girl, sat on a broken portion of wall, watching the glory of a sunset upon the Atlas, far away across the placid surface of the Queen's Pool, beyond the distant palm trees. Gowned Moors in black, brown and gray passed by, hurrying to their homes before nightfall, followed by their wives: shapeless bundles of linen, from which only a brown hand, or one eye peering from behind a closely held hood, gave any hint that the perambulating laundry-basket was human.

What eyes could be seen looked sullenly upon the Americans. The war was long over: the Americans had all gone home, yet now a few of them were back again, something about a new air base and another war. That would be as Allah willed. Meanwhile Morocco belonged to the Moors, and was surely no place for Americans to be idling about.

The American girl's voice shook.

"It's really none of your business," she began, "but I had to tell somebody. You are twice as big as he is: maybe if you said something—"

"I don't think I could do that," said the soldier. "You see, he's Captain Smith, and I'm only Private Shaw. This is the Army. If we were civilians, or even if I were a civilian, I could go to him and just announce to him calmly that he was making you nervous, and to cease firing, or he'd have trouble finding something to put his hat onto, account I would twist his neck off. Anyway, I don't think he's that bad at heart. Why, he's a married man!"

"They're the worst kind," protested the girl. "The girl that I relieved here, she warned me. He used to telephone her at all hours of the night, too. She told me he tried to drug her once, or poison her, she doesn't know which. With Major Scott gone, I'm alone in that villa except for the Arab

woman. It frightens me. This country is so wild and savage, it gets into everyone's blood. Life and death and honor are nothing. While I was at Casa, they used to pick up dead Americans every week, everything gone but their dog-tags."

Across the plain the setting sun shone full upon the brick battlements of the old city, scarlet upon red. Beyond, the snows of the Atlas had begun to shimmer like mother-of-pearl. And in the foreground lay the Queen's Pool, blue as a sapphire, an upside-down piece of sky that looked like a hole right through the earth to China.

"I don't think Captain Smith is very dangerous," comforted Shaw. "I hear he's a wolf, but maybe he's a sheep in wolf's clothing. You know he's chief of mission: he has a right to call you at all hours, because he gets cables at all hours. He has the right to have you in his office whenever he wants to, and alone. Security, you know. But he hasn't any right to get—well, if he should lay his hand on you, or grab you, he'd be in a jam. That's assault on an enlisted man."

"I'm not afraid of that—I'm afraid of his drugging me."

The soldier thought. "I saw some knives in the museum here," he began, "with a hilt made of rhinoceros horn. If there's any chemical substance in food, the horn changes color. The sultans here were all afraid of poison. I could get you one of those knives, maybe."

"Yes, yes," breathed the girl, "a knife. That would be fine. I tried to get a gun, but they wouldn't let me. If I had a knife, I wouldn't be afraid any more."

The soldier looked out across the pool, darkening now. He gave a quick glance at the purple tide that was climbing the slopes of the Atlas.

"It's pretty late to do anything about it tonight, but I can try. Anything that's any good they always have to dig up from under a rock and bring in next week sometime."

"Next week?" There was a note of alarm in the girl's voice. "I'd like to get one as soon as I can. Couldn't you get me one tonight or tomorrow?"

"I'll go in town tonight," said Shaw, "and see what I can do."

IN a Moorish café on the edge of the marketplace, where rebel heads used to hang like grapes, Shaw sat at a table with an Arab, a little rotund man, like a butter-ball.



The

"You want to buy a knife?" grinned the Arab. "How much you want to pay?"

"It depends upon the knife," said Shaw. The shops were all closed at this time of night, but he knew the owner of the café would send a boy for a merchant, and the merchant would produce a knife, if the client was an American. Any added inconvenience, of course, would be added to the selling price.



Queen's Pool

"Well, what kind of a knife you want? A good knife, or just a knife, like bazaar men sell?"

"I want a good one. With a rhinoceros hilt."

The Arab rested his chin on his hand and seemed to search his recollection. The ancient phonograph that is a part of every Moorish café screeched out its never-ending round of Arab chants; a wandering dog was driven forth yipping by the propri-

etor's foot. It came to Shaw that he had seen this particular Arab before. He wore a black gown, and his fez had four little dents in the top of it, like an old-style campaign hat. Some hanger-on around the marketplace, probably.

"WHERE did you learn to speak English?" demanded Shaw.

"I been around. New York, mostly. I was in the pilgrim racket. Lotta

Moslems can't speak Arabic. Wanted to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Personally conducted tour. I was the conductor. The war ruined it. So I come back here. Cheaper to live. Listen, Joe, whadda you want a knife with a rhinoceros-horn handle for? They cost money. Only the big chiefs wear them. The horn turns black if you touch it with poison."

"That's why I want one. My name isn't Joe; it's Shaw."

"Okay, Shaw. Call me Bou-Chaib. You really want a knife like that? You want it bad?"

"Yes, I want it bad."

"Humph! Well, I know where I can get you one. Out in the country. But you'll have to go with me to get it. The guy that owns it won't sell it to me—only big chiefs can have them. He'd sell it to an American, but not to me, see? So you'd have to go with me."

"How far out is it? I don't crave to walk, and certainly not after dark. I can't get away in the daytime, except Sunday, and I don't want to wait until then. Can't I give you a note? Couldn't you tell him you wanted to bring it in to show to an American?"

"No," said Bou-Chaib positively. "He wouldn't believe me. This guy I have in mind is a big Caid; he is chief of the Masmouda; they own all those mountains out there. He's got a couple of those knives—I've seen 'em. You could pick out which one you want."

"How far is it?" insisted Shaw.

"Not far. Half an hour. I got a car."

"No," said Shaw with firmness. "That's old stuff. I'm not going out to run all over Morocco, and then you won't be able to find the guy, or he won't have a knife if you do, and I'm out a month's pay in taxi fare afterward. Nothing doing. If you can bring me a knife in tomorrow, say so; if not, I'll try somewhere else."

"No, no," smiled Bou-Chaib. "It's my car—no charge. This Caid, I tell you, is a big duke, get it? He owns a million sheep. If he likes your looks, he'll give you a knife. No charge for the car. None. Sometime, maybe, when I'm up around the barracks, you would give me a fill-up of gas—you know, if you felt like it. The Americans can get all the gas they want, and I can't."

It was dark when the car slid into a gully, crossed a dry river-bed on a concrete-bottomed ford, and soared into the hills. Shaw had decided to go after he had seen that car. It was of American make, an ancient model, but still clean and powerful. Bou-Chaib drove with Arab nonchalance at sixty miles an hour, but after he had crossed the ford, he slowed down perceptibly.

"What's the name of that *ouéd* we just crossed?" asked Shaw.

"The Brook Reraia. Ten miles from Marrakech."

"How much farther do we go? This crate is likely to come apart under you some day, the way you drive."

"Take it easy," advised Bou-Chaib. "Pretty near there. You're in Masmouda territory now; the old Caid is king here. Nobody bothers you here—M.P.s, the French, nobody."



"I been around—the pilgrim racket."

In a little while the car turned off the road.

"What's that thing there looks like a big beehive?" asked Shaw. "I've seen a lot of them up here."

"Air vent for the conduits that take the water from the mountains to Marrakech. Irrigation system. The old sultans built it. You know the Queen's Pool? That's why the water is so blue, comes out of a conduit every day. There's the castle up there. Look. To the left."

Shaw, peering through the windshield, saw ahead of him a great castle, square, with crenelated roof and four great watchtowers rising black in the moonlight. In a moment they were in the castle's shadow, before an iron-studded gate.

"We leave the car here," said Bou-Chaib. "We go see the Caid."

After a long exchange of shouts between Bou-Chaib and someone behind the gate, a wicket opened, and they passed through into a courtyard, huge and dark. It smelled of animals and of wet wool, and was silent except for the low bleating of sheep somewhere. A stone ramp led up to a gateway in the castle proper. Enough moonlight came under the low arch to show Shaw that the passage turned abruptly at right angles and to the left, so that any force breaking through the gate would be unable to rush headlong into the castle's interior. To the right of the gate was a high stone bench, on which were shapeless heaps that might be men.

"Come on, Shaw," urged Bou-Chaib. "Give me your hand. I know

the way. Careful you don't break your neck on these steps."

Bou-Chaib led the way up a long stairway, narrow, to a small room at the top, open on four sides, into which the moonlight streamed, with a cold wind from the high snows. Bou-Chaib stepped forward and bending down, kissed the hand of a man who stood there.

"This is my friend, Shaw," said Bou-Chaib respectfully.

"This is the Caid, Shaw, Abd-el-Moulmen, called 'Masmoudi,' chief of the tribe of Masmouda."

The silent figure turned. "Glad to meet you, Shaw." The Caid extended his hand. "I've heard about you. A big strong man, like I was when I was a boy. Welcome to Oomenast."

"Glad to meet you, sir," stammered Shaw. "You speak very good English."

"I was educated in England," replied the Caid. "It was usual when I was young. We thought the English would one day own the world. That was a long time ago. You English are not so sure, now, are you?"

"I'm an American, sir," said Shaw.

"I know—only we call you all Englishmen. You all speak English. You call us all Arabs—which we are not, you know; we're Berbers. Men are ignorant. It is a punishment for their sins. Only Allah knows all."

SHAW wondered if he should blurt out now that he had come to buy a knife, and then decided that he would leave matters for a while to Bou-Chaib.

"This is a high honor for me to have you here," resumed the Caid. "You are the first American that has ever honored my poor house. During the war they were forbidden. Presently we will go down. Drafty place, up here."

The Caid lifted a pair of field-glasses he had hanging about his neck and looked out the opening in the tower, scanning the hills that rolled like ocean-seas, treeless, rockless, until they met, in the distance, the shining snows. The moon blazed on the distant peaks, dripped from the precipices in rivers of silver, rioted and danced on the slopes of ice as the flame riots in an opal.

"Isn't that a swell view!" marveled Shaw. "Golly, that's a magnificent sight. Every time I look at the Atlas, day or night, it always looks different. What makes all those colors in the mountains?"

"There is no color there," replied the Caid. "You imagine it. If you were to climb up there, taking a day, perhaps two or three, hard, merciless work, you break your back, you break your staff, you wear out your shoes, you pant, your tongue hangs out like a dog's from thirst—maybe you get a piece of iron junk through your head from some idling fellow behind a tree.

And at the top, what would you find? Snow, ice, rocks, and nothing. No colors. It is only full of color and fire from a long way off—the way life looks to a man your age.”

“But does that fire show in your binoculars?” asked Shaw.

“Eh? I’m not looking that high up. Lower down. See here, see that cleft in the hills? There’s a pass there that goes into the M’Tougi country. Neighbors of mine.”

THE Caid’s English, though pure, had a queer clipped accent, like words written by an old typewriter with the corners all worn off the keys. This peculiarity became suddenly quite marked.

“I am having a little bicker with them right now,” grated the Caid. “A question of sheep. One of my boys went over there to get a M’Tougi girl. Wanted to marry her. The M’Tougi claimed that the boy hadn’t given enough sheep for the marriage portion, and demanded back their girl. I don’t know—maybe he didn’t give any sheep at all. So the M’Tougi might come calling, the moon being at the full, to get their sheep, and any sheep of mine they find, and get their girl, and any girls of mine, too. And next month, when the moon is full, I will have to go to the M’Tougi country to teach them better manners, and it can grow to quite a scrum before it finishes.”

Shaw felt the chill of the night run up and down his spine. One of the Caid’s boys had been wife-stealing. That was what the Caid’s story meant.

“But won’t the French stop that sort of thing?” asked Shaw.

“South of the *ouëd*,” replied the Caid, “the Brook Reraia, what goes on is my show. By treaty! I keep the peace here, and have the decision over life. Death also. Is it not true, Bou-Chaib?”

“It sure is,” agreed Bou-Chaib.

The Caid took off his field-glasses and handed them to someone in the shadowy corner. Shaw saw the moon-light wink on a rifle barrel.

“This is no place to receive a guest. Come down, Shaw,” invited the Caid. “Let me offer you the honors of an old-fashioned house, the kind our fathers lived in when we were masters of the world.”

They groped down the stairway, then across stone courtyards, through patches of black shade cast by high windowless walls, to a narrow gate. Here the Caid stopped and unslung something he had worn over his shoulder. It was a small white-leather holster that could contain a pistol, suspended from a white cord.

“Have you any weapons, Shaw?” asked the Caid. “We must not bear arms in my dwelling. If you have a gun or a knife, give it to Bou-Chaib.”



“Tell me—and it had better be good.”

“I haven’t any,” said Shaw. “It’s against regulations.”

The Caid handed his holster to Bou-Chaib and motioned his follower to retire. Then the gate opened by itself, and the Caid and Shaw passed through into a small piece of Paradise.

Under the moon glistened marble walls, surrounding a garden. Pillared arches, blazing with amethyst and turquoise mosaic, supported little domes that flashed as though gilded. Perfumes of orange flowers, jasmine and mimosa, a heavy scent of cedar, and a strange smell of something like spice grew stronger as Shaw followed the Caid along a terrace. Pale blue lights began to glisten like fireflies among foliage, one after another; someone was lighting lanterns as they advanced, a dark shadow flitting ahead of them.

The garden was surrounded by alcoves facing the court, and into one of these the Caid led Shaw.

“Sit down,” said the Caid. “We’ll have some tea. This is my house. Whatever is in it is yours. Now, here are some boiled eggs and almonds. Help yourself. This is the old Berber custom, to offer this food to a guest, with mint tea. Now, sit down here on this couch.”

The shadowy attendant lighted three lamps at their feet, tall-chimneyed, that gave a pale blue light, reflected from the walls and ceiling in thousands of twinkling points. The walls, of course, thought Shaw, would be mosaic, but the deep wood-carvings of the roof, that dripped down like stalactites, must be jeweled.

The Caid sat down cross-legged and inspected the charcoal fire under a steaming samovar. The Caid wore a

heavy dark burnoose that bulged over his right hip as he leaned forward. The Caid had another gun on, thought Shaw. Still rodded up, even after passing his pistol of ceremony to Bou-Chaib. Shaw’s roving eyes came to rest upon a clock—a common clock, old-fashioned, but a cheap clock even when it was new. The hands pointed to five after ten.

“Good Lord!” cried Shaw. “Is it that late? I’ve got to get out of here! I’ll miss bed-check!”

“Eh? The clock? It doesn’t go. People that look at it don’t care what time it is. They have nowhere to go except to heaven. When that time comes, they won’t need a clock to tell them.”

The Caid lurched to his feet. “We are fond of clocks,” he explained. “Would you like to hear it strike? It has a jolly sound. I bought it because it had a merry strike.” He wrenched the hands to twelve and stepped back, smiling, his teeth gleaming in the pale light. Silence from the clock. The Caid took a swift step forward, lifted the clock from the wall and hurled it to the marble floor, near the door, where there were no rugs.

The clock gave one melancholy chime and became fragments.

The Caid returned to his seat on the cushion.

“Gee,” murmured Shaw, embarrassed, “you didn’t need to do that. I didn’t want to hear it strike that bad.”

The Caid bent forward to busy himself with the tea-making, hunting in the sugar box for the right-sized lump.

“The clock is no good to me if it won’t strike,” he said. “I can get all the clocks I want. Women too. When Bou-Chaib was running his pilgrimages, he used to send me some fine ones. I once paid fifteen hundred dollars for a Caucasian. But they won’t strike either; not for me.”

The Caid scattered tea leaves into a silver pot.

“I am a man of great wealth,” the Caid droned on. “Sheep, cattle, mines of iron and of phosphate. My followers number ten thousand families. I would give all of it for a son. Allah has humbled me; I am a childless man.”

BOILING water from the samovar spattered into the teapot.

“We grow old,” lamented the Caid. “The French are decayed; the English are decayed; only the Americans are strong in the strength of youth. A young race. Too young to lead the world. That will be for Islam. The promised hour approaches for the Faithful. I could lead them. When I was young, I threw Abd-el-Aziz, sultan of the Filali, off his throne, but the other Caid would not follow me. I could not found a dynasty, you see, being childless. No sense, think the



"I want you to marry the daughter of the Caid of the M'Tougi—tonight."

great princes of Islam, in a leader who cannot found a dynasty."

The Caid poured tea into thin glasses.

"At this time it is our custom that he who has the most honor among us should say, 'Bismallah.'" The Caid

handed a glass to Shaw and lifted his own.

"Go ahead, say 'Bismallah!'" urged the Caid.

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Because you are an American."

"Bismallah," said Shaw, and drank. The moon-made shadows lengthened across the courtyard, rising like flowing ink to turn the glittering walls to purple and blue. Somewhere in the garden a fountain tinkled and sang softly, barely audible, yet clear.

"We invented the fountain," related the Caid. "We are a desert race, thirsty. The sweetest music of all to us is to hear water running, leaping and playing and falling back to leap up again. That water comes from the snows, through conduits that were laid down by the Almoravides, builders of Marrakech."

"Yes, I know," agreed Shaw, anxious to show his knowledge. "That's why the water in the Queen's Pool is always so blue. It comes right down from the mountains."

The Caid gave a violent start, so that he spilled some of his tea.

"What do you know about the Queen's Pool?" the Caid snarled. It was a real snarl, sudden, like a dog's whose bone has been threatened.

"Why, nothing," protested Shaw. "Except I like to look at it, it's always so clear and cool and blue, you know."

"True," murmured the Caid, his voice calm once more. "Bou-Chaib told me you were often there. That's an old garden, very old. Abd-el-Moumen built it in the year of the Hegira nine hundred. The pavilion is new. It was built in my time. Yes, that's right; that's where Bou-Chaib said he had first noticed you."

THIS time it was Shaw's turn to jump. "Bou-Chaib? The man who brought me out here? I mean, why should Bou-Chaib tell you about me?"

"I asked him first," replied the Caid. "I asked him if he knew an American, tall and straight, worthy to become a caid of the Masmouda."

The Caid poured the second glass of tea.

"I believe he explained to you," resumed the Caid, "what I wanted you to do, and that the fact you came out with him showed you were willing."

"Bou-Chaib didn't say anything to me at all," Shaw protested. "I wanted to buy a knife—one of those knives with a silver scabbard and a rhinohorn hilt. I asked in a café I knew, and the man in the café sent Bou-Chaib over to talk to me. So Bou-Chaib said he knew where I could get a knife, out in the country, and that's why I'm here."

The Caid cuddled his bare legs under his robe as the breeze became cooler.

"Bou-Chaib is a very clever man," said the Caid. "He has traveled widely. He knows the Americans well, better than I. I have never spoken to one before. Perhaps Bou-Chaib is right not to tell you at once. Had he told you, we would have had no sense

out of you at all, no doubt. The meat of the matter is that I am on very bad terms with my neighbors the M'Tougi over this girl. She is the Caid's daughter—too good for the lad that carried her off. So I have her here in my castle. I do not want a war with the M'Tougi, not at this time. The hour of Islam approaches, and we must be ready when it strikes, not fighting among ourselves. Yet I cannot send her back: the Masmouda would think I was afraid, an old lion that had lost his teeth. Some of my enemies might think this was the time to finish me. They are a pack of jackals, the lot of them. I spoke to Bou-Chaib, and he suggested you."

"Me?" gasped Shaw, choking on his tea. "What have I got to do with it?"

"I want you to marry the daughter of the Caid of the M'Tougi. That will make peace with them. That the daughter of a Caid of the M'Tougi, that spawn of hairy shepherds, should marry an American, is the greatest honor those apes have ever received, could ever receive, ever dreamed, in their wildest moments, of receiving."

The vaulted room and its glittering mosaics seemed to spin about Shaw's head. His blood seemed to rush to his heart, choking him.

"Marry the girl—the girl somebody stole—what will the man say that stole her—"

"Nothing. I will get him another girl—or remove his interest in girls forever."

"Yes, but maybe the girl won't like it. In my country, you know, you have to ask the girl first—"

"Not in mine!" growled the Caid. "But I haven't seen her."

"I have. She's choice. Better than the one I paid fifteen hundred dollars for once upon a time. Come, now, I have other things to do than to have a war with the M'Tougi. They will welcome an American husband for their girl. I will marry you right now, tonight. The ceremony is simple, and I can perform it, being the chief. You can live here with me if you wish. Leave the Army—no one will come after you here; I will adopt you."

Shaw drank more tea.

"That's very kind of you, Caid," he apologized, "but I can't do it. I'm in love with another girl. An American. A girl-soldier, here in Marrakech."

"That is no hindrance. In our religion we are allowed four wives, and odd companions without number."

SHAW thought of the girl with whom he had sat so many times before the Queen's Pool, hand in hand. He had told her that he loved her. What would she think of him if he went off to the hills and shacked up with a native, Caid's daughter or not? Who would protect her now, if her

knight that had gone on her quest forsook her for a strange woman?

"No, Caid," said Shaw, "I can't do it. Marriage is a very serious thing in my country."

The moon had gone down so that the courtyard and the garden lay in shadow, except where the pale lanterns gleamed in the foliage. The Caid rose to his feet, and moving to the archway, put on his slippers and began to scrape the fragments of the broken clock together with his foot.

"Clock or man must strike," grunted the Caid, "or else go out in a basket under the rubbish pile."

There was cold menace in the Caid's tone.

"If you fell off the tower," the Caid went on, "you'd look worse than this clock. I would tell your friends and your girl that you had been caught trying to break into my harem."

The wind whistled down coldly from the mountains, making the foliage rustle.

"Do as you please," said Shaw calmly, although his heart was racing. "That still won't solve your problem with the M'Tougi, and you'll have the Americans on your back, too. There are twenty-five of us here, and a lot of Navy boys at Port Lyautey. Why don't you try your offer on somebody else?"

The Caid removed his slippers again and returned to his seat on the cushion. He sat quietly for a time.

"Very well," he said at last. "I suppose you must be getting back to town. I'll send for the car."

"About the knife," began Shaw. "That's what I came out for. I wonder if you would have a knife like I told you about that you could sell me?"

The Caid did not answer, and Shaw did not dare repeat his question. But when Shaw thought the Caid must have gone to sleep, he suddenly spoke.

"I could have given you a knife like that, or a thousand knives like that, but those knives are not for such as you. They are for men."

It was another hour before the Caid rose and led the way across the garden. Shaw was cold, and he staggered with a desire to sleep. They crossed the stone-paved courts, under the dark tower, and then across the outer bailey with its smell of stables. The Caid went through the wicket in the main gate first. Shaw heard a scramble, rushing naked feet, the Caid's shouts; but by the time Shaw had got through the wicket, all seemed calm. There were white bundles of men in the shadow of the wall, and others before the gate. The Caid struck one with a staff he had picked up, a smacking thwack that made dust fly in the sudden light.

The light came from a car's headlights, that mounted the hill and

turned around. Bou-Chaib was at the wheel.

"Get in," ordered Bou-Chaib, his tone harsh, "before they make a football out of you!"

There was no speech while they bumped down the cart track, but when they reached the highway again, Shaw spoke his mind.

"You're a hell of a man," Shaw began. "I've missed bed-check and will get a week's confinement to quarters, and no knife after all. Brother, if I don't pass the word around what a faker you are! What did you go off and leave me for?"

"Take it easy," growled Bou-Chaib. "I was just down the hill a ways. I wasn't gonna hang around there while they beat your brains out."

"What do you mean, 'beat my brains out'? Who was going to beat my brains out? Kind of a job to beat my brains out!"

"You think so? Well, them gorillas around the gate are pretty handy at it. Whaddyuh think they was out there for? Couldn't do it inside, see—that violates the laws of hospitality."

"But the Caid came out with me!" protested Shaw.

"HE's gettin' old!" snarled Bou-Chaib. "To let you go to bed with a M'Tougi princess an' get away with it! He's got to have an heir, see? Or the tribe is gonna get another caid. If he dies without an heir, the French will grab everything."

"I didn't have anything to do with the girl! I said no. If I had, it would have been my heir and not his, anyway."

"Nah. Because she was gonna be a widow so soon as you ever come outside that gate. Then the Caid marries her himself. In the Atlas, any guy marries a widow, all her children are his."

Shaw laughed, incredulous.

"Where would those Ay-rabs get the guts to kill *me*? The Americans would come out and kick that old buzzard's roost right down around his ears!"

Bou-Chaib howled above the noise of the car: "You don't think they'd leave you there all red in front of the Caid's gate, do you? They'd slam you into an air vent in one o' them irrigation conduits; and when you come up in the Queen's Pool a couple days later, who could say who tossed you into it?"

When the first palms of the oasis began to wink by the windows, Bou-Chaib stopped the car.

"Free ride is over," he grunted. "You can walk the rest of the way back."

"I suppose you want me to give you a tip for taking me there to have me murdered," remarked Shaw, getting out.

"Why not? A guy with hair on his chest would've thought it was worth it."

THE following morning Captain Smith, Chief of Missions, sat behind his office desk examining his manicured nails. The captain was immaculate in dove-colored gabardine jacket with contrasting — non-regulation — shirt. His mustache was waxed to a tip, and his thick hair glittered like patent leather, so solid with pomade that it looked as though it had been varnished. Shaw knocked on the side of the open door, and being given permission, entered and saluted.

"Private Shaw reporting as ordered."

Captain Smith continued to contemplate his manicure. There were a good many pretty manicurists in the European section of Marrakech, and Captain Smith was reported to visit them in turn.

"Well, Shaw," snapped the Captain, "you were reported absent from quarters at the eleven o'clock bed-check last night. Drunk, I suppose?"

"No sir."

"Helling around with the Fatimas, hey? I see by your face that's the answer. You've been warned if you get your throat cut by the Arabs, nobody can do anything about it. Casanova himself! I've seen you hanging around the female personnel of this mission, too. There'll be no more of

that. You catch fleas and typhus and worse off the Arabs, and so you stay away from the members of the Women's Army Corps after this. Understand that clearly? That's an order. If you disobey, I'll transfer you to Casablanca to work on the docks. . . . One more thing: Charge of Quarters says you didn't come in until four A.M.. Where did you find an establishment that stays open that late? Or were you in a ditch somewhere?"

"I wasn't in any establishment, sir. I was kidnaped."

Captain Smith laughed heartily, and rolling back his chair, placed his feet on the desk.

"Tell me about it," he sneered. "And it had better be good."

Shaw did so, in detail, up until the time Shaw had said no to the Caid's proposal.

"After that I had to wait for the car to come and get me," continued Shaw. "The driver expected me to stay there, and so he went back to town."

Captain Smith laughed again, sarcastically, but not so heartily. Shaw saw the Captain's nostrils widen above the mustache.

"Show me on the map there behind you where this place is, if you can. Personally, I don't believe a word of it."

Shaw turned and studied the map. "This is the road," he said. "It's the only one that crosses the brook at a ford. About five miles farther on, to

the left—it doesn't seem to be marked—there's an air vent from the irrigation system just beyond the intersection—there! There's the castle! I remember it was called 'Oomenast.' There it is, right on the map."

The Captain took his feet from the desk and strode to the map. He looked at it for some time. When he spoke, his voice came thickly.

"I'll go out there tonight and check up on this story," said the Captain. "I'll go alone. I don't want any talk, you know. South of the brook is out of bounds for everyone, French and Americans. Dismissed!"

SHAW saluted, about-faced, and left the office. On his way out he paused beside the girl's desk.

"Sorry," he began, "no knife. They seem to be fresh out of knives, right now."

The girl put her hand shakily to her throat.

"For that matter," continued Shaw. "I still think he's harmless. If he is an honorable husband, he'll be true to his wife, and you don't need to be afraid of him. If he isn't, you still don't need to be afraid of him any more. . . . Well, will I see you after office hours?"

"The usual place?" smiled the girl, encouraged once more.

"No," said Shaw, "I'll meet you here. Let's stay away from the Queen's Pool for the next few days."

MARTIN LUTHER sat writing his great hymn, "Ein Feste Burg," in the Castle of Wartburg. He was adapting the majestic words of the Forty-sixth Psalm to the music of a German folk-tune.

A mighty fortress is our God

A mighty fortress indeed—like the stronghold that now sheltered him—and it was with God's help that he, Martin Luther, monk and scholar, believed with firmest faith he would achieve the Protestant Reformation.

A bulwark never failing,
Our helper He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing

But there was one who ever strove to storm the battlements of the fortress which was mankind's protection and salvation—the Devil.

Luther's pen moved on to a third stanza, defying the Enemy:

The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure.
One little word shall fell him.

Perhaps it was now that Luther became aware of a malevolent presence. He blotted his manuscript with a

SONGS THAT HAVE MADE HISTORY—XIV

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

drop of ink, and the Devil laughed. The monk leaped to his feet and flung the inkpot at the fiend. In proof thereof today, they will show you an ink-spot on the room's wall.

Though later ages dismissed the tale as a legend, the Devil was a dire reality to Luther. He advised mortals, harassed by Beelzebub, how to drive him away. They could do it by gazing at a pretty girl, quaffing a stein of beer under his nose, or jeering at him.

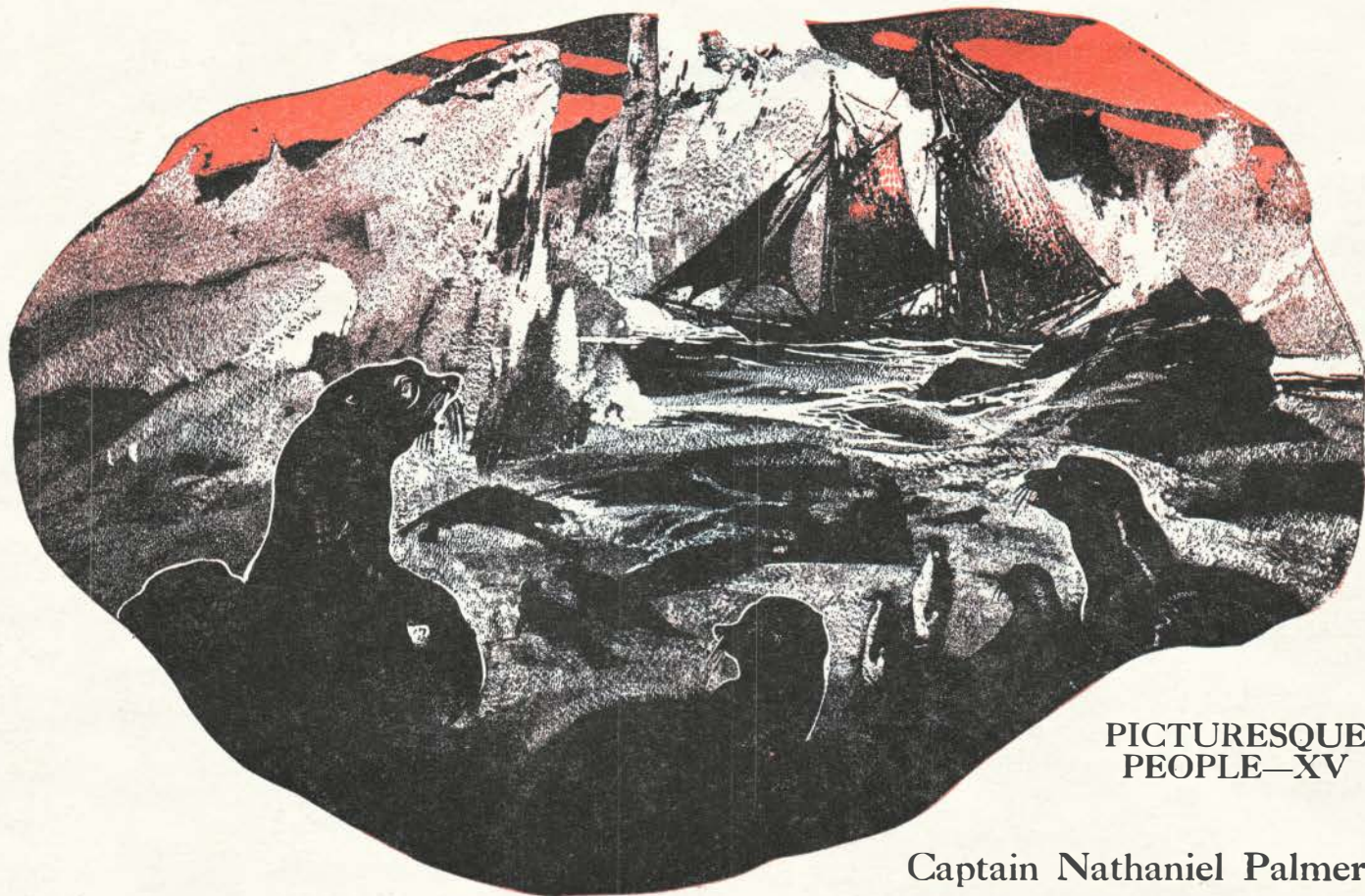
Music also could put the Evil One to flight, Luther maintained. He wrote several score of hymns and children's carols, but foremost was "Ein Feste Burg." He raised it in his deep bass to the accompaniment of a lute,

while he risked his life in his valiant fight against the practice of selling indulgences as entrances to heaven. The people joined their voices in its stirring unison and sonorous harmony. As Heine declared: "The hymn, sung by Luther as he entered Worms, followed by his companions, was a veritable battle-song. The old cathedral trembled at these new sounds; the crows in their dark nests at the tops of the towers were filled with fear. This hymn, the 'Marseillaise' of the Reformation, has retained its vitality and power down to our own time."

Bach, Mendelssohn, and Wagner all used it in compositions. Written in 1521, it was sung one hundred and ten years later by Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden and his whole army before joining combat in the Battle of Leipzig. And it has been sung in other wars.

Nor has the hymn's might in confounding the Devil and all his works diminished. When Nazi invaders of Norway sought to close Trondheim Cathedral in 1942, courageous Norwegians gathered and defied the order with the singing of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

—Fairfax Downey



PICTURESQUE
PEOPLE—XV

Captain Nathaniel Palmer

Ultima Thule

by WILLIAM H. KEARNS, JR.

A BREATH of wind whipped across the water and drew veils of fog from the iceberg that rolled easily in the ground swells. The big seal lying on the floe warily raised its head and sniffed the chill morning air. He barked his annoyance at the elements for disturbing his sleep, and splashed off noisily into the dark green sea. Sudden puffs of wind began to chase each other across the ice-pans, and slide down the lee of the berg to rustle the sails of the sloop barely discernible in the fog.

The mate on watch yawned, beat his arms around his body to restore circulation and eyed the ripples forming on the water. The rising wind prompted him to act. He opened a hatch leading to the ship's cabin and called below.

"Breeze pickin' up, Cap'n. 'Pears as though the fog might lift."

Minutes later a tall youth dressed in sealskins joined him on deck. He gazed at the vast cliffs of the berg.

"A big one, Phineas. Mighty good thing she didn't roll. We'd have been capsized in the wash."

The slap of a wet sail against the boom reminded them that the sheets would soon be filling. The Captain went below to arouse the crew, while the mate hauled in the sea anchors. Soon the ship stirred with activity.

Consolidating into a steady breeze, the wind filled the sails of the sloop and gave her headway through the lifting fog. A ray of sunlight flashed across the white water under her bowsprit, illuminating the gold letters of *Hero* on her nameplate. Captain Nathaniel Palmer, at twenty-one, a veteran of one sealing expedition in these Antarctic waters, took the helm. The crew, tense and expectant, took their lookout stations. Through the fog could be heard a booming sound.

The mate worked his way aft to stand beside Captain Palmer at the helm.

"Sounds like surf, Cap'n."

"No doubt of it. Likely a— What's that? There—through the fog!"

Simultaneously a shout came from the bow.

"Land ho, dead ahead!"

"Stand by to come about!"

In the fresh breeze the tidy sloop brought up smartly against the wind.

Captain Palmer sprang to the ratlines and peered into the fog. Where a minute before there had been just a faint shadow, now appeared a rocky promontory. Land!

Lifting fog disclosed that the *Hero* had been sailing into the mouth of a strait. Between the rocks that broke the abruptness of the sheer coastline, the brash ice jammed together with the rise and fall of the sea. Spell-bound, the crew gazed at the ice-covered mountains which appeared as the fog lifted.

The young captain turned from the rigging and gave orders to make sail while he recorded his latitude observations. It was Saturday morning, November 18, 1820.

Palmer's ability to navigate in bad weather and bad water seemed uncanny.

In the ship's log he wrote ". . . . found a strait leading SSW and NNE. It was literally filled with ice and the shore inaccessible. Thought it not wise to venture in. We bore away to the NW and I saw . . . the shore everywhere perpendicular. . . . Latitude at mouth of strait was 63-45 South."

Captain Palmer and his crew made history that day. The cold, silent land they found would lie unconquered and unclaimed for nearly one hundred years! What prompted the young captain to brave the icy waters and terrible storms below Cape Horn? Riches, fame, adventure? Perhaps all of these, combined with the gamble of exploring the unknown, for this American was a remarkable youth!

Nat Palmer came from good Stonington, Connecticut, stock. "Born," as the iron sailors of wooden ships used to say, "on the crest of a wave and rocked in the cradle of the deep." Before he could walk, Nat watched the fast sloops and schooners that grew from sturdy Connecticut oak in his father's shipyards. From paddling on the beaches in the summer to sailing around the coves of the sound, Nat grew to know his home waters as he knew the warm spot in the bed on a cold winter night. During the War of 1812, while most of his companions were still in school, the thirteen-year-old Palmer shipped out as a seaman on blockade runners. From second mate, he rose to mate, and at nineteen he became master of the schooner *Galena*. In foul weather or fair, the *Galena* could be seen plying the coastal waters, Palmer at the helm. His ability to navigate in bad weather and bad water seemed uncanny.

WHILE young Nat Palmer worked his way up to command, the coastal port of Stonington fast became the sealing center of America. Adventurous sea-captains discovered that a fortune could be made on one voyage to the coastal islands lying off the tip of South America. These were the islands where every year, millions of seals came north from Antarctic waters to breed. Yankee masters discovered that they could take ten thousand skins in a few days, and then beat their way across the South Pacific Ocean to China. In Canton, the pelts sold for two dollars Mex. With the profits made from the sale, the skippers then bought Oriental spices and silks which they in turn sold at tremendous profits in United States ports.

The trade proved so lucrative that literally millions of seals were killed annually. In a few years the known

islands were rapidly cleared of seals and the search went on for newer grounds. Attention was turned to records of early voyages around Cape Horn and to the rumors of unknown lands lying in the ice-locked sea. These rumors were based partly on fact and partly on fancy. There had been previous reports of land existing below the "Roaring Forties," but none were substantiated.

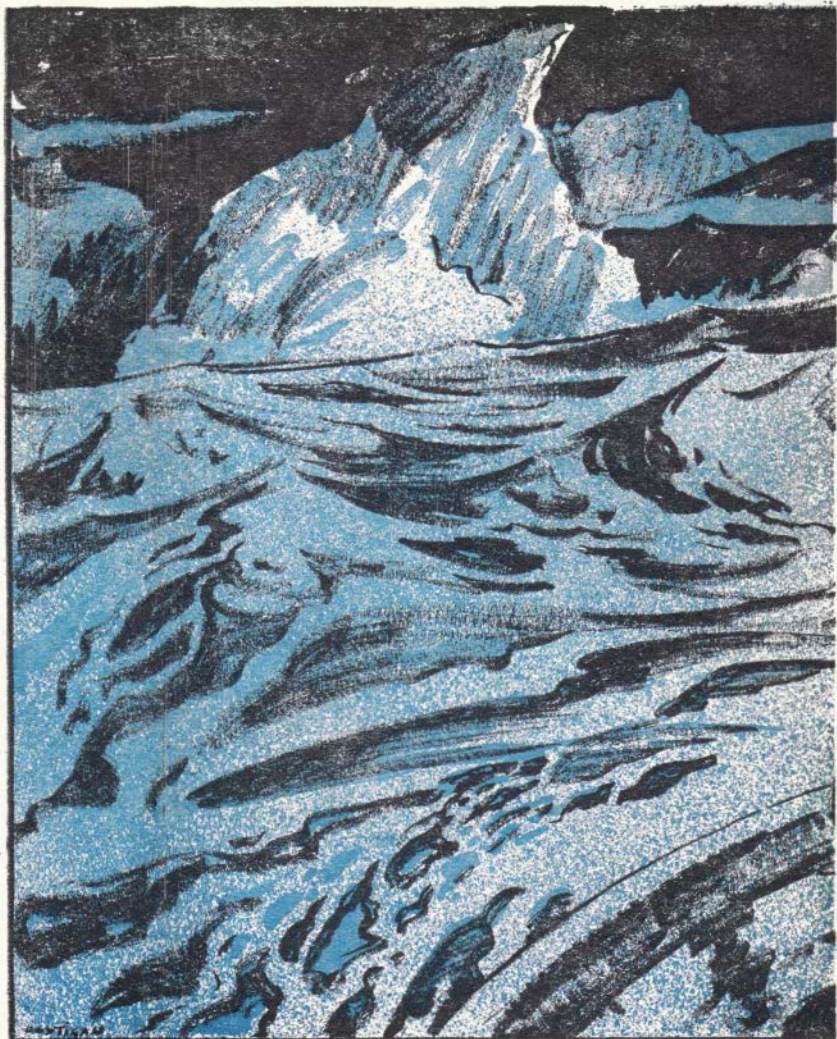
Much credence had been given to the report of a Dutch mariner, Dirck Gerritz, whose ship was separated from the rest of his convoy while emerging from the Strait of Magellan in the fall of 1598. Caught in a sudden storm, his vessel was blown southwesterly into the Antarctic Ocean. He reported sighting ice-covered islands. In the following years several adventurous captains claimed landfalls but none ventured ashore. Therefore it was accepted that someone had sighted the islands of West Antarctica before the year 1622. Yet nearly two hundred years later no one could actually prove the existence of land in these regions.

In the spring of 1817 the merchants of Stonington banded together for the purpose of financing a sealing-exploring expedition to southern waters.

They planned to search the treacherous area below Cape Horn for this land in hopes of replacing the older seal-islands, exhausted by thirty years of slaughter.

The skipper of the brig *Hersilia*, Captain James A. Sheffield, was faced with the task of picking the crew. This was not an easy job, for the trip was perilous and uncertain, and every man had to be hardy and capable. If the expedition was successful, each man would receive a large share of the profits. Captain Sheffield selected Palmer, then barely nineteen years old, as his second mate. Young Palmer, although reluctant to give up his command, succumbed to the lure of riches and adventure, and sailed with the *Hersilia* in the summer of 1817.

Unknown to the merchants of Stonington, a British mariner, in February, 1817, found the elusive Auroaras of Gerritz. Captain William Smith in the brig *William*, blown from his course while rounding the Horn, made a landfall. Since it was late in the season, he dared not delay to explore the land. The following October he went back and made the same landfall. With favorable weather, he put a boat ashore and "found it





barren and covered with snow, with seals in abundance."

Captain Sheffield, who had already sailed from Stonington, had not heard the confidential report of Captain Smith's discovery.

After two months at sea the *Hersilia* reached the Falkland Islands, a British possession lying in the South Atlantic about four hundred miles off the coast of Argentina.

Years before, British mariners had stocked these grassy islands with cattle and hogs, which provided fresh supplies for passing ships. By getting fresh beef and pork, as well as eggs from the thousands of sea-birds' nests, the dread disease of scurvy could be avoided. Captain Sheffield put Palmer ashore at the Falklands to collect supplies while the *Hersilia* set off on a scouting sortie. It was here that Palmer proved his worth on the expedition.

Several days after the *Hersilia* had departed, Palmer was surprised to see another vessel clearing the headland. It was the British brig *Espiritu Santo*, out of Buenos Aires. Young Palmer wisely made the acquaintance of her captain and found that he too was on a sealing expedition. By ingenious detective work, he learned from the

British crew that Smith had discovered land perhaps in the very area that the *Hersilia* intended to search. However, the British captain had a generous share of craftiness. Nothing could persuade him to disclose any information that might cause him to lose his virtual monopoly of the new sealing-grounds. The latitude and longitude of the new-found islands remained a secret.

When the *Espiritu Santo* sailed from the Falklands, her most interested observer was young Palmer. He took up vantage point on the highest elevation of the island and carefully computed the course of the brig. He noted each tack made by the vessel until she could no longer be seen. Then setting down his observations on a chart, he was able to determine her true course from the islands.

Upon the return of the *Hersilia*, Palmer related the episode of the *Espiritu Santo* to Captain Sheffield. Together they pored over his observations and decided to act immediately. With the skill of a naval captain planning an attack, Captain Sheffield computed the course and speed of the *Espiritu Santo*. Allowing for currents and winds, he set out

to intercept the British vessel or discover the land which she kept secret.

One afternoon, as if by schedule, they sighted land with the conspicuous masts of the *Espiritu Santo* disclosing a convenient harbor. The Britisher had found the rumored Auroras (now called the South Shetlands), even though the American vessel was not far behind. The grounds were fertile beyond the hopes of even the most ambitious Stonington sealer. Rather than becoming angry at being followed, the British captain suggested that both crews aid each other in taking sealskins. Soon each ship was riding deep in the water with ten thousand prime buck sealskins.

Months later, when the *Hersilia* dropped her hook in Stonington Harbor, the news of her fabulous cargo and of the discovery of new seal colonies spread like wildfire throughout the town. Almost immediately it was decided to send a new and larger expedition to the virgin land. The new expedition would make Stonington the capital of the sealing fleet and enrich the already well-filled coffers of the local merchants.

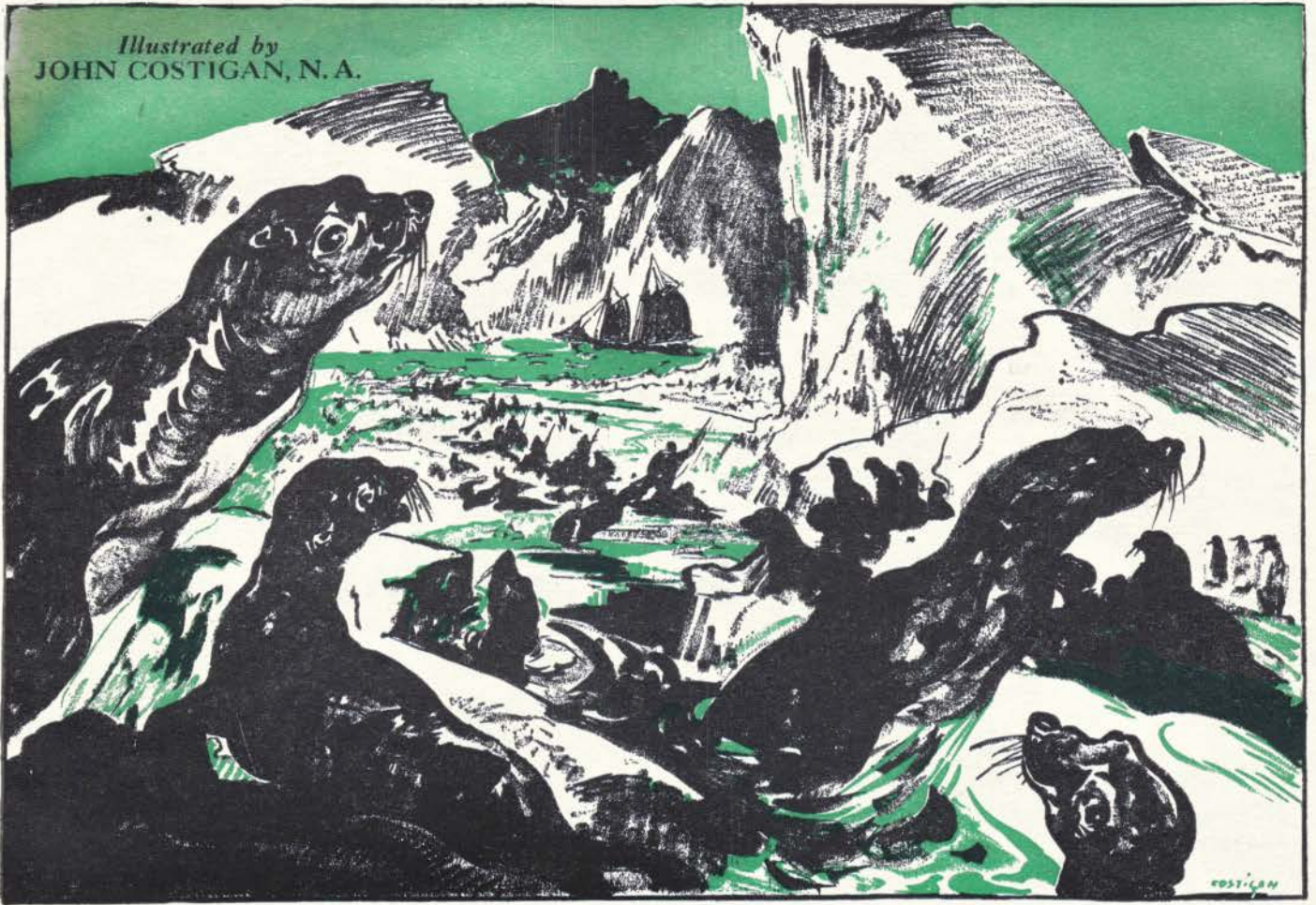
The brigs *Hersilia*, *Frederick*, *Catherine*, *Emaline* and *Clotheer*, and the schooners *Free Gift* and *Express*, were quickly fitted out for sea. In the mind of every captain were questions regarding the safety of his ship. After all, no one knew the shoal waters and obstructions to navigation in the islands.

To scout for the rest of the force, the sloop *Hero* was built in Groton, Connecticut. She displaced about forty-five tons, and was approximately forty-seven feet long, with a sixteen-foot beam and a six-foot draft. On an even keel, her gunwales were hardly more than one foot out of water. She was certainly not a large ship for a voyage of almost fifteen thousand miles to the Antarctic.

The *Hero's* main job was to scout around the islands for new rookeries (seal colonies) and maintain contact between the ships of the expedition. Nat Palmer was chosen by the Commodore, Captain Benjamin Pendleton, as captain of this vessel on which the success of the whole venture depended.

After fitting out his ship with supplies and equipment, including seven barrels of rum, four barrels of gin and two and one-half barrels of wine, he was ready for sea. It isn't hard to visualize young Palmer at eleven A.M. Monday, July 31, 1820, giving the order to take out his first deep-water command. As the *Hero* slid quietly down the bay between Bartlett's Reef and Sandy Point, he took one last look at his home and the Palmer shipyard.

Illustrated by
JOHN COSTIGAN, N. A.



There were literally hundreds of thousands of seals on every island, large or small.

With a full crew of seven men, including the skipper, they passed Block Island in company with the schooner *Express* and the brig *Hersilia*, and stood toward the Antarctic.

The *Hero* was a sturdy little vessel, and often made eight knots with all sails set. Nat took great pride in his sloop and proudly noted on the 29th of August that he had outsailed the *Express* with ease, having two reefs in the mainsail. Day by day the ships steadily beat their way southward and crossed the equator on September 18, 1820. While the temperature dropped steadily, days grew into weeks and weeks into months. The men busied themselves repairing gear and preparing for the day when they would sight the first seals.

The log entry for Tuesday, October 17, 1820, reads:

*Commences with fresh gales from southwest and clear weather at one. Past one; made the land bearing southeast and southwest and stood in from it at 4 p.m. Bore away before the wind running along the shore the whole night. At 6 a.m. made the Volunteer Rocks; at 10 a.m. anchored in Berkley Sound. Found here two shallows belonging to ship J. Knox. The *Express* in company.*

They had reached the northeast corner of the Falkland Islands, where they anchored to wait for the rest of the expedition. Shortly after all ships were in and provisioned, the sailing force once more got under way for the sealing-grounds in the South Shetland Islands.

The cruise was not spent without incident. From the log of the *Hero* an entry reports that one of the long boats of another ship capsized. Her crew, thrown into the bitterly cold water and hampered by heavy clothing, were condemned to an icy death. On another occasion, while maneuvering to speak with the *Express*, the *Hero* suddenly rammed her and carried away two timbers. One morning, while hoisting the mainsail, Captain Palmer was knocked overboard into the freezing water. He casually reported that he "regained consciousness and got on board without much injury."

Not long after departure from the Falklands, they sighted the snow-covered peaks of the South Shetlands. They anchored again in the harbor of the island (now called Deception Island) where two years before they had taken so many seals. However, Commodore Pendleton was not content to remain in Deception Sound.

The following week, the force coasted around the islands in the wake of the *Hero*, which had taken the lead in searching for rookeries. After finding suitable grounds, Commodore Pendleton ordered Captain Palmer to explore Deception Island and the waters to the south. On this trip, Palmer found one of the most famous sealing-harbors in the islands, now known as Yankee Harbor.

To the American Expedition the South Shetlands were a gold mine. There were literally hundreds of thousands of seals on every island, large or small, and in every bay there were bound to be more. Taking only the buck seal skins (valued for their stamina and texture), the wholesale slaughter of the animals kept the expedition driving constantly south, looking for new lands. Finally they reached a point where there were no longer any identifying positions on the charts—the unknown. It required a man with a sixth sense to sail around in the dense Antarctic sea fog, which can suddenly surround a ship without warning. To be caught in one of these fogs and hear the crash of thousands of tons of ice as the tremendous bergs capsize is an eerie feeling, and one that can make even the lure of rich profits seem dim in comparison. The *Hero* had just the right man,

Nat Palmer, who held no fear of fogs and dared venture still farther south where no man had ever been.

On that Saturday morning in 1820 when he saw through the fog the towering mountains with immense glaciers making their way to the sea, Nat Palmer joined the ranks of the immortal discoverers. He had found a continent with an area of four and one-half million square miles. This was Ultima Thule—the Antarctic, the last continent. The land he found now bears his name, the Palmer Peninsula.

The morning after the discovery dawned clear. Amid schools of whales, with light winds blowing, they ran northeasterly along the shore until they discovered the mouth of a harbor. Hoping to find seals, Captain Palmer lowered his boat, went ashore and "got one seal." On the following day, he again dared the surf and "was able to obtain a quantity of eggs as well as six skins." Thus he not only discovered the land but became the first human being ever to set foot on the continent of Antarctica.

There are stories told of how two months later he met Captain Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen, a German in command of a Russian exploring expedition. The log shows no indication of this. For the next several weeks the entries were confined to the state of the weather and the condition of the sea. Palmer wrote only one line for each day.

On February 24, 1821, the *Hero* and the *Express* headed for home with a full load of skins and oil. Each day, as they made their way north, impatience at being away from home is evident in the log. His entry for April 3, 1821, ended with this "May we have a prosperous breeze to waft us to our Nation's shores is the fervent wish of your humble servant, Nathaniel B. Palmer."

On Monday, the seventh of May, 1821, the *Hero* passed Block Island and Montauk Point. After seventy-four days of steady sailing, they were in home waters again. They had ac-

complished their mission, and the laurels of fame and fortune awaited them in Stonington harbor. . . .

Some years after his return from the Antarctic, Palmer, then a "deep water" captain, attended a dinner in the American Consulate at Hong-kong, China. Like all famous men, various stories had been rumored about him, particularly in regard to his Antarctic voyages. But the one story involving von Bellingshausen seemed to persist, possibly through controversy surrounding it. The British Admiral, Sir John Francis Austin, attending the same dinner, asked Palmer to affirm or deny the story. His reply was recorded and published sometime later by Frederick T. Bush, the American Consul.

According to Bush, Palmer was ordered by Captain Pendleton to search the northeast and southwest of Deception Island for possible land, from January 14 to January 28, 1821. One morning at twelve-thirty A.M. while lying-to in a dense fog, Captain Palmer relieved the watch and rang the customary one bell. Almost as an echo, another bell sounded, and with each successive half-hour the second bell rang. Finally, at three-thirty A.M. with a lifting of the fog, Nat discovered the *Hero* lying in company with two strange ships. Immediately he hoisted his colors, and the others responded with the Russian ensign. Shortly afterward a boat put out with a naval officer in the sternsheets who requested the captain of the *Hero* to come aboard the Russian vessel. Palmer obliged, and was ushered into the wardroom where he met Captain (later Admiral) Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen, whose name is now applied to one of the continental seas of Antarctica.

Captain von Bellingshausen explained that he had been commissioned by imperial decree to explore these waters in search of possible land. In the two years of searching for the rumored land, he had found nothing but ice confronting him at every turn. What, then, did this young captain in his frail sloop expect to accomplish

in such dangerous waters? To his complete amazement, Captain Palmer informed him that not only had the *Hero* made a landfall two months previously, but Palmer had beached his longboat and explored. Von Bellingshausen could hardly believe his ears!

Captain Palmer went on to describe the land, which he estimated to be of continental proportions. To substantiate his statements, he sent for his log and charts. Palmer offered to pilot the Russian vessels to the coast, or if Captain von Bellingshausen cared to wait until the fog lifted completely, he could see the mountain ranges for himself from the vessel's masthead. The Russian commander must have been more than slightly irate. To have sailed so far and come so close to achieving his objective, only to find himself beaten by a young American lad was extremely disappointing. Still, von Bellingshausen was a fair man. Determined to see that Palmer received credit for the discovery, he included the full details in a report to his sovereign. He gave the name "Palmer Land" to the long peninsula stretching out from the Antarctic mainland toward the tip of South America.

Strangely enough, the von Bellingshausen report contains an account of the meeting in Antarctica, but the Palmer log does not.

The lack of accurate evidence to substantiate the meeting has caused many eminent geographers to minimize the Palmer discovery. But a small sail-covered logbook in the Library of Congress holds the proof. Written in the hand of Captain Palmer 128 years ago, the time, place and date of the discovery are there for the world to see.

On the basis of this information, he was officially credited with the discovery of Antarctica by the *Congress Internationale de Geographie*, 1938. This amazing twenty-one-year-old American, Captain Nathaniel Brown Palmer, was the first human to see and explore the last remaining undiscovered continent of the world.



THE STORY OF A RUSSIAN AIR-
FORCE OFFICER WHO BECAME FED
UP WITH LIFE IN A POLICE STATE,
AND WITH TWO COMPANIONS,
CRASH-LANDED HIS PLANE WITH-
IN THE AMERICAN LINES.

THE most irreconcilable ene-
mies in times of common
danger may become friends,
or by simply forgetting the
past, join forces in the common inter-
est of both. . . .

This is what happened in Russia during the second World War. The two enemies were the Russian people and the Soviet regime. The Russian people, having passed through a period of the worst persecution and terrorism in the years of 1929 through 1938, which had gripped all sections of the population, of famine in 1933 and 1937—the Russian people in the hour of common danger united and formed an iron fist to oppose the German invaders.

The common people hoped that after the war they would find understanding from those who would be the first whose corpses would dangle from the gallows in case of a German victory. . . . I was among those who shared that belief.

Born in 1920, I have never known and never seen Russia in the pre-revolutionary period. I grew up, absorbing my surroundings. I took in everything that was taught to me in school, and followed the course of life I shared with those with whom I lived, studied and worked.

My parents did not participate in any political activity. Living their own personal life, they felt that they had one big task—to do all they could for us, their children. However, when the first Kolkhoz came into being, its creation affected everybody and was widely talked about. In 1930, following a refusal of my father to enter a Kolkhoz, we were deprived of nearly all personal belongings. It was then that my mother could no longer hold back her feelings. She shouted: "Barbarians! Have pity for the children!" There were five of us at the time. It was then that I realized who these barbarians were.

However, life takes its own course: years went by, and the following events erased this gloomy moment from my mind. I remember another picture: In 1933, sitting at the dinner table, my father was trying to divide fairly one and a half pounds of bread between seven people. Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I saw him break into tears. He said: "Forgive me, children; it is not my fault. It is the fault of those who have destroyed our life."



MY ESCAPE

That made me realize that some outside force was breaking up people's lives. I became gradually acquainted with the life of my home town of Tambov after 1936, when I finished seven years of high school and entered the technical institute for agriculture. Everything seemed fascinating, though at times I did not have even a crust of bread two days in a row. I firmly made up my mind to acquire all the knowledge I could. At that time a passage from Marx was being constantly hammered into our heads: "The road to knowledge is not easy or wide. Only those can hope to reach the beckoning heights who fearlessly climb its stony path." I did my best in the effort to reach this goal, even though the climbing was made difficult by a hungry stomach.

Then came the year of 1937. People were afraid to talk aloud. The teachers became even more cautious in their statements. Every morning people found out about the arrests that had been made during the night.

Then one day these arrests spread to our Institute. The first one to be affected was the head of the Institute. Student arrests followed. At the beginning of the summer recess of 1937, I decided not to return to the Institute. In 1938 I entered the teachers' college in Tambov. After completing the course in 1939 I was inducted into the armed forces. I was sent to a school of navigation in the town of Melitopol. One week before the outbreak of World War II I was transferred to the Far Eastern region. There I got my first object lesson in informing upon one's fellows. Here is a concrete example: In 1943 my personal friend Vladimir Malyshev was careless enough to point at a portrait of Marshal Timoshenko in the presence of several people and state that Timoshenko lacked talent or ability. He was denounced, taken off active duty and threatened with severe punishment. This drove Malyshev to suicide. He left me a death note: "I cannot stand to be told what to



Not knowing a word of English, all I could do was underline the one eloquent word: "Emigrant."

from the USSR

think or say. Tell my folks that I was killed in an airplane crash."

Malyshev was denied any ceremony of burial. This evoked a wave of indignation among the officers of the corps. Shortly afterward, I, with fifteen other officers, was sent to the front. I was assigned to a unit of long-range reconnaissance flyers, where I remained until the end of the war. For my services during the war I was decorated five times.

The war was over. There were big victory celebrations all over the country. In October, 1946, I was able to pay a visit to my home town. Passing through regions which had been formerly occupied by the Germans, I saw incredible destruction and human suffering, but I heard no complaints from the people. In White Russia, in the Ukraine, people lived among the ruins, sharing their living quarters with the cattle. Tambov, my home town, was spared from the German occupation, but it did not escape destruction. To keep warm, neighbors

crowded together into one house and chopped up the abandoned houses for firewood. There was hardly a family in the town which had not lost at least one of its members in the war. Almost all work in the house and in the field was being carried out by the women.

Upon my return to Tambov I found out what had happened to a close friend, Yudin, during my absence. When a statement was made in his presence that Stalin had won the war against the Germans, he had the audacity to say that the victory was won not by Stalin but by the people. For this statement alone he was sentenced to a five-year prison term. Yudin's case brought me to the realization that the NKVD (Secret Police) was continuing to carry out its work of destruction. I cut my leave short, and after only ten days out of the thirty granted me, I returned to my unit.

Shortly after my return I requested demobilization. The request was granted, and I departed for Moscow,

by PIOTR
PIROGOV

Leningrad, Odessa and finally Lvov, where I received an appointment to head the local high school in Mukachev, providing that I find a reason to fire three former emigrants employed at the school. Lvov at this time was overcrowded by refugees from other regions, who considered it a safer place than the homes they had abandoned. I think that typical of the plight of these Soviet refugees is the case of a woman engineer whom I met on a street-corner shining shoes, because her salary as an engineer was insufficient to provide for her two children.

Trans Carpathia, where the town of Mukachev is situated, at this time was the most "prosperous" part of the Soviet territory. There existed no Kolkhoz, and people still could find a livelihood.

One month after I became the principal of Mukachev high school, one of the three emigrants employed by this school was arrested and tried. The charges against him were that he had made the following remark: "There is no lack of officials in the Soviet Union; what is lacking is order."

On February 25, 1947, I was notified that I was called back to military service. I was assigned to a bomber squadron in the town of Kolomiya. Spring was lovely that year, but the beauty of nature went unnoticed by the hungry population of Moldavia. Their only interest in life consisted in the search for a crust of bread. From five to six children found their nourishment in the garbage-cans of each military mess-hall. In March of the same year in the city park of Kolomiya I saw a banner proclaiming a slogan of the Five-Year Plan. The slogan went: "What we are going to have in 1950!" Under this banner, unnoticed, lay the corpse of a man who had died of starvation. Neither the slogan nor the corpse attracted particular attention.

In the fall of 1947 I was dispatched with a group of fifteen soldiers armed with submachine guns to enforce the delivery to the Government of the grain produced by the local farmers. The farmers left their homes, and taking their produce with them, fled to the hills to avoid making grain deliveries ordered by the Government.

In May, 1948, I was called to my commander's office. The commander took me to task for having voiced my opinions about the general state of affairs, and specifically for having listened to the Voice of America broad-

casts. It was then that I realized that I had taken all I could, and made up my mind to leave the country at the first opportunity.

Shortly afterward, an army order was read to all officers stating that a member of the Soviet Air Force had fled to Turkey, using one of the military aircraft. All officers were forced to sign a statement that they agreed to be punished by twenty-five years of imprisonment if they attempted a similar flight, and that their families and relatives were liable to prosecution according to the measure of their involvement.

A pilot named Barsov later joined the unit of which I was a member. I informed him of the Government decree and asked his opinion of the flyer who had escaped to Turkey. Barsov thought that the flyer had done right, and that prompted me to acquaint him with my plan for an escape.

Barsov accepted my plan.

Together we studied maps and figured out a course for the projected flight. From then on it was a question of opportunity. The main obstacle was that Barsov and I were usually assigned to separate flights; however, the opportunity presented itself on October 9th. On that day Barsov's navigator was unable to board the plane, and I was assigned to take his place.

At 12:00 hours Moscow time we left the airport at Kolomiya. We charted a course which took us across Poland into the American zone of Austria. We had made a firm agreement that in case of a forced landing in Poland, we would under no circumstances let ourselves fall into the hands of Polish authorities, but that leaving our plane, we would make our way on foot to the border of the American Zone of occupation in Austria. The third

member of our crew, a radio operator, was completely uninformed about the plan of our flight. Our map went as far as the city of Linz in Austria.

It was fortunate for us that when we broke through a low cloud formation after having flown without the aid of radio communications, we recognized the contours of Linz and the surrounding country, which formed the edge of our map. We attempted to proceed to Munich without the aid of a map; however, we were forced to abandon this attempt and turned back to Linz. When we crash-landed in Linz, we found out that the fuel left in our tank would have given us only two more minutes of flying-time.

Just before the landing we were gripped by a panic, for on the meadows in front of a group of buildings we recognized the five-pointed star and decided that our landing-field was occupied by Soviet troops. Barsov, who did not carry a weapon, turned to me and said quietly: "If we should be surrounded by Soviet troops, do not hesitate to shoot me. After that, your fate will be in your own hands. You can do as you please."

How great was our relief when we found out that we had been mistaken! The five-pointed star we had seen was not a red star, which would have meant slavery for us. It was the American Army star, the emblem of freedom. Not knowing a single word of English, all I could do when I was first confronted with an American officer, was to take out an English textbook and underline one eloquent word: "Emigrant."

Several days later we faced the representatives of the American and Soviet armies. During the ensuing questioning we declared irrevocably that we would no longer serve under the red banners of Communism. My knowledge of life in the United States was negligible and inconclusive. It was fed from three sources: (1) the official line of propaganda, stating that the United States planned to start a war with the Soviet Union; (2) the broadcasts of the Voice of America, to which we listened regularly; and (3) works of Russian literature of the pre-war period depicting, apparently objectively, conditions in the United States. An example of such literature is the book "One Starred America," by the authors Ilf and Petrov.

In the light of my short experience in the U. S. I can say that broadcasts of the Voice had given me the clearest impression of the prevailing conditions. Guided by the information which I had received through these broadcasts, I have found nothing particularly new or surprising in the things which I saw upon my arrival in the U. S. Without going into too much detail for the time being. I

Illustrated by
JOHN McDERMOTT



Children found their nourishment in the garbage cans of mess-halls.

would like to point out the tremendous difference between the living standards of an average American and an average Soviet citizen. To give just one example, it takes an average American worker two-thirds of his weekly earnings to buy a man's suit. It takes a Soviet worker the equivalent of two months of his earnings (even taking into consideration the highest wage scale in the Soviet Union) to buy a suit of similar quality. In a more detailed analysis, at a later date, I intend to show an exact table of comparison between the earnings and the buying power of an American and a Soviet citizen.

So much for the physical well-being. But that is only one part of the things that make human life worth living. The second and maybe even more important part is the question of human freedom. What can be more degrading, more devoid of any meaning, than to be fed all variations of one theme: "Stalin the Great! Stalin the Superhuman! Stalin the Benefactor of the People! Stalin. . . Stalin. . ." No czar, no tyrant in world history, was ever made a symbol of such omnipotence as Stalin by a group of a few in the name of many. A source of unending surprise to me is the fact that in the U. S. the people can freely criticize the highest Government officials, and what is more, that these Government officials listen and let themselves be guided by the Voice of the People.

IN the Soviet Union thirty years have gone by since the revolution opened the door for a Soviet régime. For thirty years the Soviet Government has forged the metal which went into guns and ammunition, and for thirty years the people of the Soviet Union have gone hungry and without the barest necessities of life. However, all these sacrifices have not achieved what the Soviet Government set out to accomplish. In spite of all the Five-Year Plans, the heavy industry of the Soviet Union is lagging far behind in its output, and Soviet armaments can stand no comparison with the high standards achieved by the despised capitalist countries.

Every new account of the latest developments in the field of American aviation and of the mechanization of the American armed forces adds to the heavy burden of Soviet officialdom. The latest type of the Soviet long-range bomber is an airplane modeled on the U. S. B-29, which is considered outdated in the U. S. Air Force. The Soviet rocket fighter planes have not as yet left the experimental stage, and could not be put into mass production. This does not serve to show the weakness of the Soviet forces. Their strength lies in a different field. This comparison is meant to point out that the failure of the Soviet Government



Vladimir was careless enough to state that Timoshenko lacked ability.

to achieve important advances in the field of armaments makes all the sacrifices of the Russian people senseless and brings them new sufferings in the future.

The Soviet Government cannot be denied the faculty of having well organized the collective robbery of Russian farmers by bringing them into farm coöperatives. This is especially true of the farmers of the Carpathian and Trans Carpathian regions, where, as in certain other parts of the Soviet Union, whole communities have been uprooted, and where thirty per cent of farmers were forcibly evicted and transferred to Siberia in March of 1948.

My main consideration in the execution of my plan was to see the life of free human beings and not that of the obedient slaves of the Government.

I have not left Russia. What I have left behind me is the Soviet Government. They are two entirely different things. I love Russia and the Russian people, and I shall continue to love them. They are not to blame for the state of affairs in the world of today.

At least two more articles by Piotr Pirogov will follow in early issues— one on the Russian Air Force and another on "SMERSH," the Soviet Secret Military Police.

In the middle of it Wild-horse blew a stirrup and landed.

IT seemed to Wild-horse Farnum that a man who was partial to a particular horse was in the position of a tuba-player: he must drag the danged thing with him wherever he went. Wild-horse was partial to two horses, a knot-headed steeldust and a little pack-animal with no foolishness about him.

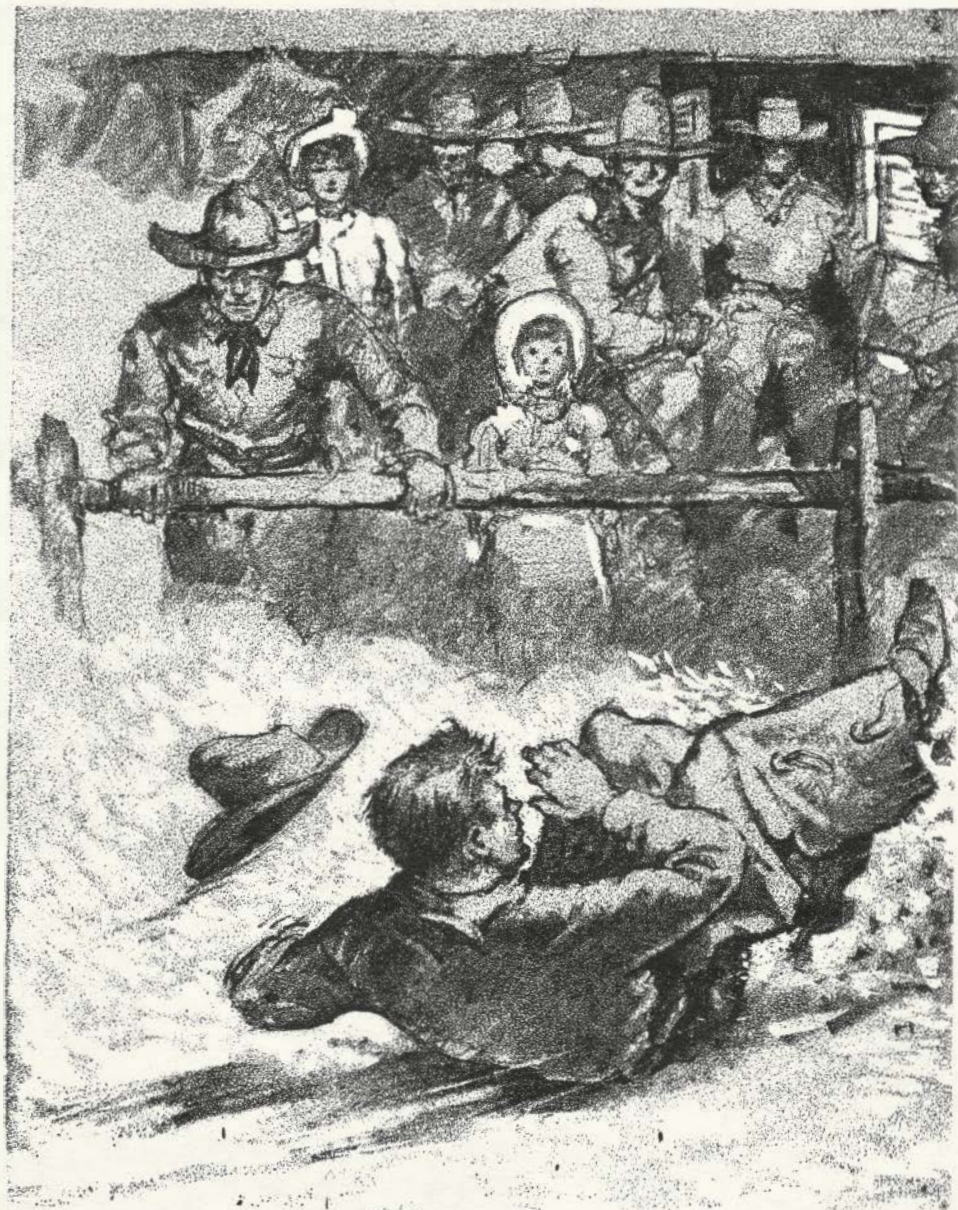
Farnum liked to travel in style, so he engaged an emigrant car at Denver, gave the horses the rear portion and boarded in the front. Three days later, he and the horses were set down at a water tank in southern Utah, on a green prairie sliding up to an austere range of mountains. He stood and gaped at them the way a gold-rush miner might have gaped at a beautiful woman.

The ghost of a snowy peak floated above the purple crests. He thought of early-summer freshets singing between banks of willow and aspen; of trout, and bands of wild ponies waiting to be trapped. Something like a hairspring in him began to oscillate.

Wild-horse Farnum needed mountains as an ouzel needs water. They were his religion; they were his belief in the hereafter. In the mountains he had been born; to the mountains he would return when these mustanging and bronc-stomping days were over. He thought of them as a little like himself: big, spectacular and lonely.

In the shade of the water tower, he packed one horse and saddled the other, swung his lemon-yellow chaps into the saddle and started for the mountains. He had been curious about these mountains ever since passing them in another emigrant car another spring. He had vowed to come back and trap in them some day. This year he had made arrangements to do his summer horse-trapping in the Whetstone Mountains. By first snow, he would have his brand on a good herd of canners, worthless, cold-blooded grass-stealers, with a leavening of perhaps a dozen ponies to be trained and sold as saddlers. And he would know about those mountains.

A fresh cattle-trail led him into the foothills. At a town called Council City he was to meet several ranchers to whom he had written about the possibility of trapping in their mountain range. Near sundown, he was about to give up hope of making Council City by dark, when he smelled juniper smoke and heard a wild cowboy yell. He decided he had caught up with the herd he had been following. This was at a gap in some



The Last

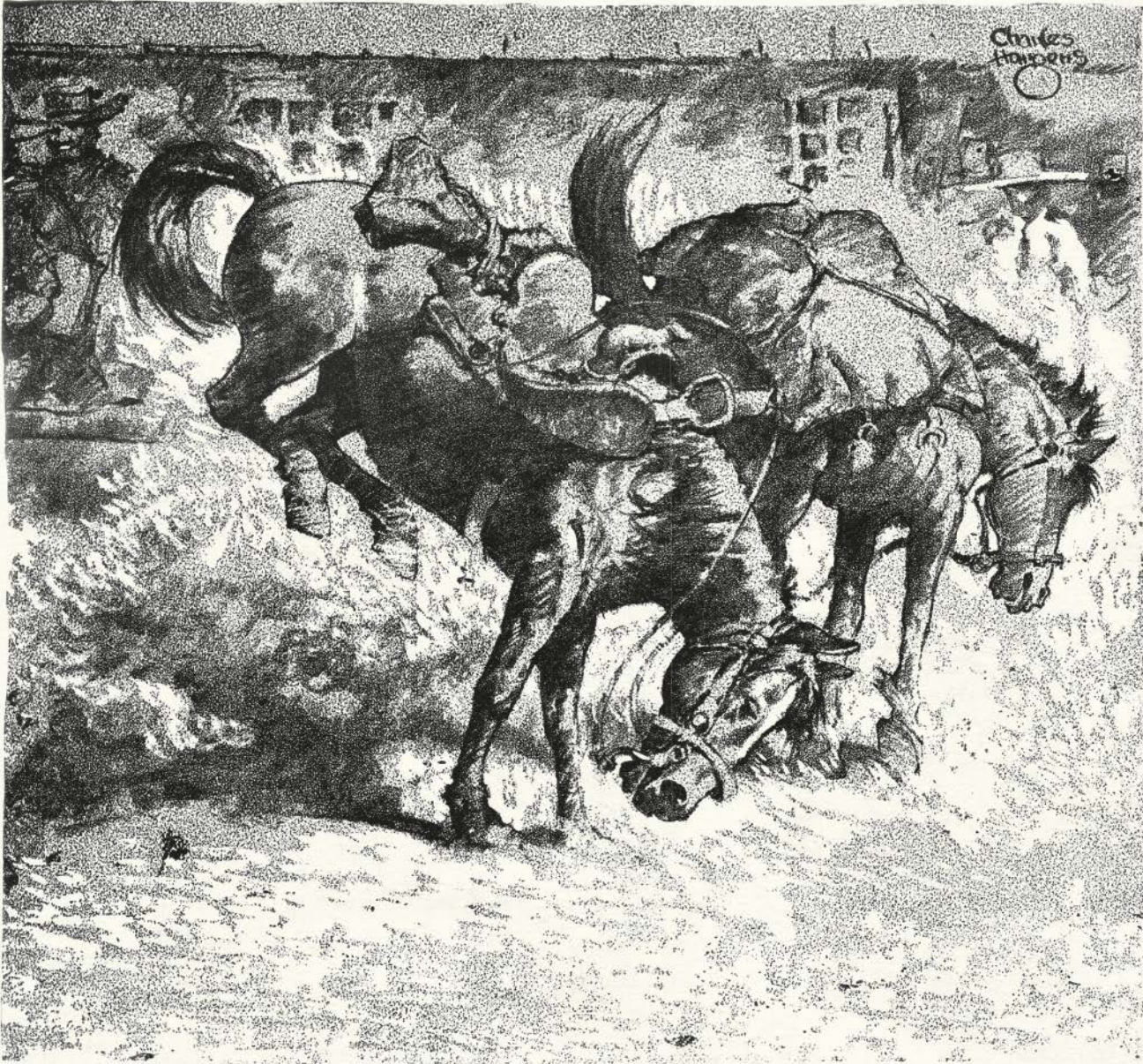
low hills tufted like a candlewick bedspread. Wild-horse reset his sombrero over his right eye and got the horse into a showy singlefoot, as an actor might swallow a lozenge before his entrance. Entrances were everything to him.

Everything was big about Wild-horse Farnum: his hands, his heart and his loneliness. He played the part of a one-man Wild West show, but always he would peer at himself doubtfully from various angles in an attempt to see how he looked to other people. The lemon-yellow chaps, silk shirt and white Stetson were the greasepaint of a magnificent ham ac-

tor who was his own best audience. His histrionics brought him many acquaintances, but he had never quite made a friend. His soul dwelt apart from all the noise, small and abashed.

A rider came toward him through the gap. His entrance spoiled, all Wild-horse could do was to pull and raise his hand shoulder high, saying: "Howdy! I'm Wild-horse Farnum."

He thought the man smiled, though it was too dark to be sure. He was rangy and solemn, plainly dressed in brushpopper jacket, jeans and work chaps. His Stetson was raw-edged and flat, and a shadow hung from the brim.



Mustang

Wild-horse Farnum needed mountains; they were his religion . . . So it came about that he found work and war and romance among them.

by FRANK BONHAM

"Howdy," he said. "I'm Shevlin. I ramrod for C. Y. Moss."

They shook hands. Wild-horse expected to ride on and have supper with the cowboys, perhaps yarn a bit. But Shevlin said:

"You might as well throw off here. Nothing flat enough to bed a wood-tick, up yonder. We've ate and set guards. I'll bunk with you here."

Wild-horse knew he was being put off. He was not unduly curious, however. He saw many strange things in his poking into the remote pigeon-holes of the back-country. He let Shevlin's terse explanation suffice for the time:

"We're bringin' a little herd down to the railroad."

In the morning, the herd had drifted considerably south. The mustanger's way was north. "See you up yonder, anyhow," Wild-horse Farnum told Shevlin.

"Not on Moss' land." Shevlin retorted.

"How come?"

The ramrod's lanky shoulders rose and dropped. "Ask him. I only work there." He rode after the herd drifting deeper into the hills.

Wild-horse Farnum was bothered. When he trapped, he did not like to worry about artificial things like

boundaries. It was awkward to pull up in the middle of a bronc' chase because you were on the wrong ranch. He would have to hooraw this man C. Y. Moss into line.

His first vista of Council City caught at his heart. The only thing he had seen to compare with the village was an Alpine hamlet on a lumber-yard calendar. Peaked roofs and a church spire poked through a green froth of trees. A creek bisected the town. Behind, the mountains tossed their magnificent heads.

For years he had been searching for such a town. Not to settle in. but to

remember in case he ever got too crippled or too old to mustang, and wanted a place where he could dig in. Wild-horse liked his way of life too well to stop moving before he had to. He loved horses, and he liked to hit a town dramatically, tell the ranchers how it was going to be, and trail into the thunderous crags most men hesitated to cross afoot, let alone on horseback after a band of wild horses. He grew fat on applause. His chief night-fear was of sinking into the obscuring mud of a prosaic life.

His round-robin letter had said he would be in Council City on the eighth, when most of the cattlemen would be in town for the spring roping. It was not quite noon when he arrived. Streamers fluttered up and down the main street. Horses and turn-outs thronged the road; children and dogs darting perilously among them. Wild-horse's histrionic soul leaped up like a dog with dirty feet: all the elements of drama were here for a man who knew how to mix them.

HE rode as far as the hotel, when suddenly the steeldust appeared to shy. Wild-horse lost the come-along of the pack-horse, and both horses went to pitching. His sombrero sailed away; his chaps flapped like yellow wings. A cowboy shouted: "Powder River! Let 'er buck!"

There in the street it was touch-and-go with Wild-horse Farnum for a while. The horse was pitching fence-cornered, coming down on stiff legs with a jarring power that snapped the mustanger's neck like the popper of a whip. Shaking his head, the pony rattled the silver-mounted bridle and bit. In the middle of it, Wild-horse blew a stirrup, and after two more lunges landed on his hip pockets in the road.

The crowd rocked with laughter at the sight.

He got up slowly, wiped his nose and stared at the big stallion. Then, warily, he moved toward it. He recovered the reins and vaulted back in the saddle, spurring savagely with the side of his boots. For a full minute, the bronc bucked from one side of the road to the other—responding to the secret language they had whenever he came too near a child—but at the end of that time he stood still, refusing to buck. Balkily, he moved to a hitchrack.

Wild-horse slid to the ground. Recovering his Stetson, he said darkly: "There, golphorn you! No bronc' is gonna pitch me just because he's got used to ridin' boxcars and thinks he's better'n me!" His glance moved to the grinning crowd. "Boys," he said, "I'm Wild-horse Farnum. Can anybody direc' me to C. Y. Moss?"

A stocky, middle-aged man in worn bib overalls regarded him loweringly: "I'm Moss. It's no dice—even after that free rodeo."

Farnum winked at a girl in the crowd. "Can we talk some place?"

The hotel lobby was no better, no worse, than most cow-town lobbies. The furniture was spur-marked like a rodeo buckler. The floor was unswept, and a rubber mat under an almost pristine cuspidor was festooned with hits. Three men went inside with Farnum. The girl he had winked at also trailed along, a pretty girl with hair the color of oak-shavings. She wore a dark skirt and a sentimental sort of white shirtwaist with a red ribbon worked through the open-work material at throat and wrists. She didn't look like the kind of girl who would trail men around hotel lobbies, however.

"Young lady," Wild-horse smiled, "we're pretty rough-talking hombres. Why don't you go out to the fairgrounds and have a candied apple?"

"I'll keep my hands close to my ears," she said.

The tall mustanger shrugged and turned to C. Y. Moss. "What's the matter, you don't want your range curried of no-account horses so you can raise decent stock?"

"I let some fellers trap on my ranch once," Moss growled. "I had three forest fires and lost my best brood mare." Moss was a pounded-down-looking rancher, his bib overalls bleached and patched, his face harried, red and pitted with lines. He smoked a pale-green cigar.

"When did you ever let anybody trap on your ranch?" the girl demanded.

Color pushed angrily through C. Y. Moss' face. Wild-horse, too, was irritated: let this thing go much farther, and he never would josh the man into line. "Maybe we can talk in the saloon," he suggested.

THE girl sat down. "No use. I'd go in the family entrance, anyway. Alter all, I run more cattle than Moss. I'm Brink."

"Brink!" Farnum had thought S. Brink, who owned the Fiddleback ranch, must be Sam, or Syrus, or something.

"Susan," she said. "Sit down, Wild-horse. I'm all for you. I'm sick of my mares bringing their darned roach-backed, coon-footed colts down for me to feed. What's your deal?"

Off balance. Wild-horse groped for the stirrups and finally started out: "Why—I figure I earn the bronc's I catch. Fact is, I usually find folks glad to lend me a few unbroke horses to use for the work. I've never started a fire in a hotel lobby or a saloon, so why should I start one in the mountains? I wouldn't hardly spit

on the ground, even, because the mountains are home to me. All unbranded horses go to me, except colts with branded mares. That's my deal."

"Good enough. You can start any time you want."

A big, pallid-looking rancher named Whitten had been watching Wild-horse closely. He seemed to reach a decision. "Ain't that a little one-sided? The cannery must pay you seven-eight a head. You can trap my range, but I'll want ten per cent of your gross."

Wild-horse found himself hurt and cheated by the whole interview. He had been received like any mustanger who might come through unannounced. They hadn't even commented on his riding. His impulse was to agree to the ten per cent and get on up. Temperamentally, he was unfitted for dickering. A man who likes to be liked cannot drive a good bargain.

SUSAN BRINK sniffed. "That's ridiculous, Whit. You wouldn't risk your neck that way for all the seven-dollar broncs in Utah. Don't you give him a cent, Wild-horse."

Whitten colored like a boy caught writing a naughty word on the blackboard. Backed up, Wild-horse said: "I wasn't going to. It's a straight deal, Mr. Whitten."

Whitten laughed. "Okay, then. I'm outnumbered."

C. Y. Moss arose tartly, dropping his cigar on the floor. "For ten per cent or for fifty, you won't trap a horse on my ranch. It's above my bend to make a living on that ranch, anyhow! One of these days," he said, looking straight at the Brink girl, "I'm going after what's rightly mine. Then maybe I can afford forest fires and stolen stock like other folks."

Wild-horse made an observation. "You talk poor but you smoke rich, Moss. If I could afford stogies like the one you just threw away, I wouldn't be wearing patched overalls."

It was an inconsequential remark, but it hit Moss like a mule's hind hoof. He looked down at the greenish cigar. He opened his mouth, shut it, stared turgidly a moment, and departed.

Wild-horse completed his arrangements with the other ranchers and found himself alone with Susan Brink on the boardwalk before the hotel. He felt immeasurably better. A little strut was coming back to his legs. "You might as well start work up my way," Susan told him. "It's at the south end, and you can work north. I've got a carryall. You can haul your groceries as far as the place before you pack. We'll see the show and go up tomorrow."

"You might as well throw off here. Nothing flat enough to bed a woodtick, up yonder."



In the morning, with the mustanger's horses trailing the big yellow carryall, they headed up a deep-rutted road through green parks sentried with juniper and fir. For Wild-horse Farnum, it was like a glimpse into a dream—the oft-repeated dream he had had of just such a country, of meadows and mountains, and a valley he had even given a name—Pleasant Valley.

"That was a beautiful ride you made," she said. "Do you always hit a town so dramatically?"

"Seems like Speck gets ornacious every time we move."

"Don't be fooling me, mustanger. You picked that spot because it was the busiest one in the street! But it was still nice."

It was gentle reproof that did not sting. He asked about how she managed with the ranch. "I've been the boss for a couple of years," she told him. "The winters got too rough on Pop. He's down at the Pioneers' Home at Prescott. My foreman runs things for me, except when it takes any thinking."

"What did Moss mean—'things that were rightly his'?"

"That's the skeleton in the closet. There's a little dispute on my place that goes back to Coronado. Nobody ever noticed it until Moss bought in. He's squawked about it ever since. He thinks he owns all my mountain range."

They passed the first ridge and gained a bench where the timber grew

stouter. The new summer grass was a bright background for white-faced Hereford cattle.

"Got a wife, Wild-horse?" Susan asked.

"Nor kids."

"A drifter never amounts to anything until he gets married."

"Drifting's my business."

They emerged from some trees; he saw before him a most glorious panorama: A valley climbed from the trees up a long corridor shaped by steep hills. Behind were the mountains—real mountains you would excuse yourself to when you regurgitated. The valley was like a green inland lake lapping dark, fragrant woods. A creek, capricious as a girl, wound deviously the length of it.

She was watching him. "Isn't it beautiful?"

Some obscure defense mechanism flashed into operation in the mustanger. Obscure and perverse, for this was Pleasant Valley, the embodiment of his dream. But it was also a green graveyard of ambitions. Here a man like him would grow prosaic and stodgy. The world would forget him. In ten years, people would laugh at a fat, wheezing cattleman ludicrously nicknamed Wild-horse Farnum.

"Scenery is scenery," he said off-handedly.

"No scenery in the world is like this," she declared. They rode on.

At the ranch, a snug layout of log cabins and pole corrals, Wild-horse met Noah Eagleson, the ramrod. Noah was small, brown and stringy, like a chunk of sunburned gristle. He was entirely captivated by the big, colorful horse-trapper with his sauntering ways. That night he cackled over Farnum's stories and card-tricks. He said: "Wild-horse, I've got a

*Where pretty girls were concerned,
it was always more blessed to give
than to receive.*



bronc' in the trap I'll bet two dollars you can't stay fifteen seconds with!"

In the morning, Wild-horse topped a hard-bitten grulla for two dollars and some glory. The horse could not buck for sour owlfeathers, but he made a pretty ride so the old man would not feel bad. Then he got ready for his first foray into the hills. Noah was proud to go along as his gate-man.

"Take a change of clothes," Wild-horse told him, "and a pair of cotton gloves. Those bronc's smell you; or your hands on the trap, and they're agoin' to explode in seven different directions."

Susan stood in the yard, smiling encouragement as they rode by, her prettiness glistening like the summer day. When they reached the trees, she waved and cried:

"Excelsior!"

Wild-horse didn't get it, but he waved back.

AT timber-line, in a gaunt valley choked with boulders and dwarf pines, they built the funnel. It was a camouflaged fence of brush and small trees across a shallow dead-end cañon, with a pole gate easily shut. "Just lay low in the rocks till the horses are inside," Wild-horse directed. "Then slam the gate. I may be a week."

"How do I know when you're coming?"

"You'll hear us."

Up through the mountains and the wreckage of mountains Wild-horse rode, driving a mount of four ponies wearing new bronc' shoes. This was dangerous and exacting work, and the stoutest of double-cinching was not stout enough. The trees acquired a starved look. The air grew sharp as chilled Rhenish wine. At about eleven thousand feet, Wild-horse sighted his first band of horses . . . a dozen mustangs moving along the bottom of a cañon. It was beyond the divide, and he was not sure whose range the horses were in, but he made sure he could run them to where he wanted them before he started down.

He had ridden about halfway down when something exploded startlingly on a rock beside the trail, and he sat looking at a silver streak on the gray granite. Then he heard the echoes of a shot pouring down the cañon. Distantly, a man bawled:

"Farnum! I'm coming down!" It was the voice of Elmo Shevlin, C. Y. Moss' ramrod.

"By George, you better come primed for fight!" Wild-horse raged silently.

In about ten minutes the ramrod rode down the trail. Angrily, he dismounted and stalked toward the mustanger. He was a harder-looking man

than he had seemed that night by the campfire, all the fat leached from his body by work, the softness from his face by chronic rancor. He was nearly as big as Farnum, wearing jeans and a horsehide jacket over a striped jersey. He strode up menacingly, and had his mouth open to bark something when Wild-horse hit him. Blood started from his nose as from a spigot; he staggered and sat down on the trail with tears in his eyes and a look of absolute astonishment. Wild-horse loomed over him. "Do you know how close you came to killing me? Three feet!"

Shevlin found a bandana and clamped it over his nose. He had lost his impetus, but retorted defensively: "I could come closer than that. Farnum, we warned you—"

"Yes, and what if I'd moved? Or the bullet'd glanced? You warned me what?" he demanded.

"To keep off our range. You passed Brink's boundary a mile back."

"That's not far." He glanced down the cañon and saw no sign of the horses. In rising anger, he stared at the foreman. "They've blowed. Say, what are you doing over here, that you're so all-fired touchy about trespassers?"

Shevlin was on his feet, trying to find a dry spot on the bandana. "It ain't me, Wild-horse. It's the boss. He's edgy about fires since he was burned out that time."

Wild-horse grunted. "I'm riding down and look for those bronc's. Next time you've got something to say to me, it better come out of that twenty-two-caliber mouth instead of a thirty-caliber car-been."

Shevlin said: "Okay, okay, Wild-horse."

Wild-horse rode on. He had not felt so good since he grand-marshaled the rodeo at Silver City. The horde of little doubts that had besieged him for a week was routed.

FOR three more weeks he partook of his false confidence. He was no longer afraid of Susan Brink and her beautiful but suffocating valley. By way of flexing his moral muscles, he went to work training a horse for her, a dandy little mare out of a *mañada* of sixteen he captured after the Shevlin incident. She had intelligent ears and a tractable disposition. He wasted a week gentling her. It was his talent to be able to talk almost any horse out of so much as a crowhop if he took time to explain things. The first time he mounted the mare, he rode her. She would make a nice, showy going-away present. He pictured himself riding off down the valley, swinging his rope and driving his mustangs, while Susan, perhaps, shed a few tears. . . .

One day, after hobbling the bronc's by tying tails to front hoofs, they trailed back down to the ranch. He would let his catch gather here before ordering a boxcar and moving them along to the railroad. They turned all the horses into the trap except the mare, which he saddled and left rein-tied in the yard.

SUSAN came hurrying out, an apron snug about her waist and flour to her elbows and in her hair. "I heard you on the trail and started a pie!" she told him. Then she saw the mare. "Whose is that?"

Wild-horse felt as if he were enveloped in pink steam. Where pretty girls were concerned, it was always more blessed to give than to receive, and something about this girl brought him to his knees.

"She was too good for the cannery," he said. "She's yours."

Susan regarded the horse with gentle wonder. "She's the most beautiful— What's her name?"

"Sister."

Susan threw off her apron and rode down to the water-gap. They were two of a kind, she and the mare, dainty and spirited, but well-schooled in the proprieties. She came back to Wild-horse, shining and tousled from the wind. "That's the nicest thing anybody ever did for me." Tears came to her eyes, then. "Wild-horse, I'm going to kiss you."

A species of terror assailed him. He backed off a step. All his fears of the valley rushed upon him. He had not turned the quicksand to stone after all, but had been sucked deeper without realizing it. The mountains were rushing forward to bury him; the trees would march over the spot where lay the most colorful wild-horse trapper the West had ever known. . . .

She halted, petulant but puzzled. "I was going to kiss you, not brand you."

The branding would come later. "I—I haven't shaved," Wild-horse fumbled.

"You're too thoughtful," Susan said. Without another word, she went back to the cabin.

At dinner she kept studying him. Women, thought Wild-horse indignantly, were mighty contrary. If he'd tried to kiss *her*, he'd have been a brute. But when he hadn't let her kiss *him*, he was unnatural and mean—still a brute! He'd kissed girls aplenty, but this was one kiss he could not afford. He was right on the point of loving this girl as he had never loved even himself.

Suddenly she said: "Did you have any trouble up there? Old Moss has finally started suit for that land."

"I pasted Shevlin for nearly creasing me."



Illustrated by
CHARLES HARGENS

Wild-horse heard the echoes of a shot pouring down the cañon.

"Well, that did it! I've got to go and hire a lawyer, now."

Wild-horse scowled at his plate. "Looks like all I've brought you is bad luck. Looks like I'd better move on to Whitten's."

"No, you don't! You contracted to clean out the broom-tails, and you'll stay at it, mustanger."

Wild-horse smothered a sigh. "Say!" he said abruptly. "You haven't had any cattle stole lately, have you?"

"You mean by Moss? No, I wish I had. I'd send the sheriff up there in a hurry."

"Well, he's moonshining or something. Jittery as a coop full of cat-birds."

He finished his half of the pie, arose and said, "That was tolerable pie, ma'am." It was the best pie he had ever eaten, but he wasn't going

to tell *her* so. Standing there in his awkwardness and uncertainty, he looked enormous, the kind of man you couldn't grow in a city, even as you could not grow a tree in a flower pot.

Noah Eagleson stared at him in bald admiration. "I'll bet you weighed a hundred and forty when you were born, Wild-horse!"

"I was the runt of the litter," said Wild-horse proudly. "I weighed four and a quarter pounds. I never caught up till I was fourteen. I had five brothers. They used to toss me back and forth like a rag doll. I had to step some to keep up in that crowd, I can tell you! Then I began to grow. Didn't stop till I was twenty-four. I'm six foot three and an eighth in my bare feet—begging your pardon, ma'am."

Susan was gazing at him in a curious way, a light rising in her eyes, like a lamp-flame warming and growing. "I might have guessed—"

"How's that?" Wild-horse asked.

"Nothing," she said. But she acted as if something very important had transpired. From that moment, she would beam at him whenever he would meet her eyes. She forced three more cups of coffee on him. He was bewildered.

Wild-horse went back to the peaks determined to finish the work and get out. The girl and her valley were closing in on him.

THROUGH the next two weeks, while summer ripened fully, the air filling with the smell of pine pitch and the ground burning with a brilliance of alpine flowers, Wild-horse Farnum's worries picked at him like a pawnbroker's fingers. The heart said, *Stay*; common sense said, *Go*. Intuition, or vanity, said: *She loves you*. Wild-horse was past denying that he loved her. But would they still love when the silk shirts wore out, and the name Wild-horse Farnum rang like an aluminum half-dollar? You could not expect a woman to go on praising and bending to a man after the honeymoon was over. Susan Brink would find herself married to a one-man rodeo, forever competing for points. It would be wonderful for about a month; and then it would be intolerable. . . .

Most of the horses still seemed to run close to C. Y. Moss' range, so that he was hampered somewhat on his bronc' chases. He thought sourly of this scrounging, uncourageous man with his worn-out overalls and expensive cigars. There was a reason why Moss wanted Susan Brink's mountain range. . . . Wild-horse was about persuaded to ride over and snoop around, when one day he saw smoke in the hills, and this gave him the push he had needed.

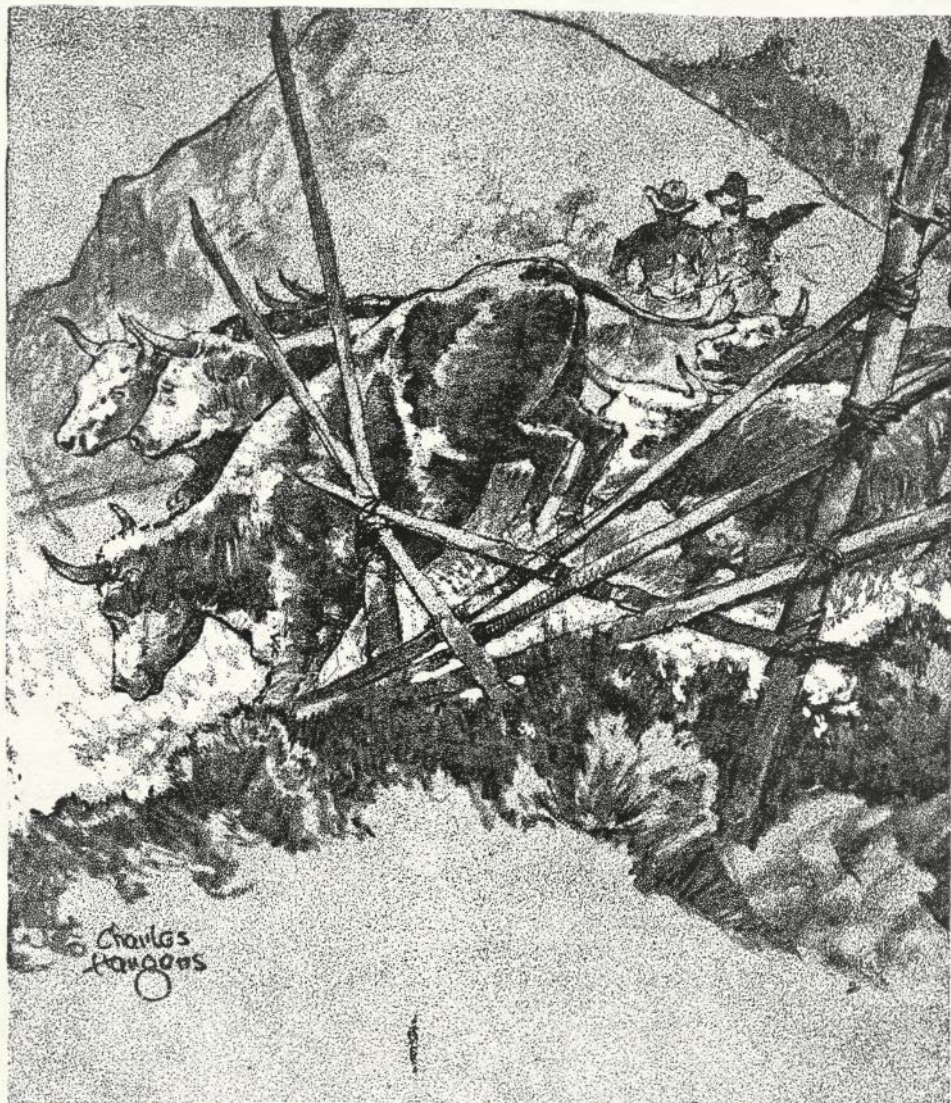
The smoke was a gray feather rising from a cañon. In about an hour he heard the restless movement of a small herd of cattle. He rode on until he saw a pole barrier across the head of the cañon and a lot of Hereford faces looking at him. But the men at the fire in the corral, C. Y. Moss and Elmo Shevlin, had not seen him yet; they were working fast, and Moss was talking a blue streak.

"No! Not so hard, Elmo! Burn that sack through, and you might as well be using a running-iron."

The steer lay on its side near the little branding-fire. Moss held a wet gunny-sack over an old brand while the ramrod thrust a branding-iron against it.

"How many more?" Shevlin asked.

"About twenty."



Wild-horse dropped a loop over a corral post and backed the horse

Wild-horse dropped a loop over a corral post and backed the horse until a section of the fence fell. The cattle streamed through. . . . Tally-book in hand, he sat there recording all the brands he could read. His carbine was across his lap.

He called to C. Y. Moss: "Was that overbit red a Dollar Sign or a Panther Scratch?"

Moss blurted: "They aren't stolen! If they are, I didn't know it."

"He's a range dick!" declared Shevlin.

Wild-horse shook his head.

"It wouldn't have taken me a month to figure this out if I had been. I knew you were hiding a herd over by the railroad that day, but I thought it was going out, instead of coming in. I guess it's kind of ethical, at that: Never rustle around home when you can do it somewhere else and bring them in by rail. Let the brands heal and then ship them out again, hey?"

He tossed the tally-book to Moss. "Sign it. And let's not have any more talk about lawyers."

A wheedling look came into the rancher's eyes. "You want to trap over here, Farnum? I can show you where—"

"All through trapping. At least I've got my herd spotted. I won't run it in, though, until I have to."

It was almost too dramatic, he thought. The fearless mustanger saving the girl and riding into the sunset! It gave him goose-flesh. But there was no satisfaction in it, only sadness. It was a wonderful fade-out; but the picture would never completely fade. It would linger, tantalizing him with the vision of what he could not have, blurring his enjoyment of things he did have. Every time he put on a bucking show, he would think: *This is foolishness.*

Gloomily, he rode back to the ranch as soon as they had taken another herd.

He was half-starved for the sight of her as he arrived at the Fiddleback for the last time. She came into the doorway and waved. Then she hurried toward him. The glow of the



until a section of the fence fell: the cattle streamed through.

wood-stove was in her face. She wore the white shirtwaist with the red ribbon she had worn in Council City. Her hair was braided and arranged in a kind of coronet across her head, and she had taken time to remove the apron. She began brightly:

"I happened to hear you on the trail—"

"And started a cake," Wild-horse interrupted gloomily.

She bounced back. "It's not every woman who can bake at high altitudes, you know."

He turned away to tend the stock. He tried to look up at the mountains in a sneering way, the way they looked at him. But for the first time they were smiling. They glittered with evening sun imprisoned in snow and ice. "Time's running out!" Wild-horse thought in panic. He made up his mind to leave right after dinner.

At the table, Susan was still full of chatter. "Wild-horse, that little mare is perfect! I've ridden her every day. You certainly know how to break horses."

He tried to shrug it off, but was pleased, none the less.

"I hope you'll still be here for the rodeo in September. I'd love to see you ride again."

Noah grinned. "This here's a real mustanger, Sue—a ring-tailed roarer!"

Wild-horse heard her saying gently: "No. This is a little boy starved for love and attention." Her face was full of warm tenderness. Desperately, he ran for safety.

"I caught ol' Moss at it," he blurted. "He was slow-branding a herd of stolen cows they'd brought down by railroad and moved into the hills. Some of the brands are in this tally-book. Use it if he ever gets butt-headed." He got up. "I'll eat that cake as I ride. I'm all finished with your range, now."

HE walked out. As he was saddling, she came to stand before him, gripping the edges of his vest. "Are you all finished with me, too, Wild-horse?"

He had her shoulders in the pockets of his hands, squeezing them hard

and saying desperately: "I'll never be through with you, Sue! But if I stayed you'd be through with me, soon enough!"

"Why?"

"Because I'm a natural-born clown, a prima donna—whatever you want to call it. I like people to like me. I'd starve without applause. I guess I'm kind of a ham actor in chaps. Of course, there's the mountains, too. . . . I'd die without them. But I'd fret myself to death up here."

"I know. I've been fretting myself to death here ever since Pop moved to the Pioneers' Home."

He hesitated. "What have you got to fret about?"

"I'm as bad off in my way as you are in yours. You said you were the youngest of six children. Wild-horse, I was the *eldest* of five! When Mom died, I had all those kids to bring up. I had four noses to wipe and four pairs of jeans and dresses to wash, not counting my own. I thought it was monotonous, until they all married or moved away, and just me and Pop were left. I felt like a widow, or something. And then Pop left. And when I saw you acting up with your horse that day, I thought: 'Here's somebody that needs me! Here's a boy that doesn't have anybody to darn his socks and comb his hair. The lonesome ones always act this way.'"

COMMON sense rallied for the last time. "But you'll get tired of it! You'll have—other things to mother after a while."

"But by that time I'll have you weaned. I weaned all the others and set them on their feet, didn't I? And on top of that, I happen to love you." She let her hands drop away, and was suddenly soft and pliant. "Well, I had to tell you. Everything looked right, to me; but if it doesn't to you—"

She went back to the house. Wild-horse slowly took the latigo in his hands and started to tighten the cinch; he faltered. He then climbed the corral and rolled a cigarette. He smoked four and climbed down. He dropped the last cigarette, took off the saddle, and turned the horse into the trap.

When he entered the kitchen, Noah and Sue were eating cake. A third piece, creamy-white and with chocolate icing as thick as a boot-sole, was at his place. He ate it, drank his coffee and leaned back. "Did I ever show you this one?" he asked.

He made a half-dollar crawl across his knuckles and disappear into his palm.

Noah cackled. "Did you ever see the like of him?" he asked Susan.

She laughed, with tears in her eyes. "No," she said. "I never did."

DESTROYER 371

THREE SEVEN ONE was a destroyer attached to the Pacific fleet which in prewar days made up our country's first line of defense. The *Three Seven One* was considered a new destroyer. Her displaced weight amounted to fifteen hundred tons; consequently she and her sister ships were known as the fifteen hundreds. She was named the *Conyngham*, after a naval hero of the Revolutionary War; but for some reason, we usually referred to her by her number. . . .

The shadows of war were looming, and new men were coming out to join the fleet. The *Three Seven One's* crew was constantly being increased, and emphasis was placed more and more on damage control. Europe was at war, and sooner or later the U.S. had to join. The Japanese navy was a standing joke. The misconception was understandable, for to see our fleet in battle array was to believe it impervious to attack. These were the days of battleship thinking.

December 7th certainly caught the *Three Seven One* unprepared as she lay quietly alongside her tender in Pearl. The first wave of enemy planes had struck and winged away before the crew had manned their battle stations. On the bridge the signalman on duty kept saying dazedly: "They looked so pretty, I thought they were ours." The hours of drill paid off when the second wave dived in, for the gun-crews fought like veterans. Their minds were in confusion, but automatically they loaded and fired the guns. Her first kill came as a dive bomber hovered above the fantail. A direct hit was scored by the after five-inch, and the plane blew into a thousand pieces. The enemy left a dismal and befogged group of men; the attack was quick and short; and the sudden stillness after the ear-splitting sound of gunfire seemed as unreal as the sudden attack.

From the rear of the bridge through the pale yellow of gun smoke, huge spirals of dark smoke could be seen rising from battleship row. To ascertain the damage was impossible from that distance, but we knew it must have been great. Little did we realize just how great it was until that night.

Orders came to get underway and proceed to sea. The *Three Seven One's* boilers had been torn down,

causing a delay of four hours before the order could be complied with. There was very little talk as the ship prepared for sea. The shock of war was great, and hearts beat hard, for now we knew what the fear of the unexpected was like. It was long years before that nervous tension centered in the stomach left us.

The day was spent outside the harbor steaming slowly on various courses with the submarine-finding device working to pick up contacts on the small midget submarines that had infiltrated the area. Late in the evening the lookouts spotted their first enemy submarine, but before an attack could be made, the sub silently submerged and was gone. It was then time to return to port.

As the ship slowly circled Ford Island, we got our first look at war's destruction. The battleline was no more. Enemy planes had scored hits on every one; and by evening the battleships lay on their sides gutted by fire and the explosion of ammunition lockers. The navy yard was a shambles, for hits had been made on the drydock. Three ships of our division had been in them and now looked like masses of jumbled steel. The air base on Ford Island had been dealt heavy blows: hangars and planes were burned to the ground. The fleet had taken a terrible beating, and so it was with heavy hearts that we tied up the *Three Seven One* for the night and turned in to sleep with the odor of burning ships and powder giving restless and nightmarish slumber.

THE big brass had ordered to sea all ships still afloat to search the area surrounding the Hawaiian Islands

The Pacific war from the viewpoint of a CPO who served aboard the same ship from Pearl Harbor through the Kamikaze attacks off the Philippines.

by
**RICHARD
F. HANLEY**

and to clear the waters of the enemy. The *Three Seven One* joined a small force of two cruisers and four destroyers sailing south into the low latitudes. It was a fruitless voyage, but gave us an insight into the many dreary, boring, seagoing days ahead.

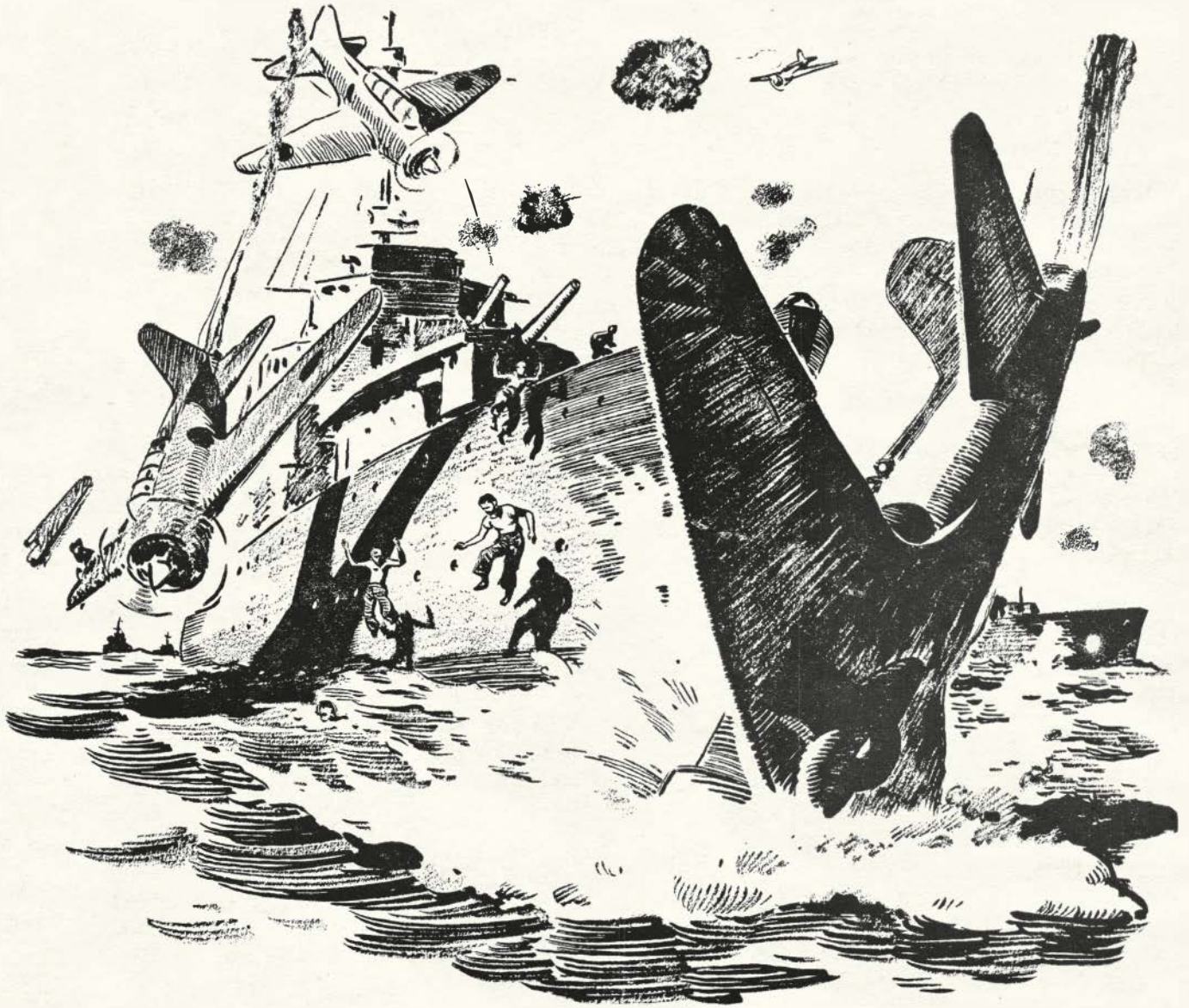
The force steamed southward past Howland, Baker and Canton islands, which are but mere strips of sand seeming to float on the broad expanse of the Pacific. Usually the first thing to be seen is a high radio tower; then as the distance is decreased a strip of yellow is added to the picture, and on coming closer one or two buildings erected on the sand. These islands were just tiny outposts acting as a radio link between the East and West, and as a small air base to extend the search area.

AFTER crossing the equator, the hills of the Samoan Islands showed as a speck on the horizon. The Samoan harbor of Tutuila, which is a naval operating base, marked the southern limit of our search. The harbor was superbly beautiful. It was with sighs of regret that the force headed northward.

Not having been prepared for such long voyages, the ship's larder was sadly depleted at the halfway mark of the return trip. Rice became the food morning, noon and night until all hands were afraid to look in a mirror for fear that an Oriental face would leer back. There is nothing so dull as endless days of sailing over a flat sea with no entertainment but the gatherings around a coffee pot, and rice three times a day. It was good to see Pearl Harbor again.

That was the last trip beyond the Hawaiian Islands for three to four months as the *Three Seven One* was assigned the gravy run between San Francisco and Honolulu, escorting various groups of merchantmen plying between these two ports. Each time she arrived at Frisco she underwent a few changes, such as replacing the outmoded fifty-caliber machine guns with twenty-millimeters, which later on proved a blessing in air attacks. The gravy train had to end, so when the chief quartermaster passed the news that the charts of the South Pacific waters had been laid out for use, it was no surprise.

We were all more or less looking forward to the fast-moving task force



Temporarily out of control, a destroyer raced across our course, men jumping into the sea.

we were to join. The early stages of the war had been so dull that to be a part of such a force seemed quite exciting. We all had visions of the *Three Seven One* dashing in to launch torpedoes at a Jap battleship, then sailing home to glory. It was not for several months to come that we were thoroughly convinced that there is no glory in war, and that the only reward was the chance to be scared, and Government insurance with low premiums.

The ships took formation in the area off Diamond Head. Carriers formed the fleet center, encircled by cruisers, both light and heavy, while destroyers dotted the outer rim of the assembly. Speed and course signals flew from yardarms, and the group headed south.

Rumor ran up and down the ship. Not even the Captain knew the strategy, but to listen to the hands on deck, one might have thought there were two hundred and sixty fleet ad-

mirals on the *Three Seventy-one*. The bridge was cluttered with messages coming and going, and flags being hoisted then hauled down, while the pilot house remained so full of men doing various jobs that the officer of the deck had barely room enough to walk from side to side. The helmsman never knew when the next person would stumble up against him. A fast-moving carrier force creates well-organized turmoil.

When the fleet reached the outer edge of the Coral Sea, then turned northward again, we were even more confused as to the ultimate destination, but by then the excitement had worn thin. Doing the same thing day after day and being on watch or drilling for at least sixteen of the twenty-four hours each day had begun to wear tempers thin.

The daily news sheet printed in the radio shack spoke of a terrific naval battle in the Coral Sea in which a Japanese armada had been turned

back with losses. Who had done this damage to the enemy remained an unanswered question until we rendezvoused with another task force similar to our own. We joined the other force north of Midway Island and for three days the combined fleets steamed in circles north of the island. We were completely hidden in a dense fog which kept visibility at a minimum. The two forces remained within sight of each other. Condition of Readiness Two had been set upon reaching this area, and after three days the crew were sleepless wrecks.

LATE one evening a many-worded message was semaphored from the flagship; the gist of it told all hands that the country depended on us to do our duty on the morrow. The country seemed a million miles distant at that point, but nevertheless a thrill ran through the *Three Seventy-one* as we knew that by tomor-



We heard no cries for help, only cheering cries: "Go get them!"

row's dusk either Japan or the U. S. would have lost a great part of their fleet. We could ill afford to lose a single ship these days.

At dawn the radio men came upon aircraft frequencies, and over the speakers the chattering magpie voices of Japs could be heard. With a roar the carriers' flight groups zoomed off the decks and headed for the enemy, while we continued steaming along, wondering what was going to happen next. The air was filled with our pilots' voices as the targets were sighted. We could hear the diving planes, and calls of hits or misses. Our lookouts began screaming of enemy planes overhead. Forgetting the radios, the bridge personnel scrambled for the wings of the bridge to peer upward and hope the planes would pick the big ships and leave us small fellows alone.

To our surprise, the enemy passed over our force and concentrated on the other ships. We could see the air becoming thick with anti-aircraft bursts. In between the bursts little black dots flickered. These dots were the enemy planes attacking. Soon the sound of gunfire ceased, and we knew the attack was over. One carrier had been badly hit, and we could see a huge column of smoke rising from her flight-deck. All that day our carrier planes returned and took off. We could see nothing, but from radio reports and visual messages we little by little pieced together the whole picture of the terrible beating the Japanese navy was suffering at the hands of our pilots in this Battle of Midway.

For three days more the fleet remained in the vicinity while the carrier planes polished off the enemy stragglers who couldn't keep up with the retiring fleet; then we turned south toward Pearl Harbor. Many

messages of congratulations on the tremendous victory were received. The *Three Seven One* had not fired a shot, but we could say we were there.

CHAPTER TWO

WE felt pretty good as the *Three Seventy-one* tied up alongside Ten-ten dock in Pearl Harbor. A group of workmen had lined the dock's side to see a ship which had participated in the great naval victory, but our part had been so little that we had a guilty conscience about receiving any attention because of it.

After an engagement the big ships could always count on a few weeks in port to wait for the next assignment, but not so with the destroyers, the workhorses of the fleet. In between naval engagements there were always convoys to be escorted, and as soon as the refueling was completed and supplies taken aboard, the *Three Seven One* backed away from the dock and headed for sea. This time she joined a group of merchantmen on their way to New Caledonia, one of the islands in the Loyalty group approximately one thousand miles northeast of Australia.

Steaming in company with a group of merchant vessels is much different from steaming with warships. Nine knots was usually the convoy's best effort. Destroyers could circle the entire outfit a dozen times while the merchantmen covered a single mile.

On these long trips the crew's conversation consisted mainly of griping—about chow, the sea, the lack of recreation, the officers, and always of the lack of women. Also when the ship reached the equatorial latitudes,

water hours would be in effect, which meant fresh water was available for one half-hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. Those on watch missed out. The crew's shower-room became at these times one solid mass of flesh. One never could be sure whose body he was scrubbing, his own or another's. Naturally the drains would plug up, and there would be the men splashing around in a foot of filthy soapy water. There were two showers aft for almost three hundred men. The officers and chiefs usually had water throughout the day, which fact did not at all sit well with the common herd. To add to this confusion, the sound men never could find a better time to pick up a contact and sound general quarters.

Three weeks after leaving Pearl a landfall was made on Tabu lighthouse, and beyond the lighthouse the mountains of New Caledonia loomed above the horizon. The port of Noumea at this time was the farthest advanced large naval base, and from here convoys formed for the northward trip into the New Hebrides, which was the arrow tip poised at the Solomons. Noumea was situated in the lower end of New Caledonia. The lower end was completely encased in reefs which were a natural barrier against submarine attacks, making Noumea as safe an anchorage as could be found. These reefs, however, had their disadvantages, for ships were continually piling up on them.

Going into the harbor of Espiritu Santo, which is the uppermost island of the Hebrides group, was quite a navigational task. The course was north leading through a channel with Espiritu on one side and a group of small islands on the other. Dead ahead a little rock painted white marked the channel range, and to have this marker more than five degrees off in bearing meant the ship was sitting in the midst of minefields. Somehow the word of these mine fields had been delayed in reaching all the ships, and one of our division of destroyers was sunk. She had thought the left side of the harbor open. Later a transport set her course too far left of the entering range and suffered the same fate. The transport became an underseas bar for navy divers as she had been carrying a cargo of beer. Luckily, in neither mishap was there loss of life.

IN August the marines had landed on Guadalcanal and Tulagi. We knew little of this event except what we heard from returning destroyers which had been part of the naval fleet that had suffered the loss of four cruisers in the naval engagement. To us Guadalcanal was just a name.

ONE day in late October the fleet formed outside Noumea's entrance and we knew that the *Three Seven One* was this time about to use her guns. Once again we took station on the outer rim of a carrier task group, and this time we headed north into the area right of the Solomons. The fleet maneuvered and waited for the enemy, who it was said, were about to launch an offensive to recapture the islands they had lost to our Marines.

We didn't have long to wait, for contact was made by our carriers' search planes on the twenty-fifth, and our attacking flight groups were well on their way as dawn broke on the twenty-sixth. The enemy knew our whereabouts, and having launched their planes at the same time as we, both forces went under attack simultaneously. Seventy-five planes slashed in on us, and all hell broke loose on board the *Three Seven One*. Our position was directly astern of the carrier flagship, the main target of the enemy, and we went under a hail of bombs, with plane-carried torpedoes slithering under us. The torpedoes were set for big-ship depth, too deep a setting for the *Three Seven One*. That was a lucky break.

Our ears became deafened by the sound of our own gunfire and our nostrils were burnt by powder smoke. Every time a thousand-pound bomb blew up close to us, the ship would shiver and shake until it seemed she would break in two. A nearby destroyer took an enemy plane aboard her bow, and temporarily out of control, she raced across our path with great flames leaping from her fore section, and men jumping into the sea to escape the flames. The carrier ahead kept circling and circling with her radius becoming shorter and shorter. We were caught in the center of her turning circle, and both ships went round and round, their guns firing incessantly. One more circle would catch us with no sea room, when luckily the attack ceased and the ships reformed, heading for a rain squall to hide in.

We drove through the men of the damaged destroyer who had been knocked or had jumped overboard when the plane crashed, and then we found out what the word *heroism* meant, for as we knifed over and through them, we heard no cries for help, only cries cheering us on with "Go get them!" They had their hands clasped overhead like prizefighters, and their hands were still clasped as we left them behind to drown.

Another attack, a small one, was on its way in. We could not stop for survivors. The second wave was

beaten off. Our fleet's loss was one destroyer which had incurred engine trouble, and while dead in the water had been hit amidship by a submarine-fired torpedo. One carrier and one destroyer were slightly damaged. We never found out the extent of enemy damage, for as usual most of us were just there and knew little or nothing.

That evening we received orders to break off from the fleet and proceed to rendezvous with a group of supply ships heading into Guadalcanal. The stories of the battle of Santa Cruz, which had just taken place, amused us immensely. One battleship in particular claimed thirty-two enemy planes shot down. Frankly, we would enjoy seeing the man who under attack from every side in the midst of a large task force, could nonchalantly stand there and make an exact count of every plane his ship shot down. By the time the pilots made their claims, the carriers theirs and the battleship hers, nothing was left for the cruisers or destroyers to claim, and the total shot down evidently exceeded the attacking group. The accounts made wonderful reading, and the little flags on the bridge denoting planes shot down do add to the overall appearance.

Our group took the route from the south passing below San Cristobal island, then turning right between the lower end of Guadalcanal, with Cristobal on the right and swinging left between Tulagi and Guadalcanal, then along the shore line of Guadalcanal to that part of the island held by our Marines. We traversed this route at night, using radar, which was then in its infancy. It was hazardous navigation at best, for between Guadalcanal and Tulagi there were two extremely small islands marking each side of the channel navigable at this period. To enter any other way was very dangerous, not only because of mines, but because it would disclose our presence to the enemy watching along the shore, and would inevitably bring an air attack the following morning.

ALL hands remained at battle stations while in the area, as an attack from ship or plane or submarine could be expected. Once a man has been in the Solomons, he never forgets the sickly sweet odor which is wafted out over the water from land as dawn breaks. It is a smell which sets every sense on edge. It is a smell of nervous anticipation, and no matter how tired one might be it awakens the body like a dash of cold water.

Our cargo ships crept as near to the beach as possible, and within an hour after dawn were unloading.

The idea was to have completed unloading by sunset, for darkness along the beach was a nightmare. The screening destroyers took patrol stations along a semicircle a mile from the unloading area to form a submarine screen. Throughout the day one or two of the destroyers would be detached to bombard enemy-held territory, blasting targets selected by shore observers. These observers would, using radio, call us and pick the spot to be fired at. Using a gunnery chart, we would fix the ship's position, and then it would be easy to pick out the range and direction of the target for our guns. The shore spotters would now tell us if our shots were over or below the target, and whether too far left of right. We would then apply the corrections, and the salvo would obliterate the objective. Periodically the enemy would send out a few raiding planes, but we suffered no more than a good scare. It seems the *Three Seven One* always picked a calm day to be there.

WE will never forget one trip we made on this convoy run. A war correspondent had come aboard to write about our phase of this campaign. In the evening, while checking torpedoes, one of the escorting destroyers had through accident fired one and it headed right for us. Turning tail, we hauled away at twenty-five knots, with this fish at the slower speed of twenty-three about thirty feet astern. Unable to turn either to port or starboard, we had to continue on a course ahead of it. We all had our hearts in our throats, for we were not sure what speed the fish was set at. The damn' thing chased us for five miles before running out of fuel, upending and sinking.

That same night by pure accident, we dropped a depth charge which exploded a bare fifty feet astern. The following morning, off our usual unloading area, we awoke from our habitual places along the bridge wings to see before us a veritable one-man army. Our correspondent was dressed, armed to the teeth, with helmet, life jacket, Marine battle fatigues, pockets crammed with emergency rations, and hanging from his side was the longest, meanest-looking carving knife we ever saw. There we were, dressed in dirty dungarees, most of us shirtless, and this army walks into our midst. A few days later we read his account of our uneventful trip. We had been attacked by a submarine and had spent hours dropping depth charges. We roared with laughter. The public must have excitement.

Luck rode with us until February of 1943, when one dark night enemy planes showed on our radar screen, coming in from the south. We knew that an enemy lookout on land had



Landings we effected while under Admiral Barbey's command were almost always free of casualties.

spotted the exact position of our convoy.

The planes appeared to be milling about, five miles distant on our port beam. We were lead destroyer off the port bow of convoy center. We could see flashes of signal lights as the planes sent and received instructions. Above us we heard the drone of a Jap reconnaissance plane, and flares dropped illuminating our ships below. The planes split for attack, circling the convoy. Once more we, now scared stiff, saw the signal lights flicker as the leader flashed the order to attack, and in they drove. Our gunners were trying to pick out targets as they passed by to strike at the convoy. They were flying low, skimming just above the water. One flew in, trying to pass astern of the *Three Seven One*. Her guns spoke, and a terrific burst of flame engulfed what we now saw to be a torpedo bomber. The plane, with a last gesture, dropped her fish which swished by our fantail; then the plane plunged into the sea, leaving burning debris afloat. Off our starboard quarter the transport had opened fire, and we saw another

bomber flare up and hit the drink. Two more planes flamed, and the remaining ones turned tail and ran. No damage was done to us. The Japs in their first attempt to use night plane tactics against convoys had scored failure.

CHAPTER FOUR

THAT night we all had the jitters, for that lucky feeling was gone, and the next day we were especially tense, awaiting the unknown. At five o'clock that evening we received orders to clear the area. All convoys were to leave Guadalcanal by sunset, as the Japs were on their way in full force for what was to be their last desperate attempt to reinforce their troops. We could see the transports' small boats scurrying back to their mother ships. Anchors were coming up, and on board the ships, men darted for underway stations. Could we be through the channel and out of enemy contact by dark? As far as we knew, the few destroyers guarding the convoy were the only warships in the Solomons, and what could four destroyers

do against enemy cruisers accompanied by fifteen destroyers?

As the sun passed below the horizon, we, seaward bound, were just entering the passage between the two islands marking the channel. The night fell rapidly and was jet black. There was no moon, and to add to the hazards of navigation a heavy rain squall engulfed us. Unable to see any of the ships, our only means of keeping station was by using our radar. The *Three Seven One's* station was off the port bow of the leading transport in the convoy. The ships were forced to form a single column to facilitate passing through the narrow channel. We had just cleared the islands and were preparing to fan out more to the left when simultaneously our sound men heard a number of ships sending out underwater signals and our radar picked up a number of vessels dead ahead.

To our astonishment, we heard American voices on the TBS, which was our maneuvering radio. The ships were friendly, and once more a big surprise awaited the enemy. From the rapidity of the underwater signals, it was obvious that the ships

were making high speeds. It was a fast force, and now the area began to fill with ships. We could hear the oncoming ships' captains talking as they made contact with us. Exchanging identity code no doubt relieved them too, as we could have been mistaken for the enemy. It was, however, our job to get out of their way, as they were making high speed and could not stop, it being imperative that they be in position to gain tactical advantage over the Japs coming in from the northern end of Guadalcanal. To that end we came right a few degrees, hoping to clear. The oncoming ships maintained a steady bearing on the radar, and then the full realization that a dangerous collision was imminent flashed into our thoughts.

OUR Captain gave orders to come hard right. At the same time the officer of the deck commenced shouting that we were crossing the lead transport's bow. His warning cry sounded too late. A great rending crash came, and the *Three Seven One* heeled over sixty degrees on her left side. The bridge personnel froze in fright. Orders came to abandon ship and then were canceled. We all had been knocked from our feet. On struggling up again, we looked around. Hearts stood still as we saw the huge bow of the transport looming over us. It had sliced into our Number One fire-room; the bow's jutting upper part had uprooted our forward stack, and it now lay along the port side of the main deck. Dank steam rose in wisps from the gaping hole where the stack had been, and our Number One fire-room filled completely with water.

On the bridge, the captain waited tensely for reports from the damage-control party. Could they or could they not keep the incoming water from breaking down the intervening bulkhead between fire-room and engine-room? Our men worked sure and fast, and the bulkhead was shored—that is, it was reinforced by two-by-fours. It held. The ship would remain afloat. Both the convoy and the intercepting American task force had swept by in opposite directions. We were abandoned to fend for ourselves. Quiet came and with it the fear of being alone in a crippled ship, rolling, helpless to maneuver, with enemy ships now twenty miles distant. Thank God, our admirals had sent in that intercepting force.

The various remarks of the crew at the time of collision will never be forgotten. Two especially remained in our minds, to be recalled over and over whenever the men gathered for bull sessions. Our leading fire-control man, who had been sleeping aft in the crew's compartment, had

been hurled to the deck. He raced topside just in time to become knee deep in the water which sloshed over the deck as the ship righted herself. All he could say was: "My God, ain't she sinking fast." The fire-room gang, who luckily had been making steam in the untouched fire-room tore topside. Upon opening the upper hatch, the man in the lead stopped awestruck while the ones behind yelled: "For God's sake get going." His returning thrust was: "There's a ship on top of me." Never before had so many naked fannies been seen aboard a destroyer. The men had scrambled topsides *au naturel*.

That night was not easily forgotten. The convoy commander, after hearing of our damage, radioed asking us to make a choice. Either we should attempt to beach the ship on San Cristobal island, or stick it out and try to bring her back to Espiritu. He added that San Cristobal was noted for his headhunting natives. We chose to stay with the ship. Perhaps the sharks were more choosy. The ship could only make five knots, for the water which had filled the fire-room rushed back and forth with the ship's movement, and the press of the water's weight might break through the fire-room's after bulkhead, which would mean that the engine-room would flood and the ship would sink.

THAT night, on the horizon, we could see the red tracer shells and illuminating searchlights as our warships engaged the Japanese task force. We heard later that the enemy had been caught unaware. Our admirals had sprung a trap; and the Japs, expecting but meager resistance had steamed serenely into our newest battleship, built just in time. Imagine how horrified the enemy must have been when on lighting their searchlights they found themselves looking into the gaping muzzles of the guns of our biggest battle wagon. To add to the humiliation, our warships had crossed the "T." This meant that ours had formed a column at right angles ahead of the enemy as they passed through the passage below Savo island, at the northern entrance of the Guadalcanal waters. Only the forward guns of each Jap ship could be brought to bear on our column, thus cutting their fire power in half. The ensuing engagement must have been a holocaust. Our ships certainly saved the *Three Seven One*. If the enemy had broken through, our executive officer had decided to fire torpedoes, then abandon ship.

Dawn broke as we crawled through the southern entrance of the Solomon waters, and now, at least, all we had to worry about was if any Jap shore observers would radio our position

to their air fields and thus bring an air attack. Probably they thought us practically sunk, for no planes appeared. The following day we were safely away from the area, and nothing but water between us and a safe anchorage in Espiritu.

The *Three Seven One* must have made a dreary sight as she labored into the harbor of Espiritu Santo with a battered side and forward stack lashed to the deck. We all heaved a sigh of relief as the lines went over tying us securely to the side of an aircraft tender. We were exhausted, filthy, and our throats were parched. For the water supply had been all but completely used, and the collision had lessened our evaporator's capacity for making fresh water. Enough had been made for the ship's propelling use alone, and the crew had been cut to one drink per day.

The problem now was to attach a temporary patch to our side, pump the fire-room dry, and restand our uprooted stack. The tender took over the repair job. Those tenders were incomparable. Given a hull, they could almost build a new ship. Taking pity on our plight, another destroyer came along our outboard side to keep us supplied with fresh water. Divers descended to patch our side, and using great ingenuity, they made a cement casing which fitted over the jagged edges of the hole. The fire-room was pumped dry, and we felt that given fair weather the *Three Seven One* could make Pearl Harbor under her own steam.

The returning trip was uneventful and non-stop. We arrived off Diamond Head on the island of Oahu one morning in the early part of March. A fast carrier force was forming in column to enter Pearl, so we fell in astern. The ships were returning from an air strike; and the sailors attached to the base, along with the yard workmen, had turned out to cheer the entering ships. Thinking we were a part of the carrier force, they included us in their cheers. Tears welled in many of the crews' eyes as they accepted this tribute. We were being cheered for a victory we had not helped achieve.

CHAPTER FIVE

PEARL HARBOR had undergone a tremendous change. The damage inflicted on December seventh had been repaired, and the yard expanded considerably. New buildings had been erected almost overnight, and the submarine-base area now looked to be as large as the entire former base. The yard workmen numbered tens of thousands. Pearl Harbor had become the largest of all naval bases and the docks swarmed with sailors in white.

Tugs moved us into a drydock, and entering a drydock is not an event to look forward to. The ship is pulled in by means of a tow rope attached from a winch on the dock to our bow; and as the gates closed behind, the water was pumped from the dock, leaving the ship sitting on pilings placed along the bottom of the dock. Little puddles of water dotted the floor of the dock. All plumbing conveniences on board were closed, leaving us the only alternative of trudging to and from a place some hundred yards distant. Six showers had to suffice for all personnel attached to ships in nearby docks. Also the docks were located quite far from the base theaters and the recreational center where a man could buy a glass of beer. A month of Pearl Harbor was definitely nothing to talk about.

We soon settled into a routine drydock life, taking advantage of this opportunity to clean up the ship's appearance and make her ready for the next trip. The navy yard stripped a good third of the port side hull from her and put new plates over the naked ribs. The speed and accuracy in their method amazed us, as the patching job was completed before we hardly realized it. Evidently, when the ship was damaged the report of what needed to be done had been radioed ahead, and by the time of our arrival a new section had been built. The damaged part was removed and the new section was fitted snugly in place. The only time consumed was riveting or welding the new in place. It was similar to an assembly line.

The command of the *Three Seven One* now passed into the hands of a new captain. The skippers were changed periodically, an event not to the crews' liking, for a new captain comes aboard eager to make a name for himself; the crew, on the other hand is tired, and looking for a rest. This makes the captain feel he has lazy personnel, and makes the crew feel the captain is unreasonable. This time the *Three Seven One* passed to the command of a man who later was to win the respect of every hand aboard, both for his capabilities, and thoughtfulness of the crew's welfare. He was strict but just.

THE men on leave returned to a completely overhauled *Three Seven One*. New faces had replaced the old and many friends had gone. Our officers had advanced in rank, been transferred, and new ensigns had been assigned the ship. The crew and officers had to be broken in. For this reason the admirals allowed the *Three Seven One* to remain two weeks longer in Hawaiian waters.

We spent the two training weeks, never farther than fifty miles from

the entrance of Pearl. The submarine practice intrigued us for these latter days subs were deadly ships. We were amazed one day when a sub and the *Three Seven One* had an impromptu surface race. We were slightly ahead, making twenty knots, and the sub was catching up! We cranked on more shaft revolutions, and it still crept closer. We were in a dead heat at about twenty-three knots. To say the least, we were dumfounded. As the sub carried two six-inch guns, including torpedoes, she could give a destroyer a real tussle. No wonder the Japs were taking such a licking from our undersea craft.

CHAPTER SIX

OUR orders arrived from the operational center; and as expected, we were once more to head southwest into the tropics. We were to escort a fast transport to Noumea. We met the transport as it was coming out of Honolulu and headed down under. We had made so many trips in that direction that the compass automatically swung to the course and once more we took up the old dreary life of drill and drill, for our new crew had to be trained, and trained fast.

We hardly had time to refuel in Noumea before we were assigned escort duty to the Fiji Islands. Our port of destination was Suva, situated on the lower coast of Veti Levi, the largest island of the Fiji group. To reach this port, it was necessary to head northward with small high islands on either side of us. Our sailing directions read to look for Thumb Mountain, which rose directly behind Suva harbor, and to use this as an entering range through the island passage. Sure enough, it was the exact replica of a left-handed thumb; it even appeared to have a middle knuckle. Using this as our object to head for, it was then no trouble to navigate into the harbor.

This was our first look at the Fiji Islands, and the crew were much interested to see the town. We were out of a war zone and were allowed to go ashore early in the afternoon and remain until one o'clock the following morning. These islands belonged to Great Britain and were now being used as a jump-off spot for New Zealand troops.

The town's atmosphere was peaceful—until our crew descended upon the unwary citizens. We had been without a good liberty for a year, and the boys were primed for a fling. The Captain was horrified, then aghast, at the condition of the men returning over the gangway. The peak of the Captain's anger was reached as he saw coming down the

dock one of those giant Fiji policemen, carrying like sacks of potatoes two crew members. It was several months before the crew was forgiven this display.

These Fiji policemen were the most remembered incident of our short stay in Suva. They were of gigantic size, six and a half feet tall, with great clumps of bushy red hair and large brass rings piercing their ears. Their strength was such that it was nothing for them to pick a grown man up from the ground, using but one hand.

To our surprise, the squadron flagship was in Noumea when we returned. The squadron, consisting of eight destroyers of the *Three Seven One* type, would now evidently operate as a unit, for anchored near the flagship were three more destroyers of the squadron. The other three would join later.

The Captain told us that the squadron was proceeding to Australia and there would operate as a part of the Seventh Fleet. Perhaps the *Three Seven One* would be forced to do a little work toward the war effort.

Brisbane was the first stop and we remained there for three days, which only served to give us a desire to spend several weeks in the vicinity. We had entered port only to pick up new charts and find out a few facts concerning future operations so after having our questions answered we proceeded northward. The captain, after Suva's exhibition, watched liberty parties like a hawk. Feeling very well behaved, the *Three Seven One* joined the Australian fleet of two cruisers and four destroyers inside the Great Barrier reef for familiarization tactics. By this time we were beginning to think the *Three Seven One* would still be in training at the war's end. The waters inside the barrier reef were ideal in which to steam out the war, and Australians made excellent shipmates, for they were extremely generous with the beer they kept on board their ships. On Australian ships drinking in moderation was allowed, while it was forbidden on U. S. Navy vessels.

WE were not surprised when orders came sending the four American destroyers north to New Guinea, for we had heard that Milne Bay was now a safe anchorage for warships. The *Three Seven One* had spent a very pleasant two weeks of operating with the Australians and it was with regret that we wigwagged our farewell messages and steamed away.

Our tender was in Milne Bay when we arrived, so we knew that the squadron could anticipate a long stay in New Guinea. Many landing craft of all sizes and types lay at anchor or along the beach, and from the steady

stream of Australian troops being transported into the Bay it was obvious that MacArthur was preparing to push the Japs from New Guinea as rapidly as possible. We were told that American and Australian forces had combined to drive the enemy over the Owen Stanley Mountains on to the beaches of Buna one hundred and fifty miles north. There the enemy had been wiped out, giving the Allies complete control of the southern part of New Guinea.

Shortly after arriving, the *Three Seven One* led landing craft eastward to Kiriwini and Woodlark Islands, where landings were effected with no opposition. This gave us more air bases for northward operations. Once again we had been blessed by the presence of a war correspondent who had written a most exciting story of the landings. It was baffling to us how such interesting accounts of dull events could be written.

While plans were being laid by the high brass for the *Three Seven One's* future, we got in a few last licks of practice in the use of radar. There were two types of radar aboard ship. One was for surface tracking, the other for air-search and plot. Watching our radar team tracking aircraft was fascinating. One man would call out range and bearing, while two others would plot the data. After several plots on the same contact they could figure the plane's course and speed. The plotting became quite exciting when the radar had two or more separate contacts.

To protect convoys from air attack, a system was devised whereby one ship, usually a destroyer, was given her own flight of land-based planes to control. Voice contact was established with the planes which constantly circled overhead. Upon making contact on enemy planes with the radar, all data which could be deduced from a series of plots would be disseminated to the leader of the air cover. He could then lead his flight away from the ships and intercept the enemy before they could drop bombs on the convoy. The only difficulty was when more than one raid came in at the same time. Then it needed expert judgment to decide which raid took preference, and how many planes of our group to send to intercept each raid.

The use of radar for bombardment purposes was another new wrinkle in naval warfare. We now tried to bombard at night, taking navigational bearings from our radar screen. Due to slight mechanical errors we found it impossible to pinpoint a target, but it was possible to place our shells in a general area. Then by walking the salvoes up and down and from right to left, the area could be generally torn up.



Low-flying torpedo planes were easy pickings for our five-inch guns.

Buna by this time had been somewhat rebuilt, with an air strip added. Having fighter planes on hand gave some air protection to ships. Once again we pushed a little farther north by using Buna as a jumping-off spot. We felt somewhat distinguished by the fact that we were the first Allied warships ever to have penetrated these waters. We were now within daily contact of enemy planes. The very first day three separate attacks were made on shore installations. The ships were unmolested, for being unaccustomed to seeing ships in this area the planes never even glanced in our direction. This would change soon, for our destination that night was Finschaven, where we were to harass the enemy with a twenty-minute bombardment.

As darkness fell the four destroyers got under way and proceeded at full speed northward. Our chart of Fin-

schaven was as incorrect as the others. We were to close the shore to five thousand yards, then follow the beach line, using rapid fire. The navigator almost lost his mind attempting to use his charts, finally resorting to taking a rough estimate direct from the radar screen for gun range and bearing. We fired, then hauled for home at high speed. We never did find out what we hit, if anything, that night. Our trajectory had appeared so much longer than the other ships' that the Captain had grave misgivings as to our accuracy. The navigator is probably still scratching his head in perplexity. Dawn found us safe in Buna with the other four destroyers coming up from the south to complete the squadron. All eight of us would now use Buna as a haven.

Lae was the thorn in our admiral's side. It lay as far north as Finschaven and was the closest enemy air base,

and every day raids would come out of Lae to harass the Buna territory. These raiding planes found it difficult to bother the ships at anchor, for if they came in from seaward, our radar could contact them and planes would intercept before they reached us. Their best approach was from the west over the mountains which obstructed our radar waves, and unload their bombs on the air-strip. This way they were out of bombs on reaching the ships. Either way they approached, we felt fairly safe while anchored in this vicinity.

Our pet hate was the snoopers which flew down at night to harass us and keep us awake. These planes would circle overhead throughout darkness, only dropping what bombs they carried when just gas enough remained to get them back to Lae. Naturally we would have to stay at battle stations most of the night. Being constantly on the alert was exhausting and told on our nerves. This of course was just what the enemy hoped to accomplish.

Lae had to be captured before the enemy organized a large-scale air raid and sunk us all. To this end the *Three Seven One* escorted landing craft to Nassau bay in the dead of night. A small landing party was set ashore here at Nassau a few miles south of Lae, with the intention of working northward toward Lae. On the fourth of September in forty-three, the Australians were to land in full force a few miles east of Lae and close in from that direction. The *Three Seven One* was chosen to act as the flagship of the landing fleet.

A FEW days prior to the fourth we steamed down to Milne bay to take the Admiral and his staff aboard. At first the crew and officers resented the idea of having an admiral on the ship, as usually an admiral caused much confusion; but Admiral Barbey gave us a pleasant surprise through his understanding of our problem of accommodating a flag upon such a small vessel as a destroyer. He quickly won the respect of all hands by trying in every way to cause a minimum of trouble. Having him and his staff aboard was soon to become a pleasure. Then too it gave us our first opportunity to watch the planning of a landing operation.

Admiral Barbey's staff consisted of about seven officers; that is, the staff used for operations. What size staff he had for other operations we didn't know. These men acted as coördinators of branches which when combined made up a landing force. One had the job of arranging the routing and courses with speeds of the fleet including the safe navigation. Another had the duty of seeing that the proper number of troops and suffi-

cient supplies were loaded. A third coördinated communications between ships, planes and landing troops. A fourth saw to it that we had the necessary intelligence concerning the enemy which included the number of opposing troops, their location and also the number of enemy planes from which we could expect attack.

The amount of paper work required to plan for such a landing was astounding. Each copy of these landing plans was hundreds of pages long. Reading one of these was like reading the story before it happened. These plans gave every minute detail down to the very second; such as they would state at seven o'clock ships would reach the unloading area. Seven zero one, the destroyers would commence bombardment. Seven ten, friendly planes would bomb and strafe the beaches. Seven fifteen, the first wave would land, and then it would continue in this vein, giving the exact time of each succeeding wave.

These men not only arranged for the initial landing but at the same time listed dates and hours for each of the resupply echelons. Making the initial landing was only the start of the problem. The troops had to be resupplied almost daily. Resupply echelons were the ones that caught hell, as for air cover they were only allowed from four to six planes.

Landings we effected while under Admiral Barbey's command were almost always free of casualties during the initial stage, for the timing was perfect.

After picking up the Admiral, we returned to Buna, arriving in time to take our position at the head of the fleet. Destroyers surrounded the main body of the fleet, which consisted of a hundred or more landing craft; and overhead we had such an array of fighter planes that the enemy limited themselves to just one token air raid in the evening. As dawn broke the next day we set the troops ashore. The airfield at Lae took a terrible pounding from our planes using two-thousand-pound bombs, while we bombarded the landing beaches so well that our troops walked ashore. Lae was considered ours within a few hours after the landing. Admiral Barbey was so pleased with the result that he asked and received permission to effect a landing at Finschaven on the twenty-second of September. As this was two weeks after the Lae landing, his staff had to do some fast organizing.

The enemy, although putting up meager resistance, still attempted to harass the shipping at Lae. The *Three Seven One*, being flagship, remained at Buna for the better part of the two weeks following the landing, but the other destroyers of the squadron were not as lucky, and while pro-

tecting the resupply echelons were attacked several times by enemy planes. Some casualties were inflicted on the squadron but no ships were damaged. The squadron did, however, lose one ship from submarine attack. Four of our destroyers were making a search for enemy submarines; and one evening as they patrolled along the coastline, the second ship in column took a torpedo amidships, sinking within two minutes. Considering what had been accomplished, the loss of one ship and the few casualties was a small price for our squadron to pay.

The *Three Seven One's* crew began to show signs of weariness after the landing. We had been under attack one or two times ourselves while taking the Admiral on inspection tours of the landing beaches, and no one ever felt safe, for the Japs were intent on sinking the destroyers which were proving to be such thorns in their side. Enemy planes were raiding day and night, and four hours of unbroken sleep was hard to find.

AFTER last-minute instructions had been given the fleet, we got under way, heading toward Finschaven. On board, besides the Admiral's staff, we carried General Blamey and his entourage, for these landings were being made with Australian troops, whom we thought to be equal to our Marines. These troops had fought across the African desert in the campaign driving Rommel from the near East, and then with no rest they had been thrown into the steaming New Guinea jungles. They were a part of the famous "rats of Tobruk" and had caught hell both there and here, but never once did we hear them complain. We held them in respect and they in turn were much appreciative of our small efforts to keep them well supplied with fighting essentials. It was rather awesome to watch the troops spend the entire trip sharpening knives and cleaning guns, knowing that in the morning these same instruments would be put to use. There was one little Aussie no taller than five feet who tickled our imagination. The others said he was in the habit of filling a sack full of grenades, and upon hitting the beach would simply start walking and throwing until his sack was empty. Then he would sit down and brew a cup of tea while waiting for the others to catch up. Evidently his aplomb baffled the enemy so much that they forgot to fire at him.

To our navigational department's credit, the landing was made at the exact spot designated beforehand, and at the planned time. The destroyers bombarded to give the Aussies the best cover possible, but on this landing there were casualties on the

beaches. The landing was made during darkness, which meant the planes could not strafe preliminary to the landing, and so the trees bordering the beachhead held a few enemy troops who sniped at the invasion party. The Admiral felt, however, that if we had waited until daybreak, the casualties would have totaled more.

This last prodding given the Japs was too much. We had returned but halfway when our radarmen picked up enemy planes on the screen, and spotters on the beach radioed that seventy-five planes were on their way down. Against this array we had but sixteen planes in our cover for interception. Our air force at Buna were on their toes that day, for a moment later they chimed in on the conversation to tell us to take it easy, for they had dispatched fifty friendlies to ease the situation. Our sighs of relief were no doubt heard on the horizon. Our aircraft shot down every dive bomber, which left us only fourteen low-flying torpedo planes, and they were easy pickings for our five-inch guns. The destroyers surrounded the landing craft, then commenced circling at high speed. Only one plane managed to get through the circle, and it was so shot up that it couldn't drop its torpedo. We were all hot that day.

RESUPPLYING Finschaven was a chore we detested. The squadron was split into two groups, each group making one supply run every three days, and every run brought an air attack. Being on a small ship and having it the center of attack is a terrifying experience, for no matter in which direction one looks there is a plane intent on scoring a hit, and each plane appears to have a perfect aim on the ship. One gets the feeling that the pilot has the onlooker himself right in his sights. Also on a ship there is no place to hide; all one can do is stand there watching and praying.

After a period of almost continuous bombing, war gets to be a personal affair, and every man feels that he is the only one needing a rest. The demand for alcohol became incessant, no matter what the price. One of our ex-shipmates had the market cornered on the beach, and this fellow jumped his prices so high he made Al Capone look like a piker.

The *Three Seven One* once again was smiled upon by Lady Luck, for along the route from Milne bay to Buna, a trip she made at odd intervals, she hit some undersea object. A rasping sound was heard along the ship's bottom, then a thud as the propellers churned against the object. Immediately the cry, "Brisbane bound," was heard, the only groan

coming from the quartermaster, who just a few moments before had lost his savings trying to make a flush stand up against four jacks. We were the envy of the squadron, as the tender looked us over then waved us on to Brisbane and a drydock. Our propeller shaft had been bent out of line and we would have to enter a drydock to have the bearings replaced.

What a happy day it was when the *Three Seven One* edged into the drydock! With no water under us and the buildings of Brisbane in view, we knew we were safe from enemy raiders. Adding to our joy was the fact that our captain had quite forgotten Suva's exhibition. The piece of luck was also enhanced when we saw what the dock of Brisbane contained for repair jobs. Their gear was so decrepit that what normally would be a three-day job would take twenty here. All hands settled down to become residents of the town of Brisbane. Little need be said of our liberty. In fact, the less said the better. It was a sailors' paradise, and the *Three Seven One* returned to Milne bay leaving Australia the richer but taking in many fond memories.

As we retook our anchorage amid the ships of our squadron, we could hear the mutterings of "Slackers," "Racketeers," and other names mostly unprintable. Once again the Admiral stepped aboard, bringing the news of a proposed landing at Arawe, which lay in the left corner of New Britain. The planning for it had already been done. This saved us much trouble as it made us merely acting as a chauffeur. American troops were to be used, and cruisers would add their eight-inch fire to the destroyer bombardment. Even carriers were detached from the Solomons to act as supporting naval forces.

One section of the plan looked bad to us: A small group of men were to land on the right of the beachhead with no supporting fire. It turned out as bad as thought, for the craft were decimated, leaving men encumbered with gear struggling in the water without even having reached their objective. As we carried the Admiral and had no other missions, the captain lowered our whaleboat for the survivors.

The main fleet had by then retired, leaving us behind, and we couldn't have picked a worse time to be alone. Over the hills popped the enemy planes; four dive bombers chose the *Three Seven One* for a target and caused our first casualty when their bombs struck within a few feet of our fantail. Our chief torpedoman was hit in the thigh with a large chunk of the flying metal and our fantail was holed until it looked like a sieve.

That was enough for us and we took to our heels, hoisting the whaleboat as we went. By this time small boats had come from the beach to pick up the men in the water, so we felt free to leave. We caught up with the main body in time to share two more plane attacks before evening, attacks which resulted in casualties throughout the group. The following morning various ships came alongside the *Three Seven One* leaving their casualties for us to transfer to the base hospital. Looking down from the bridge at the pale bearded faces of the wounded brought yesterday's attacks more poignantly into mind and we were glad to see them sent to the beach; then we could begin to forget.

The New Guinea waters were now becoming cluttered with destroyers and we knew our time for returning home was nearing. The Admiral kept us as his flagship for the Cape Gloucester landing, but it was only a matter of carrying him to the landing beach and returning immediately after the first wave of troops had landed. The new squadron of destroyers which had arrived in time to assist in the landing lost one destroyer to enemy planes. It was their first operation, and we felt that perhaps it was due to inexperience. To maneuver at the proper moment when under attack, took time to learn and we had a captain who seemed to sense the moment when the plane was about to drop its bomb. Our squadron although suffering some deaths and casualties had lost but one ship and she had been sunk by submarine attack. To the squadron's credit were at least thirty planes shot down and one sure submarine kill. The squadron had earned a rest.

It was a happy day for the *Three Seven One* when she turned her charts of New Guinea waters over to her relief and headed for home. She could forget the war for a time as San Francisco lay at the end of her next trip, and for the crew, beyond Frisco lay home. As it was the custom for homeward-bound ships to fly what is known as a homeward-bound pennant, the signalmen took upon themselves the job of creating one. The pennant consisted of about four feet of blue bunting with a white star sewed upon the blue for each officer serving aboard the ship, and one foot of red and white bunting for each member of the crew. Upon reaching the harbor line at San Francisco the pennant was unfurled and proudly the *Three Seven One* steamed at high speed up the straits to Mare island with this pennant streaming behind and reaching beyond the fantail, where it buried itself in our wake.

Three years had passed since last the *Three Seven One* had docked in



The Jap's face turned gray. He reached down, pulled a lever, and blew himself to hell.

the yard, and proud we were to bring her home once more. She had accomplished nothing heroic in this first half of the war but she had done her duty.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AS the last thousand miles of our homeward bound journey had been spent pressing and repressing our liberty uniforms, given the signal, we could dash for leave in a moment; and we simply were dumfounded at the yard's decision to allot us only twenty days for leave. The commandant of the base reminded us that there was a war to be fought. It was also mandatory for half the ship's company to be aboard at all times. Twenty days for a man to cross the country and return left but ten for visiting the folks at home, and we had waited three years for this. It was hard to take, and our Captain felt cheated for us. He brought representatives of air lines and rail lines aboard, and we received top travel priority.

At this time the commander of the destroyers of the Pacific fleet had ordered the majority of our crew transferred to new ships. This way new ships would have a fair sprinkling of old hands to organize recruits, but these transfers left the *Three Seven One* woefully short of veterans. To add to our confusion, we also received a new commanding officer much younger than the last, and for an executive officer we now had a man of twenty-four. It would take many months to weld the new men and officers into a fighting unit. While at Mare island the ship received a major overhaul. Her engine-room was completely torn down and rebuilt; every gun was taken off and replaced by new; our radars were exchanged for later models, and our bridge was rebuilt to give better vision during plane attacks. The hull was left intact but all else was either renewed or rebuilt.

Luckily it doesn't take many days of leave to rekindle a spark of life in men who have become dulled by the

sea. At the end of leave and a few good liberties, the old hands commenced once more to show an interest in the everyday activities of shipboard life. Their voices became sharper and the cussing about inexperience came more frequently. Our executive officer welcomed the griping, for with every cussing he heard, he knew a change for the better would come. The old hands by beefing were once again showing spirit.

All too soon the Yard had the *Three Seven One* ready for sea. Several of our crew had married; and while we remained in the yard had been assigned living quarters on the base. Their wives would have to make the long journey home alone, for the *Three Seven One's* vacation was over. Against their better judgment, these men had married. The wiser men remained single, for its difficult enough to worry over one's own person without adding family ties to cause more mental strain. At the war's end many would be sorry for mistaking a companion in loneliness for a companion in life.

We found upon anchoring at Pearl Harbor that an extremely large task force was making up and the *Three Seven One* was assigned to replace a destroyer which had broken down. To be just out of a navy yard with a completely green crew and then handed task-force duty was giving us an almost impossible job. But we were expected to hold our own. Our force rendezvoused outside the harbor and off we steamed.

There was no question of could we keep up or not. We simply had to; and as it turned out, being handed this duty at the outset was the best possible thing for the *Three Seven One*. For now the new hands had to buckle down. Maneuvering with the best of the ships aroused our competitive spirit to its highest peak. The crew turned to, and within weeks the *Three Seven One* was once again one of the best in fleet operations.

Our task group this time was the largest we had ever seen and later

we were to be completely astonished at the enormous amount of tonnage the navy had assembled. The *Three Seven One* must have stuck out like a sore thumb in this force of new ships, for we were antiquated in comparison with the other destroyers, and our armament only equaled half of what new destroyers carried. Nevertheless our engines were still good enough to turn the screws over as fast as needed to keep us with the group.

The Captain told us that the Navy had decided to penetrate into the outer rim of the Japanese defenses in the Central Pacific. We would take the island of Saipan, which was the largest of the Marianna group.

The battle for Saipan was opened with an air strike by all the available aircraft of our carriers on the 12th of June. The air group put into the skies from our carriers numbered in the hundreds as we had all our carriers in the area, including many small escort carriers. From the 12th of June until the 5th of August the memories are hazy, but some highlights stand out here and there.

We will never forget the morning of the 13th, for during the night both carrier and bombardment groups had joined. As dawn broke we could see the entire sea covered with warships. Never before had such naval might been assembled. We on board the *Three Seven One* could not have felt more insignificant. The assembled ships stretched for seventy miles, and we could see ships from horizon to horizon.

The bombardment group consisted of battleships, cruisers and destroyers. They broke off from fleet formation and headed in toward the western side of Saipan. We fell in astern of a column of battleships, feeling as if we were a small rowboat being towed behind the last ship. . . . The Navy pounded the island for two days, and on the third our transports arrived and sent the troops ashore.

THINGS done by the enemy were quite hard to understand at times. A good instance of their unpredictability was a gun emplacement on a little island at the entrance to Saipan's harbor. For two days our ships had steamed by without drawing fire. Then on the third day, when all the ships were more or less biding time waiting for suitable targets, the gun opened fire at a battleship. The whole bombardment group turned on the island, literally pounding it into dust. Just why they had waited so long to fire when countless ships had passed close enough to have been hit with a thrown rock, we will never know. They passed up every suitable opportunity, then picked on a big battleship at extreme range. We, on the *Three Seven One*, had spotted

the flash of the gun first, and felt pleased that we could locate the source of fire for the battleship we were following. Our captain enjoyed telling all that gold braid where to fire.

ESCORT carriers were assigned the task of supplying bombing and strafing planes to support our troops ashore and the *Three Seven One* drew the dull job of screening the unit. We steamed back and forth along the east coast of Saipan until we thought we would grow crazy with the monotony. Throughout the day planes would take off and land on the small carriers. The planes were assigned such tasks as bombing gun emplacements, strafing enemy positions or just reconnoitering. We continued up and down the coast drawing criticism at every turn of the formation as our officers of the deck were still ignorant of the proper method to turn in formation without losing station. Each time the Captain tried to catch a few winks of sleep we would turn, fall out of position, and receive a nasty message from the unit commander which would bring the Captain to his feet cussing.

The *Three Seven One* was finally detached from the escort carriers, and after refueling joined a large carrier group, one of several in the area. The 19th of June ushered in the only large scale Japanese attempt to molest our fleet and it turned into the now famous "Turkey Shoot." Later we found the enemy strategy had been to launch carrier planes from a distance, have them strike our fleet on their way to Guam, refuel at Guam, and return to their carriers. The only thing wrong with their plans was that no planes returned to their carriers. Our admirals were fully prepared, and in the ensuing air battle our pilots shot the enemy down in swarms. Then our fleet chased the enemy from the area. This we learned later; now all we knew was that an air battle was in progress. At intervals throughout the 19th our ships went under attack, but the few planes which penetrated the screen caused only minor damage. In the *Three Seven One's* near vicinity but two enemy planes appeared. One was splashed on our starboard beam by fire from a nearby cruiser and ourselves. The other passed completely around us, then literally throwing a bomb at a battleship on our port bow as it rose almost perpendicular, high-tailed it for the horizon, chased by shells from both the battleships and the *Three Seven One*.

Soon after the last carrier engagement, the bulk of our naval forces left the area, leaving a handful of cruisers, destroyers and escort car-

riers, to play supporting rôles in securing Saipan. The *Three Seven One* spent the next four weeks guarding the transport area, patrolling off the northern end of the island or adding our gunfire to that on the beach and knocking out pillboxes, machine-gun nests, and other obstacles impeding the progress of the troops. In the evenings the destroyers would form a semicircle around the outer edge of the anchored transports, where, upon receiving aircraft warning, we would commence making smoke to drift over the ships, obscuring them from view. The enemy curtailed their operations to sporadic raids at night by a few large planes.

Those days of bombarding appeased somewhat our desire to avenge ourselves on the enemy, for on rounding the rocky southwest corner of Saipan, we could see enemy faces peering out from the many caves. Our troops had driven them over the cliffs' edge and here they had sought shelter. We, sailing within yards of the cliffs, would train binoculars on the rocks, make mental notes of the location of caves in which the enemy were seen. Upon completion of our designated bombardment mission or finding a lull on our hands, the Captain would retrace the route, this time firing forty-millimeter and twenty-millimeter guns into the openings. It was like shooting rats in a barrel.

SAIPAN was our first chance to watch ground troops in action. Knowing nothing of land warfare, we had thought of that phase of war as being a matter of leaping from one cover to another under barrages of heavy guns. Such was not the case in this bit of fighting. We got a clear view of troops in action when the enemy were pocketed in the northern end of the island. We could see a long line of our soldiers emerging from the brush, walking slowly northward. Interspersed among our troops were tanks which fired spasmodically. Evidently our men simply kept walking until meeting fire. Then the tanks opened up at the point where the fire came from, while our men still standing emptied carbines in the same direction. This would keep up until a particularly heavy concentration of enemy was found. Then if heavy guns on the beach could not be brought to bear, we would swing into action. Upon receiving a point of aim from the beach, our guns would cover the area of the concentrated enemy and once more our troops would slowly forge ahead.

It was all the more thrilling to watch later, when the enemy were driven on the beaches. There was a little rim of sand extending along the northern shore with a slight ledge about twenty feet in from the water's

edge, and from where we lay in the water we watched the Japs, their bodies pressed against the ledge for protection, or dashing along to hunt for better cover. We couldn't fire for fear of hitting our advancing line, but whenever we saw a particularly large amount of enemy our radio men contacted the base commander, and he passed the word along to the front lines. From our vantage point it was like watching a football game with death for the loser. It was both thrilling and frightening. Once again we thought: "Thank God, we joined the Navy."

Guam was reoccupied by our forces on the 18th of July. The *Three Seven One* was considered a part of the fleet assisting in the landing, but her part was very minute, consisting only of escorting a few of the little carriers to a point south of Guam and taking up the old grind of back and forth steaming while the carriers' planes made air strikes. We hardly felt qualified to wear the engagement star issued for these landings, for our job had been almost nothing. As a change from the monotony of working star sights, our chief quartermaster tabulated the number of sea miles the *Three Seven One* had steamed from the beginning of the war. He came up with a total of two hundred and seventy-five thousand miles.

The *Three Seven One* returned to the Saipan area in time to do what she could to help our soldiers cross the five miles between Saipan and Tinian. Shore batteries consisting of howitzers had been set up on the south shore of Saipan. These guns bombarded across the channel while we steamed in close and tore up the beach at short range. It seemed rather unusual to see transports loading at Saipan, then proceeding barely five miles to unload. By this time Saipan had been turned into a large and safe anchorage for our shipping. Tinian duty was for us similar to the Saipan campaign. We did exactly the same things, patrolling, escorting small carriers and bombarding.

NATIVES on Tinian were, as we found out, terrified of Americans. These people had been for the most part imported from Korea. The Japanese had filled their minds with horror tales of the way we treated prisoners. From what we heard those natives had visions of being boiled and eaten. That people could believe such nonsense seems ridiculous, but the southern corner of Tinian became a suicide spot. The natives persisted in throwing themselves from the cliffs, and the rocks below were cluttered with broken bodies.

One morning as we took station to be on call for bombarding purposes

some forty or so Koreans were spotted in a large cave. They had, instead of jumping, climbed down a path which lay between two walls of rock. The *Three Seven One's* Captain trained the loudspeaker toward the beach, and talking in English, attempted to turn them back. He succeeded in keeping them from throwing themselves into the water, no doubt due to our near presence; but they, not understanding our language, would not retrace their steps. Not having a translator put us in a dilemma. Finally we contacted one on the beach and explained the situation to him. We then placed the microphone attached to our speaker next to the shore receiver and let the translator talk. He talked for about an hour, telling the natives to go back and surrender. At long last they turned, retraced their steps and were met by our advancing troops. We felt rather good for we had saved lives which would have been needlessly sacrificed.

The *Three Seven One* had spent three months in this area and now it was time for her to move once more. She was ordered to New Guinea. We now learned that MacArthur was ready to re-enter the Philippines—which caused much speculation, for we were of the opinion that he was biting off more than he could chew. Let it be said here and now that coming events proved that MacArthur was the one man who had judged future enemy resistance down to the finest hair line. Our prophecies were completely wrong and his every one was right. From now until the end, we on board the *Three Seven One* believed MacArthur nuts; and it was only when we lay at anchor in Manila Bay at the war's end did the realization of what MacArthur had accomplished in so short a space of time strike us. Then we knew him to be one of the greatest generals of all time.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE *Three Seven One* joined a group of merchant vessels comprising a resupply echelon due to unload at Leyte the day after the actual landing. Our first glimpse of the Gulf impressed us with its peaceful atmosphere. Without mishap we steamed by our covering fleet of two battleships, three cruisers and a number of destroyers and reached the unloading area in a fine frame of mind. This duty was all right. Then it happened.

Along the rim of mountains surrounding the Gulf flew a single enemy plane. It hovered while picking its target, then smashed into a large supply ship. A few moments later another plane appeared, picked its

target, and dived headlong into a tanker. Something new had certainly been added. Evidently from now on it would seem we would get plane, pilot, bomb and the rising sun—the works.

A few minutes after these two Kamikaze boys welcomed the *Three Seven One* to the Philippines we heard a terrific din coming over the water from where our fleet had been quietly steaming around. Reports began coming in on damaged ships. We remained in Leyte Gulf three days before getting under way again for another run to Hollandia. These three days sufficed to show us that the Japs were now in dead earnest. It was horrible to watch single planes sneaking in through the mountain passes, then crashing into ships at anchor. Now we wished we were in the Army.

Returning to Hollandia was like receiving a reprieve, and the crew took advantage of every liberty opportunity. This would appear as if the beach had much to offer, but actually liberty consisted of three cans of beer and a beach for swimming. Normally this type liberty would not have enticed a single person but as the crew knew that the future months would bring the toughest duty possible they took advantage of the opportunity to leave the ship for a few hours and change the day-by-day monotony.

Too soon another convoy formed and the *Three Seven One* escorted it to Leyte. The anchorage was more organized now with sections reserved for each type ship. The town of Tacloban at the upper end of the harbor was in our hands, and some shipping could use the docks. The Japs were sending raids over the ships in the harbor during the entire day and night for they were carrying on a war of nerves and after almost two weeks of continuous air attacks our nerves almost broke. The first two nights we passed in the channel off the town wharves, tied alongside a supply ship. The air field was the objective of enemy planes during this stay. They came down from the north passing overhead on their way to the air field.

A day spent on board ship in this anchorage was most unusual as daily work continued and men tried to live each day as if nothing extraordinary were happening. The *Three Seven One* remained hove short which meant the ship was riding to a minimum of anchor chain; only enough to keep the hook buried and keep it from breaking ground. We were ready to get away at a moment's notice. Naturally the ships tended to huddle together, feeling a safety in numbers. The small ships attempted to nestle up to the larger ones, realizing that of the two, the larger would

be chosen as a target by the suicide pilot.

Our most intense fear came while refueling from the tankers, for we knew if either the tanker or the *Three Seven One* took a crash diver aboard while refueling, all hell would break loose. At the least sign of the enemy we would cast off and steam in circles waiting for the "All clear." The Japs were hitting such a number of ships that something had to be done, and soon. An idea to lessen the ship losses was conceived of: surrounding the major ships with smoke-pots. The period immediately after sunset was the worst of the entire day, for the air cover from the field at Tacloban would secure and the Japs would follow our planes in, to attack as soon as the last of our fighters made its landing. This was the time the smoke-pots would be started to surround our ships with a white fog.

AT first our Captain would deliberately steam south below the man-made fog to reach an open spot, believing he could from this point get a good shot at the raiding planes. This maneuver terrified the crew, as we certainly didn't desire to be out in the open. We were most thankful that no opportunities afforded for shooting, and in time the skipper came to believe in the safety of numbers along with the rest of us. Perhaps it was a good thing destroyers pass under the command of new men at yearly intervals, for the more one saw of war, the less one wanted.

We were shunted to the open spaces again shortly after a decision had been reached to stay close to the command ship. As the command ship received good smoke-pot cover, this order to send us away was discouraging, for once again we were to be without protection; now being assigned the duty of remaining at anchor on the right side of the harbor with the task of supplying drydocks and ammunition ships with gun-cover. During the two days the *Three Seven One* spent here, two ships were struck, and we never fired a shot. They popped up and crashed before we knew they were there.

Luckily for the *Three Seven One* she now drew an assignment to take some landing craft to Hollandia. That day we lived in anticipation, for we knew that underway in the evening would see us safely away by morning. We considered ourselves lucky, and that was a mistake for as the last glimmer of light left the sky and all hands peacefully relaxed, an enemy plane escaped detection by our radars. In the flash of a second the plane had swept over us, strafing as she went. The landing craft, careless with their guns as usual, opened up and sprayed us with machine-gun

fire at the same time. We counted our casualties above twenty. The plane had accounted for but one or two; the stupidity of the craft we were protecting caused the rest.

Our doctor and pharmacist mates with superhuman efforts kept the casualties from being deaths. The doctor operated on the wardroom table throughout the night, with the poorest kind of light and a minimum of proper surgical instruments to save the life of more than one. If only those landing craft had held their fire instead of shooting crazily off into space! The only ray of humor in the entire happening was the way in which the crew eyed one chief, who was supposedly trained to perform a transfusion in case an emergency developed whereby a pharmacist mate could not be spared. And all that night he waited in the chief's quarters for the opportunity to practice his medical skill. To the men's relief and our vampire's disappointment, no blood was needed. With a disgruntled sigh he returned the equipment to its proper place and went about his usual duties, a thwarted medico.

Arriving at Hollandia, we transferred the casualties to the base hospital and awaited further assignment. As expected, the *Three Seven One* returned to Leyte in time to join a landing force to Ormoc. For several weeks previous, destroyers had been rounding the southern end of Leyte and working up along the western side, cleaning up the many enemy barges plying up and down the coast. Some twenty destroyers had been damaged on this jaunt. Our land forces had pocketed the enemy in the northwestern corner of the island; and the landing at Ormoc, which lay up in the northern end, evidently would save our troops many long miles of jungle fighting; so it was attempted, and for the Fifth Squadron it meant the beginning of its toughest war duty. The route took us below our air fields, then up the other side of the island with mountain ranges lying between us and our air strip. Planes were to be overhead at all times, but as the weather could turn bad at practically any moment, we felt more and more alone as we traversed the route.

OUR force could not help but be spotted, for the enemy held every other island, and the passes between islands south of Leyte were not wide enough to keep us out of sight. We got around the island easily, thanks to heavy rain squalls which kept the enemy grounded, and our troops were sent ashore after the preliminary daylight bombardment. The landing took place on December seventh as a commemorative Pearl Harbor pres-

ent to the enemy. We had surprised them with the landing, for the rain had hidden the fleet the previous day, and the weather had cleared that night giving us good vision in the morning. We expected the worst attacks possible when discovered and the hokey-pokeys did not disappoint us. *Three Seven One* was following the shore line abeam of the town of Ormoc, bombarding and machine-gunning the town when the first planes appeared. It was a small raid of no more than six planes, and they attacked a destroyer patrolling on the horizon. Every plane crashed the ship, two hitting and the others plowing into the sea close aboard. Huge columns of oily smoke spiraled up from the ship. It was impossible to save her from sinking.

That attack ushered in a concentrated enemy effort to damage every ship. We remained under attack for eight solid hours. Planes would be heard above the lower layer of clouds; then one or two at a time would drop below the clouds into view and attempt to crash a ship before being shot down. We had on board the *Three Seven One* war correspondents from every theater of Allied operations. They said they had never seen or heard of such terrifying air attacks.

We had reached a point halfway between Ormoc and the southwestern end of Leyte when we witnessed what we believed to be the best shooting ever done by a destroyer. Four planes dropped into view astern of our position at the rear of the fleet. One of the newer destroyers was a few hundred yards on our starboard quarter, and these planes swept up from astern heading directly for us. As they passed abeam of the other destroyer, she opened up with every gun, and with no more than thirty seconds of firing had splashed three of the raiders. The fourth turned right to drop a bomb on the ship which had the audacity to shoot down its three companions. Then after almost stalling, she smashed into the bridge of one of the *Three Seven One's* sister ships. We on the *Three Seven One* had glasses trained on our sister ship at the moment of crash, and could see men leaping off the superstructure into the water or onto the main deck. Later we found the plane had strafed as it crashed, causing casualties on the bridge who were unable to jump clear of the oncoming plane. We were heartsick over seeing one of our squadron take such a beating. The ship was saved but needed an entire new superstructure—what remained was but twisted and charred steel.

Night fell at last bringing with it relief, and once more the *Three Seven One* had lived through another day. We by now believed the *Three Seven One* to be the luckiest ship afloat, but

as the crew looked at each other that night, they could see years of life had been added to their lined, weary, powder-blackened faces. This crew which had seemed such a group of landlubbers had surpassed all previous crews on board the *Three Seven One*. The men and the ship were united more closely than ever before. Night had come just in time, for we were reduced to but one round of five-inch for each gun, and could not have fought through another attack.

The initial landing at Ormoc was but the beginning of a long series of trips around the island of Leyte, and each trip was as tough as the last. This was a bad area for destroyers, for their armament was not sufficient to beat off this type air attack. It was especially bad for the *Three Seven One's* class as they carried even fewer guns than the majority of destroyers. Our Captain journeyed to the air strip and brought back four fifty-caliber machine guns. This increased our armament no small amount and in our next trip they saved the ship. At times we resented our Captain's apparent lust for battle, but other than that, we could find no fault with him. He was exceptionally quick-witted and was young enough to carry the weight of command at this crucial time of the ship's life without too great a strain.

WE added those fifty-caliber anti-aircraft guns just in time, for on the next run the echelon caught hell from the enemy. The landing craft with a few destroyers had barely steamed out of sight of the anchorage when four hokey-pokeys dived from concealment in the mountain ranges into a destroyer dead ahead of the *Three Seven One*. Our air cover shot down three, but the fourth landed squarely amidships, blowing itself and the destroyer to shreds. On board the *Three Seven One* general quarters sounded just in time for us to arrive on deck and see the bow of the destroyer slide forever from sight, leaving a large bubble of steam marking the spot; then the bubble disappeared as the waters closed over. That destroyer had been operating with us since the days of the New Guinea campaign, and we watched her sink from view with tears in our eyes. She had sunk within two minutes, taking half her crew down with her, and many of them had been our friends.

Darkness fell, leaving us to our thoughts; and the constant drone of enemy reconnaissance planes overhead told us that they were tracking our progress. Adding to our fear was the knowledge of a large-scale Japanese reinforcement group heading down from Manila to resupply their forces in our objective area. Who would get there first?

Our landing craft nosed up on the beach to unload a few hours before dawn while the destroyers scattered out to screen the area. The enemy sent over bombers which dropped flares, then attempted to make runs on us. Their bombs fell clear of the ships, but we knew that daylight would bring a large-scale raid. North of us a destroyer had ferreted out an enemy barge, and tracers pierced the darkness as she destroyed it. Feeling the premonition of doom, we raised the air strip at Tacloban by radio to cry for help. It was a cry in the wilderness, for rain had shut in the air strip. We pleaded in vain for aid telling them that we already had enemy bombers overhead with our radar contacting more. We sensed the concern in the replying voices, for the air base knew dawn would find us alone and under attack. They couldn't help, and we were late starting the return trip. By daybreak we should have been miles below the beaches, but our landing craft had trouble withdrawing from the sand, and dawn saw us just starting to reform for the trip. Our radars began contacting a large group of enemy coming in from the west, and off in the distance tiny specks appeared—thirty-two specks spreading out to attack. Overhead we heard a thundering roar, and with yells of joy and tears in our eyes we saw four beautiful Navy fighters hurrying to intercept. What bravery those pilots showed as with no hesitation they dived like terriers into the enemy planes, slashing right and left and splashing planes one after another!

It was a help but not enough. The planes came over our formation, then concentrating on the *Three Seven One*, they dived to attack. We opened fire, using every gun. Some of the men became hysterical, and having no guns stood there flinging curses at the diving planes. For ten minutes time stood still for us, and our minds blurred with the sound of gunfire and the smell of powder smoke. We couldn't tell how many planes came at us, for they dived from every side to splash into the waters close aboard. Our hearts stood still as one plane in particular seemed to have us at its mercy. She came down almost vertically, heading for the bridge. At the last possible moment, trying to crash lengthwise, she turned over and, missing by a scant ten feet, crashed into the sea, covering us with bits of broken plane. Ten men, thinking that we were goners, jumped over the side.

A second plane, meeting too much fire power from us, turned aside and crashed into the screen commander's superstructure. Out of the smoke and flame surrounding the ship's bridge came the flicker of a signal

light as the commander in this moment of distress thought of his duty and flashed the message "*Take charge.*" Guns fell silent as the last and only remaining plane fled. It circled at a distance, then headed for home. Our gunnery officer as a parting shot at the enemy opened up at extreme range with the forward five-inch gun, and the plane spun into the water. No enemy planes would reach their home that day.

We wished that was all for the day, but the Japs did not have enough. Once more they sent planes to destroy the echelon. By this time the weather at Tacloban had cleared and we received air cover which intercepted the raid several miles from us and kept them from our area. But one plane broke through our cover, and this plane almost caused our destruction. We thought our guns had scored a hit as it came within range, for the plane went into a spin, but the pilot pulled out within a hundred yards of the *Three Seven One*, and started a low glide toward us. Our new fifty-calibers saved the day, for the range was too close for five-inch and our millimeters were missing completely. The fifties hit the plane and tore it to pieces not a moment too soon. The plane fell into the water. The *Three Seven One* once again had missed being sunk.

CHAPTER NINE

WHILE the *Three Seven One* had been busy with these minor engagements, our fleet had met the Japanese fleet and had destroyed what remained of it. What the *Three Seven One* had been doing was more or less inconsequential as compared with other events that had taken place. Our ship never had and never did participate in any of these history-making engagements, for our assigned tasks were always as supporting rôles in minor landings. The *Three Seven One* would never go down in history as having accomplished a deed of note, but we on board felt that she did all that was desired and in doing so she made a small name for herself as being dependable.

The *Three Seven One* withdrew from the Philippine area for two weeks, journeyed to Manus Island in the Admiralty group, and remained there long enough for the crew to enjoy a beer or two. Then she sailed west to Hollandia once more, then up to Leyte again.

Christmas Day of 1944 was spent at sea, but we had the trimmings. The Navy always had turkeys for the ships. Ours was tough as leather, for the commissary steward had been saving it for months but it was still turkey. Christmas was held, action or

no action, and at each table place would be, as a present, one pack of cigarettes and one cigar. It was a small gesture, but meant much to men away from home and tired of day-by-day drudgery. We never failed to stop by the ship's galley and thank the cooks who had passed the preceding night making up the Christmas dinner. It was a difficult feat to set an appetizing table on board a destroyer.

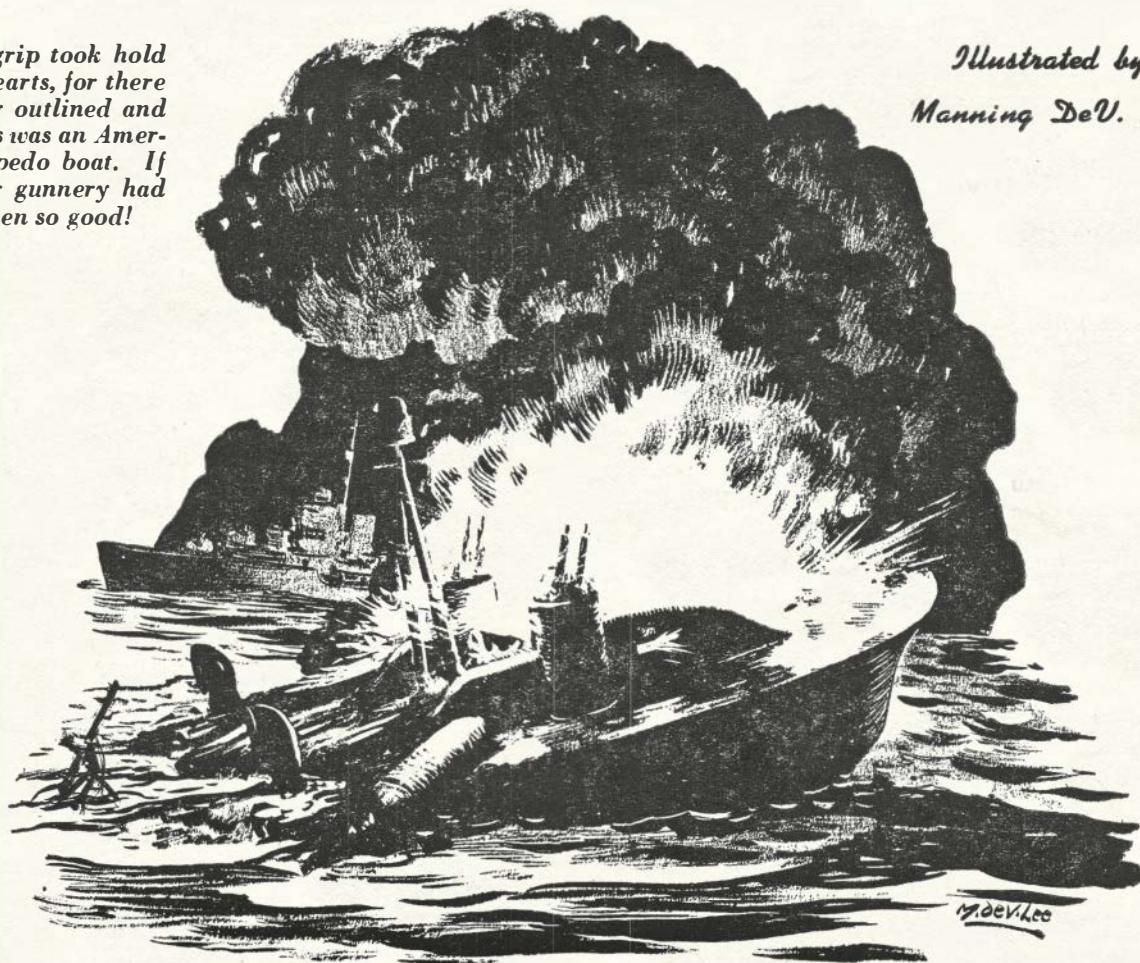
MACARTHUR believed in bypassing enemy resistance at every opportunity in order to strike at Manila as quickly as possible. By jumping ahead a hundred miles to Mindoro he could establish air bases from which our planes could cover the northern Philippines and with our aircraft working out of three air strips on Leyte covering the lower half of the islands, our ships could travel anywhere with impunity. As soon as Mindoro was ready for plane usage our forces stormed onto the beaches of Lingayen Gulf which lay north of Manila, in order to work down from the north and capture Manila.

The Lingayen landing for us was a matter of escorting a resupply echelon from Leyte. We were attacked only once, and then by four planes. Two incidents were worthy of note. One plane scored a crash in a most unbelievable manner. He came in from ahead of the convoy and dived almost vertically from an altitude of a thousand feet. Upon reaching the height of no more than twenty feet above the sea, he pulled out and flew into the side of a Liberty ship, leaving a perfect imprint of the plane's body along the side of the hull. This was stunting with a vengeance! A few seconds later one of our planes, hurt in the dog-fight going on over our heads and thinking to find safety amongst the shipping, flew in between the ships. We, knowing him to be friendly, waved; then to our horror we saw the merchant ships open fire. It was a ghastly mistake, but luckily their marksmanship was none too good, and we saw the plane stagger through the convoy, and although crippled fly off toward home. . . . We stayed at Lingayen long enough to bombard and then retraced our wake as far as Mindoro.

It took two weeks to organize ships and troops for a landing at Nasugbu, a little town below the mouth of Manila Bay. By making this landing, the enemy were caught in a pincers; their only avenue of escape lay to the east and in that direction they would meet the ocean. The landing was accomplished with the usual preliminary bombardment. We met no opposition either by land or by air, for our air force had complete command of the skies.

An icy grip took hold of our hearts, for there perfectly outlined and in flames was an American torpedo boat. If only our gunnery had not been so good!

Illustrated by
Manning DeV. Lee



The *Three Seven One* in the evening of the day of the landing took patrol station on the outer circle of the unloading area to screen the beach, and we felt perfectly safe. The Japs then added another method of dying for their emperor, for in the middle of the night small suicide boats darted among our landing craft and proceeded to ram themselves against our ships' sides. Each of these small craft carried a charge of explosives in its bow, and upon ramming, the charge would be set off, blowing themselves to kingdom come.

That night they scored hits on our landing craft and we could see the furor going on close to the beach. After finding what was causing the confusion, we lost our feeling of safety and doubled our vigilance. The following night, expecting a similar attack, we took station close to our beach head to fend off such suicide craft as appeared, and the ships we were protecting huddled together expecting the worst. At midnight our radars picked up high-speed surface vessels coming upon us from the south. All hands manned the guns, and our five-inch stood ready to open fire with illuminating shells. The Captain, knowing our PT boats to be somewhere in the vicinity, hesitated to engage. We asked permission from the Admiral in charge to open fire.

He replied: "Open fire. I will assume the responsibility."

We crept down the coast abeam of where the ships seemed to have stopped, and fired a star-shell spread, lighting up the targets. Our next salvo meant business, and we scored a hit on a small boat, sending it up in flames. The other targets appeared to have disappeared, so we withdrew a short distance seaward. Suddenly a destroyer escort called to report an extremely fast boat heading out to sea toward us. They opened fire with their forty-millimeters and requested assistance from our five-inch, for we had the fire-control system good enough to hit such a fast target.

Our radar picked up the boat's track and the guns trained out. Several flashes of light were seen coming from the fast-moving target. Our Captain, thinking they were firing torpedoes, ordered, "Open fire." The guns once again illuminated with star shells, and with one more salvo of five-inch blew the target out of the water. As the ship exploded and burned, an icy grip took hold of our hearts, for there perfectly outlined and in flames was an American motor torpedo boat. The Captain groaned aloud and turned away from the sight. We were all horror-stricken.

If only our gunnery had not been so good!

Our torpedo boats usually could pass through a rain of shells, but this time they had zigzagged right into our shell pattern. We steamed over to the burning wreckage hoping to find survivors but it was no use; not one was found. One slim chance remained and that was that perhaps the Japs had similar-style craft as ours. We had heard they did.

Upon returning to Mindoro, our communications officer journeyed to the PT boat base to acquire further data and to ascertain if it was a friendly or an enemy we had sunk. Survivors of the mishap had arrived back on the base. None were killed of the first sunk, as the crew had jumped upon first being illuminated, and knew we were not enemy. Five had suffered instant death in the second boat, while six had survived. The PT boat men held no grudge, for they realized they had penetrated an area which they should have remained clear of. They were, however, enraged by being chased along the shoreline for several miles by the Japs. One said he was damned if he had joined the Navy to run a foot race.

That evening as the *Three Seven One's* crew mustered on the foc'stle, the Captain stood up and reported

to the crew that their surface engagement had resulted in two friendly ships sunk and five of our men killed due to circumstances which, he felt sure, could not put the blame on the *Three Seven One*. The Admiral had assumed full responsibility. All felt better knowing it was an accident—that is, all but the man who knew that he, and he alone, could have averted this disaster. He was always to remember.

Our ship once again received a new skipper. We could realize the tremendous growth of our Navy by watching the age of each succeeding commanding officer. The Captain, who commanded the *Three Seven One* at the start of hostilities was about forty-five; his relief was near forty, probably around thirty-eight; his successor was thirty-four years old; and this new skipper could not have been thirty. Our old captains had gone on to new and larger ships such as cruisers and battleships, or else had become commanders of a division of destroyers.

The Subic Bay area was in American hands, and from here a landing fleet was forming to take Corregidor. As the *Three Seven One* was a permanent fixture in the Philippine Islands, she received orders to report to the admiral in charge of operations in Subic Bay, lying some forty miles above the entrance of Manila Harbor. Corregidor, an island lying at the entrance of the bay leading into Manila, seemed to be almost impregnable, for its steep cliffs rose almost perpendicularly from the water's edge.

OUR first move was to capture Mariveles Harbor on the north end of Manila Bay across from Corregidor—which was easily done. While here the *Three Seven One* got her first look at a small Jap suicide craft. We were patrolling and awaiting the next morning's effort against Corregidor. When daylight came, we saw sitting about two hundred yards off our port bow a little twenty-foot speedboat. When we trained our binoculars on the craft, we saw squatting in it a little runt of a Jap dressed in life jacket and helmet. We stared at each other and the Captain steamed closer to get a better look. Evidently the boat had been chasing us for the better part of the night, and running out of fuel had stopped dead in the water. We wanted to capture that boat badly, as it would just fit across our fantail and would make a wonderful plaything, but the Captain was not quite sure how to go about making the capture. Finally, after studying the situation, he ordered the twenty-millimeter gun to fire a burst close to it, but not at it. This was done, and the little Jap's face turned as gray as a yellow face can. He

reached down into the cockpit, pulled a lever and blew himself to hell. We were disgusted at losing such a good trophy. Our gunnery officer received a scratch from a flying piece of wood, and inquired of the Captain if he now rated a Purple Heart.

The troop-carrying landing craft soon formed off Mariveles Harbor, and the fleet started across the gap between the shore and Corregidor. B-24's commenced bombing the rock, as Corregidor was called; and after they had done their work transport planes appeared overhead. MacArthur was using a division of paratroopers to expedite the rock's capture; and these men tumbling from the long lines of planes made a picturesque sight with their multi-colored chutes. We had never seen paratroopers in action, and we watched with mouths agape as plane after plane flew by, unloading little white, green and red dots.

On gaining our firing position, the *Three Seven One* commenced bombarding while the minesweepers cleared the area of mines. The little minesweepers had a rugged time as they neared the beaches, for the Japs gave them a warm welcome with guns hidden in caves covering the beach area. As the landing craft approached to disgorge their troops, the enemy blew up electrically controlled mine-fields, causing smallboat casualties. The landing was tough, but a beachhead was gained. Paratroops had control of the flat ground atop the northern end of the island, and a beachhead gave us a section of the middle; now the mopping up commenced. During the next few days the *Three Seven One* circled the island and fired intermittently at various gun emplacements. Once or twice she received a few salvos in return, but they fell far short of us. From a rock about a half-mile off the northern end of Corregidor a single Jap heckled the passing ships with his mortar, so we steamed in close scanning the crevices. Upon locating him, we fired a burst, sending him scrambling over the top to the opposite side.

Watching our paratroops in action brought memories of Saipan. They formed a circle around the rim of cliffs atop the northern end and then commenced a slow walk down the sides, driving the enemy ahead like sheep. There was no escape for the Japs, for destroyers lay offshore forming a ring enclosing the island. They had to surrender or be killed. Once or twice we saw enemy officers scurrying along the water's edge, dragging long swords, over which they occasionally tripped. Their appearance looked slightly comical as compared with the deadly and purposeful pose of our slowly advancing troops. These paratroops looked tough, and one

moment's glance sufficed to show the onlooker they were out to kill. The Japs fled before them, to be caught at the edge of the water and killed. Corregidor was soon in our hands.

CHAPTER TEN

THE remainder of the Philippines was secured in a series of small landings on bypassed sections. On February 28th, troops went ashore at Puerto Princessa, a town on Palawan, the westernmost island of the group. On March 24th we escorted landing craft from Leyte to make a beach head at Talisay, on the island of Cebu, and then we made a landing at Davao Gulf on Mindanao. Not once were the ships molested, for by now the Jap air force in the area was no more. The *Three Seven One's* fighting was nearly at an end, but at Cebu Island we came close to being hit by a torpedo. We saw the torpedo slip past, then on following its track back saw the little midget sub which had fired it. The sub, thinking she was in deep water, had dived under, only to bury her nose in the mud, leaving her screws churning the air. We fired but missed as she backed off from shallow water and disappeared from view beneath the surface. That night she surfaced again, only to find herself alongside a destroyer escort which hammered her with its forty-millimeters. She submerged for the last time.

In other parts of the Pacific our naval task forces were striking mighty blows, and the war had passed by, progressing northward to Okinawa, where the Navy found it tough going, even tougher for smaller ships than the early Philippine campaign. The *Three Seven One* was left behind, as faster and better-gunned destroyers had usurped her position in the group of first-line ships. We began to acquire the same feeling the old four-piper destroyers of the First World War had at the start of this one. In between operations we sat either in Subic Bay or Leyte Gulf, at times escorting convoys between the two. Once we entered Manila Harbor long enough to view it through glasses but not long enough to go ashore.

Balikpapan was our last meeting with the enemy. The *Three Seven One* steamed to Morotai, an island of the Halemahara group just below the Philippines. Here the task force assembled and sailed west to Borneo. Australian troops made the landing with preliminary air bombings, and bombardment by destroyers and cruisers. The landing was accomplished with a minimum of naval effort, but the little minesweepers caught hell again, losing eight of the original fourteen of the group which a few days previous had swept the area.

The *Three Seven One* had but one incident worth recalling. A shore battery singled us out for attention and gave us a good fright. Its first salvo landed a thousand yards short of our position at anchor. We were firing while at anchor, but the position of this shore gun which had just fired was unknown to us. We searched the area with binoculars looking for the telltale gunflashes and smoke. The gun's second salvo landed five hundred yards short, and still no sign of the emplacement. The next salvo fell only a hundred feet away. Now we were on the spot, for the next splash was just beyond us, which meant we had been straddled. All the gun needed to do was fire at the same range, and sooner or later she would score a hit. We began rapid fire, covering the area, hoping with a lucky shot to hit that gun.

WE called for help from a nearby cruiser which joined in the conflict with her eight-inch guns. We both kept up a continuous fire, ranging the shells up and down the beach where we thought the emplacement to be located. One more shell splashed close enough to be uncomfortable; then the splashes ceased. Our shells probably were coming too close to them, and they decided to wait. Having used up our ammunition allowance in this futile duel, we were relieved by another destroyer. Later we heard it too crying for help from a cruiser, so we knew we had not scored any hits. Perhaps they did, as after that we heard nothing more.

The *Three Seven One* passed the remaining days of the Balikpapan landing patrolling offshore. Once every few days as darkness fell one or two planes would appear overhead, but only succeeded in heckling us by waking up the crew. We had on board a chief quartermaster who, although having been a member of the crew since Pearl Harbor, had yet to fire his first shot at the enemy, as his duties consisted of navigational and signal work. Thinking that perhaps the war would end finding him shotless, he persuaded the gunner to mount a single fifty-caliber above the bridge in front of the fire-control mechanism.

The gunner mounted it one evening just before the usual heckler plane appeared. The night was pitch black, and no one could see one foot in front of him, but above the bridge our quartermaster's voice was heard asking: "If I see it, can I open fire?" After asking several times the gunnery officer, tired of hearing it replied: "Yes. Fire and be damned to you."

The chief took a firm grip on the gun, swung the barrel from side to side and no doubt scared the plane

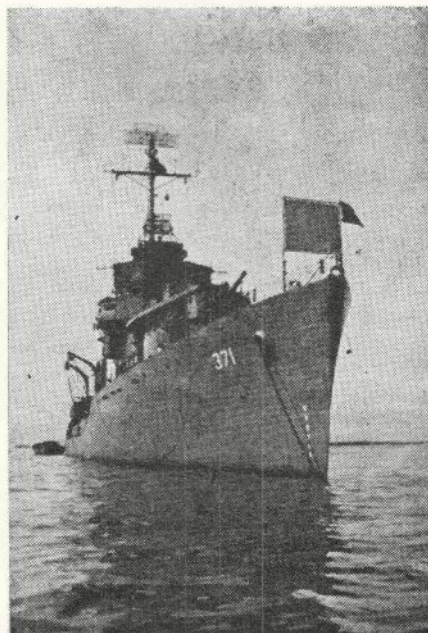
away, for the sound of its motors was heard growing fainter and fainter until heard no more, leaving our poor chief a sad and dejected man.

The war had ended in Europe a month and a half ago, but this had meant little to us. Our only thought had been that now all the materials would flow our way. We left the Balikpapan area on July fourth and headed back to Moratai. Then we returned to the Philippines and went alongside a tender in Subic Bay for overhaul.

The war and Japan seemed so far from our retreat here in Subic that the atom bomb seemed an unreality. We listened carefully to every radio broadcast for the events leading up to the capitulation of Japan. When the surrender came, we turned the radios off and went on deck to look over the bay. We held no celebration. The *Three Seven One* had been at sea too long for that. There was only the deep hurt of relief in our hearts as we watched several ships firing rockets. On the fo'c'stle where the chiefs gathered at night one could see the oldest veterans turning to look out over the water. No more would they have to keep watch for the enemy. It was good to know that they had lived through the war. They returned below to listen to the latest news flashes. The war was over for these men sitting around their table drinking coffee, saying nothing and just staring at the bulkheads with dreams of home mirrored in their eyes.

Our Captain requested permission to take the ship into Manila Harbor for liberty and recreation, and as there was no other duty for us at the time we received an affirmative reply.

As we came upon the deck of the tender, we saw a group of men who will remain forever in our memories.



They had recently been released from a prison camp in the outskirts of Manila and showed all too clearly the ravages they had undergone. They were mere shadows of once healthy men, and some bore deep and lasting scars of maltreatment. We watched in horrified awe as they sat on deck consuming entire boxes of candy at a single gulp.

Manila liberty introduced us to a war-torn city, for few buildings remained intact. The Japs had holed up in the city until every building was reduced to rubble. The sight of this shambles showed to us the enormous struggle the islanders had before them to regain what they had lost.

Food in the city was scarce and the prices for it unbelievably high. . . . The city was fast becoming a hotbed of black-marketeering and other varying types of gangsterism. The police shot on sight and the city began to be a good place to remain away from.

Leaving Manila we sailed for Leyte. We were on our way home.

SUCH a wonderful dawn that was when the *Three Seven One* arrived off Point Loma at San Diego. We smelled the good fresh Stadeside air as we woke and came on deck, while off to port lay San Diego shrouded in mist. This was home at last and the final port of call. Those of us who had brought her out to sea felt proud indeed to have brought her safely home again. No little Japanese flags dotted her bridge superstructure, but we knew that those in charge knew the *Three Seven One* had done her duty. She was old now; her sides were coated with rust spots and her crew was tired. Those men who originally had gone to sea on her as apprentice seamen had come back chiefs. The years had left their mark on both men and ship. She nosed into the dock, the dock with the large dirty WELCOME HOME sign. The lines went over and wearily she settled down into the water, her life behind her, while from out of the warehouse shed came a dilapidated truck playing cracked records of martial music and the driver calling out a "Welcome back, boys." The war was ended. . . .

Later we read that the *Three Seven One* had been used in the Bikini Atom Bomb Test. We hope she was sunk, as we believe it not fitting for our home through these years to be tied to a dock or added to a red-lead row; and surely it is not fitting for her to be scrapped. But rather let her go to the bottom to take her rightful place among those ships, who, having done their duty, found an everlasting place of peaceful abode. The *Three Seven One* did her best and was our home. Let her now be at rest.

"The poor dog, in life the firmest friend,
The first to welcome, foremost to defend."

Here follow six stories of dogs famous in their own right or because they belonged to noted men.

DOGS OF



Paul Brown

BOBBIE

He found his way back home by himself, though he had to travel three thousand miles to do it.

BOBBIIE was a collie, plus a dash of English sheep-dog. When he was six weeks old, he was acquired by G. Frank Brazier, a restaurant man of Silverton, Oregon. In puppyhood Bobbie learned that deep, abiding love of his family and his home which throbs in the heart of a dog, aware that he in turn is cherished. That was the first of the compelling urges which made possible the extraordinary feat Bobbie would perform.

Others were his courage and persistence. True to his breed strains, Bobbie was a working dog. He liked

to help herd horses. One day a crotchety nag, annoyed at being driven toward the stable, kicked him twenty feet. Bobbie shook his bleeding head, which would bear a scar for life, got up and finished ushering the stubborn horse into its stall. Next he was struck by a tractor, and so badly injured his owner considered putting him out of his misery. But Bobbie, refusing to give up and die, recovered.

In 1923, his family rejoiced him by taking him on a long automobile trip. Driving east from Oregon, they stopped at a garage in an Indiana

town. A local dog sighted Bobbie in the car and barked insulting remarks. Bobbie scrambled out and in a far-ranging scrap convinced the canine Hoosier that politeness to strangers is a virtue. The Braziers, ready to motor on, searched vainly for their pet. Sadly, leaving reward offers for his return, they drove on. They toured south to Mexico, thence to California and up the coast back to their home in Oregon. Losing a dog is a tragedy no easier to bear from the fact it happens to many. Months passed, and the Braziers gave up hope.

But Bobbie was determined not to stay lost. After his fight, he returned to the garage to find his family gone. Perhaps he first followed the trail of the car's tires by scent. Anyway, he trotted south.

Mile after weary mile, he plodded on his trek. His quest led him across the prairies, through towns and farms, into swamps, skirting lakes, over the hot sands of the desert. Once in the south he strayed from the course he had pursued so surely. But an instinct, marvelous as that of the homing pigeon, rescued him and he struck northwest. Often hungry and thirsty, exhausted and footsore, he threaded his way through city streets.

People remembered the passing of the gaunt, resolute dog. Now and again Bobbie stopped at farms where kind women fed him—or approached campfires with wagging tail and won a welcome from woodsmen. Never staying long, he forged on and on.

On February 15, 1924, exactly six months after the day he was lost, a thin, worn Bobbie limped up to his Oregon home. He had traveled three thousand miles!

His overjoyed family reported his return. Spread over front pages, it became a national sensation. People all along his route wrote to confirm the extent of his great journey. Before Bobbie recuperated—it was a week before he could struggle to his feet—he was famous. He was presented with a gold collar and medals galore. A wire-mesh barrier had to be put up to protect him, so great were the throngs of admiring visitors. Some had traveled considerable distance. But then, so had Bobbie.

DESTINY

by FAIRFAX
DOWNEY

Illustrated by PAUL BROWN

VIGE

The fighting dog of Olaf
Trygvason, first Christian
King of Norway.

DRAGON-SHIPS beached on the coast of Ireland, and the Viking band swept through the countryside. Harried often by these dreaded Norsemen, the farm folk fled in terror. Rapidly the raiders emptied many a byre of cattle and drove them toward shore. But before the beeves could be slaughtered, a greatly daring peasant ventured out of hiding and begged the Viking leader to restore his twenty cows, all he possessed on earth.

Olaf Trygvason—Olaf I, King of Norway—stroked his beard and stared at the Gael bold enough to face him. His fierce glance lightened. "Pick and prove which cows are yours and you shall have them back," he promised, "but delay not our march."

The peasant blew a blast on his horn and spoke a brief order to the shaggy shepherd dog that trotted up. Instantly the animal plunged into the milling mass of cattle. Without hesitation he singled out and herded apart exactly twenty cows. Every one of them bore the same brand mark cut in an ear. Olaf, gesturing to their owner to take them, asked:

"Will you sell me the dog?"

"I would rather give him to you," came the answer.

The King accepted the gift, but in return bestowed a gold ring on the peasant, and pledged him friendship in the future.

Declares the Icelandic saga, *Heimskringla*: "This dog was called Vige, and was the very best of dogs, and Olaf owned him long afterwards."

Vige faithfully followed his new master through the fierce conflicts which ensued when Olaf, late in the Tenth Century, embraced Christianity. Conversion or the sword was the choice he offered all who worshipped Odin and Thor.

Among the Norsemen who clung to the old gods was Raud the Strong, reputed able to conjure up fair winds

for his fleet. In spite of his wizardry, Olaf defeated him in a sea fight. Raud drove his ship ashore and fled, hotly pursued by Olaf. The pagan chieftain, fleet of foot, was about to escape when the King shouted to his dog: "Vige! Vige! Catch the deer!"

AFTER the runner sped the dog. In great bounds he overtook the fugitive, sank his teeth in a leg and halted him. Olaf, rushing up, flung a spear which transfixed his foe; but before Raud fell, he dealt Vige a frightful blow with his sword.

Vige, a great wound gaping in his hide, was borne back on a shield.

Carefully tended, he recovered and took part in Olaf's last great battle.

The might of the heathen kings of Sweden and Denmark, joined against him, overwhelmed the Christian King of Norway. Olaf, fighting to the end on the deck of the *Long Serpent*, vanished overboard, never to be seen again. Einar, one of his earls, defending the forecastle with Vige and a few survivors, called to the dog: "We have lost our master."

At once Vige plunged into the sea. He swam ashore and ran howling to the summit of a hill, where he remained, refusing all food, until he died.





At last the chief trailed the dog and watched him give the loaf to his dying master.

one of his thighs, and the plague's agony and sleeplessness seized him. Strength enough remained to him to totter out of the hospital where he had been toiling, so that he would not be a burden. He dragged himself to the edge of a wood and lay down to die.

There his dog found him. Whimpering, the animal licked his helpless master. Then he trotted away.

IN A glade in the depths of the forest a party of noble lords and ladies had encamped, seeking refuge from the plague. Aware each day might be their last, they spent their time in feasting and revelry, careless of the fate of others. As they sat at a banquet, they saw a strange dog walk up to the table, seize a loaf of bread in his mouth and lope off through the trees. Day after day the same performance took place. At last the chief of the party trailed the dog and watched him give the loaf to his dying master. Roch, an old verse quaintly declares, rendered up his soul, free of sin, and died a good Christian in the arms of his dog. It is related that the nobleman was so moved that he dedicated his own life to the service of his fellow-men.

Roch, sainted, became the patron of the plague-stricken and of all dogs. He is one of that company of holy men, often represented in images and paintings in company with a dog: Sts. Huber, Bernard, Benignus, Wedelin and Dominic. St. Roch's dog is shown with a loaf of bread held in his jaws.

The DOG of SAINT ROCH

He Stole Food for His Dying Master

IT happened in those terrible years in the Fourteenth Century when the Black Death stalked through Europe. Spreading from the East over trade routes, the pestilence, a form of bubonic plague, ravaged Italy, France and England. It claimed countless victims—some say as many as 450 million. Against that somber background shines the story of a man's self-sacrifice and the faithfulness of his dog.

Roch was born in Montpellier in the south of France, a nephew of the governor of the city. Much of his career is misted by legend, but it seems definite that when he reached manhood, he gave his fortune to the poor, became a monk and journeyed through the countryside ministering to the peasants. Everywhere he went he was followed by his dog.

Having made a pilgrimage to Rome, Roch was in Italy when the Black Death struck that land in 1348. Thousands fled in panic, finding no safety anywhere, stricken in their tracks. While families in wild terror deserted their own dying, Roch went from city to city, caring for the sick in the overwhelmed hospitals. Finally a telltale swelling sore broke out on



ALEXANDER POPE'S DOG SAVED HIM from an ASSASSIN

A DARK figure glided into the bedroom of Alexander Pope at midnight. Moonlight glistened on the knife in his hand. The intruder, Pope's valet, moved silently, knowing the location of every piece of furniture, and the noted English author slumbered on soundly. Even if he waked and struggled, his weak, deformed body could offer little resistance to the would-be murderer.

Pope's savage satires had made him many bitter enemies. Perhaps some of them had hired this assassin; or the man's motive may have been robbery, since he knew his employer's writings had earned a fortune. Before he could strike, glass crashed, and the poet's pet poodle, Marquise, burst through a French window and flew at the valet's throat. The fellow was badly mauled when other servants, brought by Pope's outcries, pulled the dog off.

Nerves severely shaken, Pope resolved never to be without a canine bodyguard. When the brave poodle died, the writer played doubly safe by choosing a magnificent Great Dane. Bounce was so powerful a monster that even in playfulness he overturned guests; but to his misshapen master he was all gentleness and devotion. Pope had no need of the pistols he carried on his walks through the grounds of his villa at Twickenham—not with Bounce stalking along by his side. Angry hatreds were aroused by Pope's vitriolic book, "The Dunciad," yet its victims only fumed and sputtered from afar. Nobody was rash enough to venture bodily violence against a man whose constant companion and guardian was a Great Dane.

"My only friend," Pope called Bounce; but that was poetic exaggeration. The author rejoiced in comrades and admirers of his genius who were also fond of his dog. Jonathan Swift wrote a tribute, "Bounce to Fop—An Epistle from a Dog at Twickenham to a Dog at Court," in which Bounce was made to boast:

*Nobles whom arms or arts adorn
Wait for my infants yet unborn.
None but a peer of wit and grace
Can hope a puppy of my race.*

The Prince Regent was one of the fortunate ones favored with an offspring of Bounce's. The gift arrived wearing a collar with an inscription, barbed by Pope's irony:



*I am His Highness' dog at Kew.
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?*

Bounce died during an absence of his master from home. Sadly Pope wrote: "I dread to inquire into the particulars of the fate of Bounce. Perhaps you concealed them, as heaven often does unhappy events, in

pity to the survivors, or not to hasten on my end of sorrow. I doubt not how much Bounce was lamented."

The world must hold Bounce and Marquise in grateful memory. They protected a man whose pen, sharp though it often was, flowed also with wisdom and grace, and left a priceless legacy to English literature.

THIS BLOODHOUND WAS WELL NAMED NICK CARTER

MAN is the bloodhound's natural prey, and Nick Carter tracked down fugitives from the law relentlessly. Some prison-camp bloodhounds are trained to attack; when they approach an escaped convict, he climbs a tree in hot haste. Not so Nick—like most of his kind, he was mild and gentle. When he found his quarry at the end of a trail, he trotted up to him wagging his tail, as if to say: "Tag, you're it."

Nick was well named after the celebrated dime-novel detective, for another title of his ancient breed is "sleuth hound," and man-hunting has been their specialty since the Sixteenth Century.

A powerful dog, black and tan with white forehead and chest, Nick Carter's air was alert, and he lacked the look of mournful dignity, characteristic of many bloodhounds. He liked to find lost children, but it was the

scent of law-breakers he sniffed most often. He established a record when he took and followed a trail 104 hours old. Chalked up to his credit were the trailing, capture and conviction of six hundred criminals. His great achievements did much to restore the public sympathy lost to bloodhounds by "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in which they were described savagely pursuing the slave *Eliza*, fleeing across ice-floes, her baby in her arms.

NICK's master and trainer was the redoubtable Capt. V. G. Mullikan of Kentucky, who used the hound in numerous dangerous missions: trailing Hatfield-McCoy feudists, operators of moonshine stills, robbers of country stores—trails that might run from ten feet to many miles. Typical was the exploit one day when the owner of a smokehouse saw a thief running from it, fired and missed. A telephone call brought Captain Mullikan, with Nick Carter and his mate, Ivy Bell, in the back of the car, their leashes attached to their collars. Led to the spot where the robber had been sighted, Nick's leash was snapped to his harness. At that signal he took the trail and nosed along it for fifty

yards, when Ivy Bell replaced him for another fifty. Then the two hounds worked along together, straining at their leashes so that the men found it easier to follow at an eight-mile-an-hour dog-trot than to hold the animals back.

Miles later an isolated cabin loomed through the woods. Mullikan surrounded it with his posse, and hand on his six-shooter, strode up to the woman who came to the door. "Step aside," he ordered. Nick and his mate brushed past and went straight up to a certain man in a group at a card game. Though supporting evidence such as shoe- and finger-prints was gathered, the hounds' identification of the smokehouse robber was accepted in court, as the mute testimony of bloodhounds often is.

Nick Carter, profiting from experience, was a far better tracker in his old age than his youth. When he died, he was termed "the greatest bloodhound ever." Swift's lines could serve as his epitaph:

*And though the villain 'scape awhile, he feels
Slow vengeance, like a bloodhound, at
his heels.*

GENGISK

The best-loved friend of Frederick the Great was this dog that fought at his side all through the Seven Years' War

LOPING through the dusk, the huge hound easily kept pace with the horse of his master Frederick the Great. Gengisk, the Great Dane, was not supposed to be following the solitary rider this evening; he had been shut in a tent, but had broken free. So it happened that the King of Prussia, rashly riding alone through country where parties of the enemy might at any time be encountered, gained an unexpected escort.

Abruptly Gengisk began to show signs of excitement. He leaped up to tug at his master's boot, and when Frederick paid him no heed, sprang higher in an attempt to seize the reins. The monarch then halted, listened where the hound pointed and heard the distant pounding of hoofs. Hastily he dismounted and led his steed beneath a culvert. Hardly was he hidden, when a troop of Cossacks galloped across the bridge above him. Frederick, holding Gengisk's muzzle to muffle his growls, released it after the foe had passed, to pat his savior gratefully.

Gengisk fought at the King's side through the Seven Years' War and was several times wounded. At the Battle of Soor, the Great Dane was captured with the imperial baggage and presented by an enemy general to his wife. After Prussia's victory, a special clause in the peace treaty demanded Gengisk's restoration. In an affecting reunion, the stern ruler threw his arms around the big animal's neck and wept. "The more I see of men," Frederick declared, "the better I like my dog."

Meanwhile the King had acquired a terrier to fill the gap made by his favorite's absence, and the small dog jealously resented the rival he regarded as an intruder. For days the Great Dane treated the terrier's yapping and snapping with dignified forbearance. At last he picked up the little upstart by the nape of his neck, swam the Danube, then in flood, with him, marooned him on the farther bank and swam home.

When Gengisk, weakened by his wounds and battle fatigue, died, he was buried beneath a granite monument in the rose garden of Frederick's palace, Sans Souci.





Unknown Légionnaire

An imaginary hero turns up in person to plague his hapless creator.

by GEORGES SURDEZ

THE people concerned were old when I knew them, and that was twenty years ago. They are beyond possible harm or embarrassment by now. And I have come to believe that when General Roseval, retired, told me the true story of ex-Légionnaire Vernitz, it was in the hope that I would divulge the story in the future and clear up a situation that puzzled many. The General was not a rich man. He had lived close to seventy years and had educated three sons, married

off two daughters to other army officers. Consequently he did not have much more than his pension, and lived very modestly in a rather pretty small villa in a suburb of a large North African city. He was a widower, and an old couple served him. The man had been his orderly for years, was butler, valet and gardener, the wife was maid and cook. As she came from Burgundy, an invitation

to lunch or dinner was always an occasion for me.

I liked them and the General very much, but there was another person about, ex-Légionnaire Vernitz, whom I did not like at all. He was a phenomenal old fellow with delusions of grandeur and extreme arrogance. It was quite evident that in his prime he must have been, as he claimed, a tremendous man. Even then he stooped to something like six feet two inches; and his body, reduced to bones, strings of muscles and wrinkled

Illustrated by Dick Black

hide, remained broad and imposing. His official status was that of assistant gardener and handy-man, but in reality he was a tyrant.

It amazed me that I could detest a man his age, and an ex-Légionnaire, at that. But I resented him because I saw that he imposed on the General, a school officer of good family, as courteous as a court gentleman under Louis XV. Vernitz bullied the General as some wives bully their husbands, as some children bully their parents, with a constant threat of emotional scenes before witnesses. For instance, if he saw a bottle brought to the arbor behind the villa, he would hover about, cough, and at an unguarded glance in his direction, he would draw himself to trembling attention, his eyes moistening, and his gnarled hands quivering.

"If I have offended my general, I apologize," he would say in his thick German accent. "All right, I am in the way. I'll go and croak in some ditch, quietly. Thirty years of Légion, four war wounds. Sunstroke in Tonkin, cholera, typhoid, yellow fever. My brain's cooked. But I meant no disrespect and no harm—"

"All right, my friend," the General would end by saying. "Here, take a glass, drink our health and you may go. No, no offense. This gentleman understands Légionnaires."

Vernitz would toss off his drink and hold on for another.

"You may not believe me, but I have drunk with archdukes—"

I KNEW from the old couple that Vernitz was a constant source of trouble, a costly item in the household. He had a formidable appetite, and had made it clear that he expected the same fare as the General. Even for a former Foreign Légionnaire, he had a prodigious thirst. He never did any work, although he fussed about and ruined all he handled. Twice a month he went on a three-day bender; and once every three months, he indulged in a week's spree. It was known in the neighborhood that the General paid his debts in bars and cafés, with a little coaxing. He was picked up dead drunk here and there, and those who brought him back expected tips. In certain moods he was belligerent and destructive. He was arrested regularly, fined for public scandal, nocturnal disturbance, insults to gendarmes, policemen and constables, and the General had to bail him out.

"You wonder at my patience, don't you?" the General asked me on one occasion, when Vernitz had brazenly swiped a bottle from the table.

"He is an extraordinary character," I evaded.

"He saved my life," the General informed me.

"So he's told me many times."

"Oh, he's talked to you, has he?"

"Yes. He pops in to see me every now and then, General."

"Did he touch you for much?"

"Five, ten francs now and then," I admitted. "But I'm glad to do it. He has a lot of stories to tell, and—"

The General smiled gently and shook his head.

"Come, come! All you'll ever get from him is rehash of old tripe, about the Légionnaire who was a bishop, the one who was the Kaiser's cousin—he knew them all: they were all in his squad. But just as a superb specimen, he is worth a few francs now and then. If he bothers you too much, you can duck him. But he has me pinned down so I cannot do a thing, although I realize there is a definite system to his childishness, and that he makes me look like an indulgent fool. He is my Old Man of the Sea. I picked him up, and I can't put him down, ever."

"Why not?" I wondered.

"I would be deemed ungrateful and rude by a number of very fine people. I'll explain, but keep it to yourself awhile, until some of us are gone. It won't be very, very long. I have talked enough for you to be familiar with my career—"

"I also know quite well how to read, General."

"Thank you. I have been mentioned in footnotes. But you do know that I never served in the Foreign Légion at any time. I was in the Marine infantry up to the rank of major, however, and did get around a bit. Well, three years ago, just before I retired, I was assigned to pilot a big shot from Paris on a semi-official tour of North Africa. He had commanded an army in the Big War, and of course there were reunions and banquets everywhere, given by veterans of this or that unit.

"On one occasion, there was a big get-together attended by Légion officers, a Légion show. As usual, they did things very well. Somebody even had the tact to remember my start in the army, and the band played the Marine Infantry Hymn—which you know as a Colonial Infantry song—you remember?"

*To be a Marine soldier—
You need to have in your breast,
The heart of a sailor,
And that of a soldier. . . .*

"I had eaten well, and as that other song goes, drunk still better. In the proper surroundings, one slides into that easily, progressing from apéritifs through ordinary wines to champagne and cognac. You might go as far as to say I had a snoutful. That old song touched me deeply. I remembered the Légion everywhere I had seen it. A bit clannish, conceited,

but what fighters, what wonderful fellows!

"The big shot made a speech about the Légion; other officers made speeches about the Légion. Toasts were proposed and drunk to the Légion. You know what happened when it was my turn to lift my glass. I had a little speech prepared. But even the big shot had understood that this was not the time and place for ordinary patriotic bull and platitudes. And this lot of Légionnaires had been wonderful to me; and they had even played the Hymn, although there has never been much love between Légionnaires and Marines. If I said anything, I realized, it would have to be about the Légion. They wouldn't be interested in anything else.

"So, instead of evoking Verdun or the Somme, I told them that, for good or evil, if I was addressing them, they had only a Légionnaire to blame. Yes, a Légionnaire had saved my life. You comprehend my psychology? I not only owed the Légion a fine load; I owed the Légion my very life! That immediately set me up as a wonderful fellow, a hero. They asked for full details—when, where, how.

"It was an old, old story even then, but I remembered the details very well. Several of those present had been on the spot, in the Tonkin, on that very occasion.

"I had been a very young sub-lieutenant at the time, with more daring than good sense. Our column was fighting the usual mixture of Chinese regulars and Tonkinese pirates—no one has ever established the difference to my satisfaction. Darkness had caught me and my section some distance in advance of my battalion; and instead of quietly waiting for developments, I felt I had to show initiative, establish communications, report to somebody or other.

"My second in command was a thirty-five-year-old sergeant, a veteran. He sort of hinted that nobody was bothering us much, that sooner or later day would break, that the natives had more sense than to fumble about without purpose, and that sending back runners through the jungle at night was like murdering them. Well—I was very young, and my reaction was to retort that never in all my career—seven months at the time—had I asked a man to undertake anything I wouldn't do. If our spot was so secure, he could take charge, and I would locate headquarters and give my report.

"I started out; and at the dinner I gave a fine account of my wanderings through the jungle, a credible account, and I was addressing experts. Naturally, I got lost and finally floundered into a pond or marsh.

One could not see one's hand before one's face. And by that time, I had realized that I was in for serious trouble. If the Tonkinese did not catch me and hack off my head, I was due for a court-martial—you know, deserting my unit and all that. I was fearful that my intention would be misunderstood, and that people might think I was seeking my personal safety away from the front.

"Then—and this is where the story gets intriguing—I found myself caught in thick mud, in quicksand. I was not far from solid ground; one hand was grasping a bush. But no matter how I struggled, I was sinking, down to my hips, to my armpits. I was growing very tired; could not haul myself out. I did not dare call for help. I thought I would disappear and be reported missing. I thought of my parents at home.

"THE mud was sucking me farther down; water was under my chin. I kept swallowing and spitting; and I must have made some noise, for suddenly someone whispered very close by: *'French?'* and I whispered an admission. And I asked who was there.

"*'Légion,'* came the reply.

"I told my listeners how wonderful that single word had sounded. The man was very big and powerful. He pulled me out casually. He told me not to make any noise, that there were other Légionnaires around. His company was over on our left, and he and a few others had sneaked away to try to catch some small animals to eat—anything, even turtle or fish. That chap was marvelous; he seemed to see through the darkness. I hung on to his belt, and he guided me back. Inside twenty minutes, he had located my outfit, and we were hailed in a low voice by one of my own sentries.

"I told my rescuer my name and rank. I asked him for his, and he refused, with a laugh. He spoke in a German accent, saying he would catch it if his lieutenant found out he'd been prowling about without permission. Not that anybody cared what happened to him, you understand, but he carried a rifle and cartridges, and he wasn't supposed to risk their being captured. He melted into the darkness, and that was the last I had seen of him. I knew only that he was tall, had very big, powerful hands and spoke with a German accent.

"I said that as soon as possible I made quiet inquiries. But never could I locate my rescuer. And I concluded: 'And so, Gentlemen of the Foreign Légion, if I am alive and boring you tonight, you can blame one of your own, an anonymous Légionnaire. I lift my glass to'—and I listed ranks and names in order—'and

to my savior, my own Unknown Légionnaire!'

"They liked that story. Wasn't it just like an old-time Légionnaire to think that saving the life of a Marine infantry officer would not compensate for having disobeyed the orders of his immediate Légion superior! The old-timers who had been on the spot that night started comparing notes, naming this company and that; the dinner did not end for hours.

"Just after I retired from the army—that's about two years ago—I received a letter from an old major who had been at the celebration, also retired since. He had wonderful news for me; he had located my savior, after a long investigation. The man was alive. There could be no mistake, the major explained; he had checked the records. The man had been with the Légion company on the left of the Marines that night and had indicated, on a large-scale map, the spot where I had sunk.

"However, the major added, he did not believe that after such a long time and in the absence of the man's direct superior at the time (an absence likely to be prolonged, as he had been killed in 1915 in Champagne) that enough official evidence could be gathered to obtain a decoration. However, there was something to be done. The man was down on his luck, reduced to doing odd jobs, grown old. I could probably employ him at a nominal salary, find him some chores to do, in a word disguise what would be a form of charity.

"WELL, I sent the man his fare, and he came along. You know old Légionnaires; they bicker and quarrel among themselves, but they are proud before the rest of the world. Those in town arranged for a sort of welcoming banquet, where I officially met and shook hands with my savior. He was very tall, had enormous hands, and still spoke with a German accent. Even after all those years, and having seen me only in the darkness, he identified me at once; he remembered my voice.

"So, you see, I owe him my very existence, so what are a few bottles and a few lines now and then? One would have to be as mean as a Marine infantryman to reproach a Légionnaire with such trifles. After all, if I am a general living on a fat pension—you know just how fat!—it is because he did not let me drown as a sub-lieutenant in an Indo-Chinese swamp. Discharging him, even paying him a salary to keep away, would not do. We must, ideally, be inseparable, two old soldiers growing older side by side.

"And it would be no use sending him money elsewhere, for he drinks whatever he has, inside an evening."



"I asked who was there. 'Légion,' came the reply. How wonderful that word sounded!"

"But he served a long time," I protested; "he must have a pension."

"Oh, that! He liquidated it—he cashed in, you understand, soon after leaving the Légion. The usual business: some young woman convinced him that they could set up a shop on his capital, and left him flat as soon as she had his dough."

"I see how you are fixed, General," I admitted.

The General sighed, nodded: "And it serves me right, too."

"Serves you right? Just how, General?"

"For trying to make myself popular for a few minutes. I cannot throw the first stone at poor Vernitz for his boasts. Oh, the story is true enough in its details, but it did not happen to me. It happened to somebody else—six years after the time I gave, and in quite another spot. Légionnaires are splendid soldiers, but they are also the world's quickest opportunists. Vernitz heard of the story, and did not miss the occasion to chisel into a soft existence."

"Have you told him you knew he was a faker?"

"God forbid!" The General held up both hands. "By this time, he is convinced it happened. If nothing more had occurred after I told that yarn at the dinner, I would not mind confessing. All know what a few bottles and a friendly gathering will do to an old soldier's imagination.

"But as it is, the major who located Vernitz for me, or thinks he did, believes he has done me a great favor. The veterans who treated us two, reunited after all the years, would feel hurt, insulted. They'd forgive you for killing a man, but they never would condone killing a legend. If I turned Vernitz loose, he would go around explaining that I had lied out of avarice, to keep from giving him food and shelter due him. There is nothing I can do to dispel the celebrated Vernitz, do you understand—just because I created him!"

*Flaming lights burst in my face,
mingled with a crashing roar.
Then I seemed to be whirling
into a black pit.*

I MOVED slowly, passing between the moss-covered rock and the tall broad fern without touching either, though there was barely room for the legs of a man to pass without swishing the broad fronds of the fern. When you have lived all your life in the woods, you learn to move that way, even though you do have a limp. Pausing beside a fallen redwood, I listened. Around me was green twilight, and a silence deep and empty. In a redwood grove there are few insects, so there are no birds or smaller fur-bearing animals. Yet I was certain there was life nearby. I could not hear it, but I could feel it. Easing my rifle around slowly, I smiled. I felt like speaking, the way you'd speak to someone you knew was watching you, someone you could not see. I eased myself up upon the trunk of the redwood. It stretched away into the matted brush for a hundred feet without a limb or a branch to block the broad pathway it offered. The giant had been down as long as I could remember. Redwoods do not rot away like pine or spruce. I had been seven years old, the first time I walked that trunk.

Balancing on the trunk, I felt with my woods instinct rather than with my eyes or ears. My mind was back with the seven-year-old boy the day I first saw the fallen giant. I had been five miles from home, and alone, that day. My mother had been frightened, but Father wasn't excited. He just walked down the ridge and met me along toward dusk.

Returning to the mountains, getting back home again, had wakened a lot of memories. I had been filled with them all day, the same way I was filled with clean air and silence. I knew I would never again endure the roar of a shipyard, the stabbing flame of a welding torch, the crowded, dirty barracks squatting on mud flats. Now that I had escaped from it, it all seemed like a nightmarish dream.

The only part of that life I had liked I had brought back with me. The thought of Celia made me feel a bit uneasy. I had been gone all day, leaving her alone in the big ranch house. I had asked her to come along, knowing I didn't want her, but not wanting to leave her. She'd be all right; she'd take the car and drive down to the lodge for a beer. It was just that there was a powerful cross-pull, Celia pulling one way, the woods another—until I had to slip away.

A faint rustle behind me made me turn. A chipmunk had jumped from under the log. The little one darted

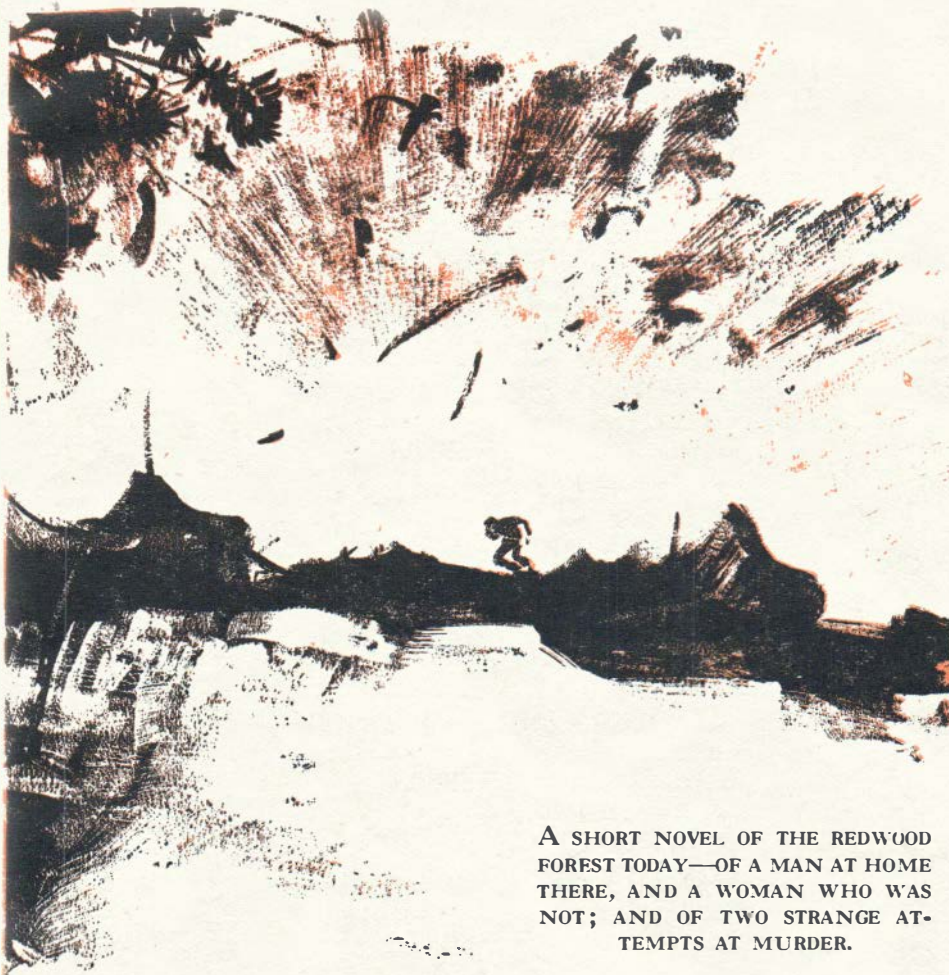


Dark

along, his tail held high like a rudder. Then a crash broke the silence, and a beautiful buck broke cover almost under my feet. I got but one shot at the dark, flashing body, but the rifle came around as though it were part of me, and the shot was fast, steady. The instant I felt the impact of the steel butt against my hip, I knew I hadn't lost any of my skill. After its first long, high bound, the buck landed, not taut and powered for a second clear leap, but upon sagging legs that doubled under it. It went down in a heap, turning over to go smashing into a thorn bush. I whipped out my hunting-knife as I slid from the redwood trunk.

The buck did not lash his antlers. Even in his last desperate moments of life he protected those perfect antlers; he wasn't damaging them while they were in the velvet; they had to be protected so that when they hardened they would come out of the velvet shining and perfect. I slashed his throat, then stood back. After a bit the awareness faded out of his eyes, the small hoofs stopped trying to slash me. Before getting at the job of skinning him out, I listened. It was hardly likely that anyone would be within hearing of my rifle, but the local game-warden knew I was back. I got busy, cleaned the buck out and skinned him.

Illustrated by
JOHN FULTON



A SHORT NOVEL OF THE REDWOOD FOREST TODAY—OF A MAN AT HOME THERE, AND A WOMAN WHO WAS NOT; AND OF TWO STRANGE ATTEMPTS AT MURDER.

by RUTHERFORD MONTGOMERY

Interlude

The carcass of a young black-tail buck isn't very heavy. This one would go about eighty pounds. I swung it across my shoulder, picked up my rifle and headed for the ranch. I was suddenly eager to get back to Celia. Getting the buck had calmed the restlessness that had been tormenting me for days.

Five miles of rough going with an eighty-pound pack isn't too tough a chore for me; I've done it many times. There is the twisted leg, of course, but I manage. That leg kept me out of the Army, made a welder out of me instead of a soldier, which was all to the good, because it got me Celia, and quite a bit of cash I needed.

Topping a low saddle, I paused to look down upon the ranch buildings. My grandfather had come to California with Frémont. He had taken title to three hundred acres of rough mountain land, well-timbered, but steep and jungle-matted. The ranch had come down to my father without any improvement. My father had not made a very modern ranch out of it. He had built a rambling house, and cleared a few acres for orchard, mostly prunes. He had left the ranch to me when he died after being thrown by a big gelding he had been feuding with for over a year.

I stood looking at the big bay window where my mother used to sit

after she ceased to be able to walk. It was in that room my father took me to look at her one evening. She was dressed in her wedding gown, and she looked pale and tired. The smile on her lips was not hers; the woman lying there wasn't Mittie—even I knew that. She wasn't given to prim smiles; she would have been laughing.

THAT got me to thinking of Celia, and I began moving fast. Celia isn't frail and flowerlike; she's beautiful in a way that makes you want to take her in your arms, just to feel her pressed against you. Celia had been a welder too. She had started welding before she finished high school. I met her at a beer parlor. All of the girls working in the yards went to the beer places; some of the married ones even took their kids along and let them play on the floor while they had a beer.

I hit the old wood road, going at a trot. It was well beaten, because the horses used it in coming up from the lower pasture. I stopped at the old packing shed, and hung the buck carcass behind a stack of rotting prune-trays. The stack of trays was all that was left of my father's prune venture. The stoop labor connected with prune growing didn't suit him. He got into horse-raising. Even in the toughest part of the depression a few people could afford to buy saddle horses. He left me a nice start in the horse business, a good stud and twelve mares. Old Jud had taken good care of the horses while I was away.

I carried the buck liver to the horse trough, where I washed my hands, then headed toward the kitchen door. Our battered car wasn't in the yard, so I knew Celia hadn't got back from the Lodge yet. The kitchen was just the way I had left it early that morning. Two dish towels hung over the back of a chair; the lower shelf of the cabinet was littered with bottles and cans and cereal cartons. Celia hadn't fixed herself any dinner. There were no dishes in the sink, except those I had left there after having breakfast. I put the liver on the drainboard.

I went to our bedroom to see if Celia had left any cigarettes on her dresser. The big front room, which opened off the kitchen, had been the heart of the house while Mittie was alive. The furniture was old and looked pretty drab. I opened the bedroom door and stood looking into the room. I could imagine Celia tossing the spread back over the wrinkled pillows, giving it a jerk, then leaving it. Celia didn't care much for house-

work. I always liked the room because it was the one spot in the house Celia had fixed up to suit herself; it was like Celia, everything pretty and gay.

I planned to surprise Celia with buck liver and bacon for supper. To my way of thinking, there isn't anything to equal buck liver fried with strips of bacon. I planned to knock out a batch of baking-powder biscuits too, camp style. I lighted the butane gas in the oven, then built a pine-wood fire in the trash burner, just to have the smell of woodsmoke in the room.

The onions were browning, and the buck liver had just started to curl at the edges when I heard the car drive up. If I hadn't had to check on the biscuits, I'd have headed out to meet her. Then I heard voices—Celia had brought someone with her. I didn't much care for that; I wanted Celia to myself, the way I felt just then. I had just closed the oven door when I heard her voice.

"Oh!" She sounded startled. She stood in the doorway, her straw-blond hair gleaming, her green eyes very big. "You scared me." She turned halfway around. "Grant, Russ got back." She sniffed as she came into the kitchen. "What's cooking?"

I WANTED to grab her and hug her, but she didn't give me a chance: she sank into a chair and leaned back. Anyway, Grant Streepy was right behind her, grinning at me.

"Buck liver and onions," I said, then added: "Hi, Grant."

"Up to your old tricks, I see," Grant said with a grin.

"I fed this fellow," I said. "He's part of the stock I raise."

Grant tapped a cigarette out of his pack, and handed it to Celia. He held a match for her. Celia bent forward and puffed deeply; then she leaned back lazily. Grant passed his pack to me. He was big and easy-going; we had worked in the same shipyard. Grant wasn't exactly handsome, but he had a way with women. Because he came from the hills, and we had gone to grade school together, I had run around with him down at Richmond. I'd tried to imitate his way with the girls, but it was no go. After I met Celia, I didn't care.

"Buck liver. Sounds messy," Celia said.

"It's tops, the way Russ fixes it," Grant said.

Celia got to her feet. She tossed back her long wavy hair. "I'll fix up a bit," she said. Then she went out of the kitchen.

I set the table, dished up the buck liver and biscuits and set on the percolator. Celia came in with her hair smoothed down, and her lips looking red and eager. Grant pulled out a

chair for her. I could have kicked myself for not thinking to do that. She smiled up at Grant, and said: "When Russ starts messing around the kitchen, I make him go all the way."

I sat down, and we started eating. Celia liked the liver the way I had fixed it. Grant and I gave our attention to eating. That's the way hillmen eat. Talk would come later. Celia liked to talk while she ate. Tonight she had something on her mind, I could tell, because she puckered up her forehead every once in a while. Finally she got around to it.

"Grant says we can get thirty thousand dollars for the ranch."

I was surprised, and had to take a minute to think. All I could think to say was: "Nobody'd pay that much for rough timber land."

"Be easy," Grant said. "With lumber as high as it is, a man could set up a mill, and take out enough red-wood lumber to bring that much; then he'd cut up the place and sell it off for acreage. People are going nuts over small places in the mountains."

I was still getting my thoughts lined up. "I know land prices have gone out of sight," I said. I looked at Celia. She was looking at Grant. He said:

"I know a man who'd buy this place for thirty thousand."

"We could get out of the sticks and live in town," Celia said. "You could start a business. Russ, a garage or filling-station. We could have a new car."

I poured myself some coffee. Celia had been hinting along this line for some time. I sugared my coffee, then lighted one of Grant's cigarettes. I wasn't selling the ranch, but I didn't want to hurt Celia's feelings. "I don't know," I said. "This suits me about right."

"It's a hole." Celia's face flushed, and her eyes snapped. "No place to go but the Lodge—a ten-mile drive for a beer."

I began to feel a warning prickle at the roots of my hair. Grant had been putting ideas into her head. But I wanted to keep my temper in hand. Celia meant a lot to me. Being away from her a few hours had showed me how much. Grant was smoking, not seeming much interested one way or the other. "I got a buyer if you want to talk turkey," he said.

"I'm not selling," I said. I didn't mean to snap it out the way I did, but Grant was getting under my skin.

"You might consider me," Celia said.

That cooled me down. We had been having a few little quarrels lately. This looked like a real one. I said: "Now, honey, if timber is worth so much, we'll cut some of it. We'll clear the lower ten acres next to the

road. That will get us a new car and let us fix things up around here." I tried to catch her hand, but she pulled it away.

"Well?" She was looking at Grant.

"Not a bad idea," Grant said.

I was thankful for the way he said it. He could help me smooth things over with Celia. "How about going in with me? We'll take out the logs and sell them to the mill." I knew Grant wasn't working on a job.

Grant lighted a cigarette. "Sure, I'll go in with you," he said.

Celia jumped to her feet. She came around and gave me a hug. "You're a swell Joe, Russ," she said, and I was glad I had hit on the right way to fix things up. I had been thinking of clearing that ten acres and selling it off for a mountain-home site, anyway.

"We'll dump the dishes in the sink, and run down to the Lodge for a case of beer," I said. "Grant may as well put up with us for the night."

WE stayed up late that night talking and planning. Most of it was talk, helped out by the beer, but Celia was excited and radiant. When we entered our room, she stood looking around, her eyes half closed. I knew she was thinking about what she'd do to it, and it irritated me. I liked the room the way it was, the way it had always been, with Celia's added frills, of course. It had been the guest-room, the best room in the house. The bed and dresser were Mother's wedding presents from my father. She had always considered them too nice to use every day. They had gone into the guest-room where they could be kept made up with the best spread, and the best scarf. There were other smaller treasures my mother had put into the guest-room where they could be kept nice. The room hadn't been used until Celia came. My father never let anyone sleep there after Mother died.

Celia tossed her head. "I'll have all this junk dumped out. I want twin beds, and a blond dresser with a glass that comes down to the floor."

"What's the sense of twin beds when we use only one?" I asked, trying to hide my irritation.

"You'll find out, smarty-pants." Celia slipped an arm around me, and burrowed her head against my chest. I just couldn't argue with her. I felt warm and tender as I took her into my arms. I had a feeling she needed protection and care, lots of care. . . .

We started on the logging and land clearing at a time when work was really work. It was summer, and the rainy season was over. Every day was cloudless, and the sun shone hot and clear. The lush grass carpeting the mountainside dried out and turned brown. The splashes of color from



*Celia's soft fingers closed over my hand . . .
"Russ," she said, "it was a terrible accident."*

the wild flowers vanished. Only the hardy, desert perennials remained green. They had learned a trick or two about conserving moisture. Getting out logs was a tough job; shooting out the stumps was a tougher job.

OLD JUD stayed on to tend the horses. He lived in a little shack a half-mile below the house. He had never cared about living with us. He liked to be alone, and spent half his time wandering around. He didn't much like the idea of logging off the ten acres. He'd come to the edge of the clearing and stand there watching us work, but never saying much of anything.

I had just checked the fuses on two sticks of dynamite. We had about two acres cleared. The mill had hauled the cut logs away, and we were blasting out stumps. Grant and Celia stood beside the battery box which would set off the charge. My father had taught me to use a detonator instead of cut fuse. He said it was safer. I walked toward them, wiping the sweat from my forehead. It worried me because Celia would not stay at the house where it was cool.

"All set?" Grant asked.

I nodded as I slumped down on a root. Grant pushed the lever down. There was a momentary hush, with all of us holding our breath, then a fast flash of sound, followed by a dull, thudding roar. The big stump split, then lifted into the air.

"Two sticks did it," I said.

"Powder is cheaper than sweat," Grant said sourly. "I'd use four, might loosen the roots deeper down." He sat down on the ground beside Celia. "Hell of a way to make a few bucks," he growled. I had noticed that he was beginning to get tired of the hard work.

"There'll be more than a few bucks," Celia said.

"I'd have taken the thirty thousand, and let somebody else do the sweating." Grant was looking at Celia's open-toed slippers.

I got up and headed up the hill to the old tractor. The K-20 was tough to start, and I had to do the cranking. I choked the engine and flipped it over a few times. After the fourth turn, it started with a coughing roar. Grant was waiting with the cable when I swung in close to the biggest half of the stump. It was almost noon, but Celia hadn't gone up to

the house to get dinner ready. We snaked the two halves of the stump to an arroyo, and dumped them into it.

When I drove back to the field, my mouth was dry as dust. "May as well quit and go get something to eat," I said.

"Which one is next?" Celia asked.

"The big one," I said.

"You'll have to put four sticks under that one," Grant said.

We walked up to the house, where I helped Celia set out a cold lunch. Grant lay down and went to sleep. We had to waken him when things were ready.

By evening we had four sticks of powder set under the big stump. I had trouble with the tractor, and that delayed setting the charge. Celia left us about four. That meant a hot supper, and I was mighty glad. Grant was in a better humor, and did his share of the digging and drilling. When we were ready for the lines to the box, I felt pretty good.

"You might just as well go in and get washed up," I said. "I'll get everything ready for the shot tomorrow morning."

Grant went up to the house, and I set the shots. I was a bit dubious



*"How about taking them off my eyes?" I asked.
"They are off your eyes," Doc said.*

about four sticks of powder: that would make a big splash. But we could dig a foxhole to get into to be away from flying wood and clods, or just get into a hole we had made in taking out a stump.

I got to the house an hour later than Grant. He was in the kitchen helping Celia, but they didn't have supper ready; they were just getting it started.

"Celia and I polished off a bottle of beer," Grant explained.

I didn't pay any attention. I was fagged out and dirty; all I wanted was to wash up and flop into a chair. Celia was flushed and nervous. I figured she was staying out in the sun

too much, and I mentioned it at supper. She snapped me off short.

"I won't stay in this old house alone all day."

I was too tired to argue, so I let it pass. After a few cups of coffee and some hot food I figured we'd all feel better. I'd coax Celia a little when we were alone that night.

The coffee did do a lot for us. After supper I decided we all needed pepping up, so I offered to drive down to the Lodge and get ice-cream and a case of beer. Celia brightened up at once, but she didn't offer to go with me, so I drove off alone.

I had a couple of beers at the Lodge, and was feeling pretty good when I got back. As I drove into the

yard, I saw Celia and Grant coming up from the field where we had been working.

We stayed up late and did quite a bit of gabbing. Celia was a bit tight when we went to our room, but she was warm and cuddly. I felt pretty good, the way I had got us over our grumpy spell.

The next morning Celia surprised me by saying: "Guess I'll stay at the house today, Russ."

That really pleased me; then Grant broke in: "This will be the big shot—you better come along and see it."

"We won't need you," I said. "No need for you taking a beating out in the sun."

Celia looked at Grant. "I guess I'll have to see the big shot," she said.

That got me, but I didn't argue. "You can come back to the house after the shot," I said.

WE walked down to the big stump, through the dead grass that was drenched with dew which did nothing to dampen the parched roots, because the sun lapped it up before it had a chance to soak in. Grant had moved the battery box to another hole where a stump had been blown out. It was a deeper hole than the one I had picked.

"This looked safer to me," he said. He and Celia sat down.

I walked down to hook up the wires, and check the charge the way I always did. Before I bent over to look at the wiring, I saw old Jud come out of the woods. Grant was waving him back. His shout sounded angry. Old Jud stopped and stood there. When he didn't go back into the woods, Grant stopped yelling.

I bent over to have a look at the tamping around the holes. As I leaned forward, I had a strange feeling, a feeling I have often had when out in the woods hunting. It is a warning I always heed when I'm in deep jungle growth. It means something is wrong, or some danger is near. I straightened quickly, obeying the impulse without even thinking what I could have to be afraid of. As I straightened, I felt a hard pressure against my body. The pressure became intense, and flaming lights burst in my face, mingled with a crashing roar. I felt my body lift; then I seemed to be whirling into a black pit. . . .

I lay like a wounded animal without trying to move, waiting for my strength to return, and my senses to clear. I guess I did not move, for fear movement would bring another attack; that is the way with a wounded animal. After a while I heard sounds, and realized the sounds were voices. They mingled with the pains inside me, the burning flame that was sear-

ing my face. I lay still, thinking if I didn't move, the voices would go away. But there was something familiar about the voices. It was not anything reassuring; they did not drive the fear out of me. I made little effort to follow the words, though they had separated themselves from the swirling blackness beating down upon me. Animal instinct, the cunning which does not desert the gray fox until you smash his skull, was about all that was alive in me.

The voices finally went away, and another voice came near to me. I was beginning to recover now. I was thinking: It had been bad wiring; the blast went off in my face. I moved my lips, and they felt gritty and sticky.

"Don't try to talk, Russ." This voice was reassuring; I recognized it. "Doc?" I asked.

"Yes, Russ, Doc Miller."

The fear that had kept me still and unmoving slipped away. I thought of Celia, and tried to sit up.

"Celia? Is she safe?"

I felt Doc's hands pushing me backward. "She wasn't hurt. I gave her a powder to make her sleep." I felt a pillow under my head; it was cool where it pushed in around my neck. I relaxed. Celia wasn't hurt; she was asleep. I felt the doctor's hands working on my face, and then I drifted into a deep blackness, a deeper blackness which engulfed even the animal awareness.

THERE WAS a new voice in the room when I awoke—a soft voice; for a moment I thought somebody was singing. The voice was close above me, but it wasn't speaking to me. "You need not worry about anything, Mrs. Morgan, I'll take care of him. Doctor Miller left careful instructions." Then I heard Celia's voice: "I'll go out on the porch. I want to speak to the Doctor when he comes."

I tried to sit up, to call to Celia, but I couldn't manage a word because my mouth was bandaged. And a firm, cool hand kept me from sitting up.

"You mustn't move, Mr. Morgan." It was the musical voice. I lay back, and waited for the voice to go on. I smelled a faint perfume, not the kind Celia used, something harder to catch, like the perfume of a wild flower. I waited for Celia's voice, hoping she'd say something to me. She had gone away. I flexed one hand, and knew I had one good arm left. I could have held Celia's hand, given her a sign of how I felt. The soft voice said: "Don't worry about anything—just rest."

I wondered if this was a hospital. I had never been in a hospital in my life, but this must be one. The voice was the nurse. I waited and listened.

The nurse wore soft-soled shoes, but to a man who can hear the padding of a cougar in the bush, her footsteps sounded clear. I knew when she left the room.

After she had gone, I reached out with my free hand. My fingers found the edge of a table. Slowly I traced the edge, and I knew where I was: I was in my own bed. There was no mistaking the carved edge of the table. I explored the carved corner of the bed, and that made it certain. This was my mother's bed. After that I lay back. I started fitting things together, going back to the big stump, groping my way the way you'd follow a trail in the woods. I had a feeling there was something I ought to remember. I fell asleep still groping along that trail.

I was awakened by Celia's voice: "Is he awake?"

The musical voice answered: "I think he is asleep, but if you sit beside him, he'll wake up presently. He has one good hand. It might help if you held it."

I waited eagerly. I don't know why I didn't lift that good hand and beckon to Celia. Something kept me from making the first move. But when she didn't say anything, and did not move closer to the bed, I lifted my hand and reached out toward her. She must have been over near the door: I heard her high heels clicking as she crossed the room. Then her soft fingers closed over my hand. She sat down beside me. "Russ," she said. "You feel better?"

I squeezed her hand as hard as I could. I wanted her to talk to me.

"It was a terrible accident," she said. "The handle was still up." I squeezed her hand to let her know I understood. I wanted to take her in my arms—she sounded scared. I waited but she didn't say any more.

It was good to feel her flesh against mine, and I held tight to her hand. Just feeling her so near made me feel quiet and drowsy. I let my fingers relax. She slipped her hand out of mine. I heard her get to her feet. I didn't want her to go away, but I did not move my hand. I lay with the blackness pressing down upon me, and that restless feeling began stirring in my head. There was something I had to remember. Celia's hard heels clicked out of the room, and I went back to the big stump, starting all over.

After a while Doc came. I heard him talking to the nurse. They talked low, as though they figured I was asleep. I lifted a hand, and pulled at the bandages over my mouth to let him know I wanted to talk. The nurse came over and took my hand away from the bandages. Doc stepped close to the bed and put his fingers around my wrist.

"Not yet, Russ; perhaps in a day or so. For a while you'll have to eat soup through a tube." He laid my hand back on the blanket. "He'll be one patient who can't talk back to you, Amy," he said to the nurse. I made a protesting sign with my hand. Again the fingers of the nurse closed over my hand. The fingers were firm and cool.

AFTER Doc and the nurse left, I lay waiting for Celia. I was beginning to have a peevish feeling, like a little kid who isn't being noticed. When she did come into the room, I didn't motion to her, but sulked, waiting for her to come over and take my hand. She did come over, but she just stood above me a few minutes, then turned and went out. I lay waiting for her to come back. I knew when she did come, I'd reach out and take her hand, I'd let her know I wanted her to sit down beside me. After what seemed like hours, I heard her voice and then Grant's voice. They were at the door.

"He's asleep," Celia said.

"Tough break, that!" Grant's voice sounded very concerned. "I found the short. It was in the battery box. He must have pulled the wires when he tested the charge."

I heard the nurse say, "You can sit with him awhile, if you wish, Doctor Miller says it will not upset him."

"I'll scream if I have to sit there very long," Celia said. "It's so terrible."

"Get hold of yourself—go in and sit with him," Grant said gruffly.

"I never could stand blood," Celia protested.

"There isn't any blood," Grant said.

"There *was*!" Celia's voice was tight.

"Later on I'll take you down to the Lodge and buy you a beer to buck you up." I heard Grant moving away. The nurse had gone too. I just waited, feeling sorry for Celia. She was all broken up, her nerves shot. When she didn't move, I lifted my hand and beckoned to her. She came over and sat down beside me. I held her hand, trying to buck her up. When she didn't talk to me, I stroked her hand for a while. After a bit I relaxed and let her think I was asleep. She stayed awhile, then slipped out of the room. After Doc took the bandages off my mouth, I'd get things straightened out with her.

Time means very little when you lie on your back staring up into blackness. I guess it meant more to me than to some, because I had learned to be aware of many things I did not see. I could always locate a big cat by just listening—I could even tell what he was doing; and a cougar is

one of the softest-footed, most careful brutes alive; he does little of his moving in the open.

It must have been hours later when I heard Grant and Celia out in the kitchen. I smelled pork chops frying, and caught snatches of words. Celia seemed to have got over her nervousness. I heard her giggle twice. I was trying to make a picture of what they were doing, when the kitchen door closed. The hinges creaked, and the door had to be jerked to make it shut. That door hadn't been closed for years. There wasn't any need for closing it. I lay thinking it over, and jealousy began to work on me.

The nurse came in. She closed the bedroom door, and sat down over by the window. I figured she was reading, or just looking out into the yard. It must be evening. I got to wishing she would come over to the bed and sit. I was sore because Celia and Grant were out in the kitchen, because Celia had been giggling with Grant. The effort to lift my good hand was more than I wanted to tackle. I just let myself drift away.

Hours later I was awake again and listening. Cool air stirred in the room so the window and the door were both open. I didn't hear a sound except for the night sounds coming in through the window, but I knew the nurse was still in the room. I opened and closed the fingers of my good hand; then I wiggled my toes. When they moved, I moved my feet. I must be better off than I had thought. . . .

I went back to the big stump, and this time I had a bit more to go on. Grant had said the short was in the battery box—I had pulled the wires. But I hadn't pulled the wires; that was one thing no one would do. Now it wasn't jealousy alone; there were some ugly thoughts mixed up in it, like thirty thousand dollars which my widow would get, like how easy it would be to scrape the wires and then see that they got pushed together. I tried to tell myself I was letting go my hold, running wild like a loco steer; but I couldn't drive the thoughts away—they kept piling up until I began jerking around on the bed. That brought the nurse. She gave me some medicine that put me to sleep.

THE bandages came away without much pain. I had been sitting up in bed for a couple of days. When my mouth was freed, I flexed my lips, but I didn't say anything. It was the bandages over my eyes I was waiting for; I wanted to see the owner of the soft, musical voice. I owed her a lot. She had kept me from blowing my top. She had kept me in line until Celia got over her jitters and began taking a real interest in me.

"There," Doc said. "Now we'll put on fresh bandages."

"How about taking them off my eyes?" I asked. My stiff lips made my voice sound strange.

"They *are* off your eyes," Doc said. There was something in his tone that made me jump.

"I can't see," I croaked.

"No, Russ; the sand and dirt particles left scar tissue over the lenses." Doc spoke as though he had been dreading this moment.

I STARED straight ahead into the blackness. I guess sweat broke out on my forehead, because the nurse wiped it with a damp cloth. I was scared; I felt like a trapped thing. When I didn't say anything, Doc finally spoke.

"I'm not an eye specialist; I won't say you'll never see again, but you have to face that possibility." He put a hand on my arm.

I still couldn't say anything. The shock was like getting hit a hard blow on the chin; it numbed me. All the time I had been lying on my back, I had never once thought I'd come out of this blind.

"Your face can be fixed up as good as new by a surgeon." Doc began replacing the bandages.

"To hell with the face, Doc," I said.

"Get hold of yourself, Russ. You're alive, and you'll be as strong and healthy as you ever were. Many a man has licked bigger handicaps."

"I'll not stay blind," I said.

"I'll take you to a specialist." That was as much encouragement as Doc would give me.

The nurse slipped an arm around me, and I lay back. I didn't intend to make a fool of myself with her watching. Her hand stayed on mine for a little while before she moved away from the bed. Suddenly a very funny thing occurred to me, and I laughed out loud.

Doc grunted. Amy patted my hand.

"What's the joke?" Doc asked.

"It's on me," I said, and I was thinking that I had been about as eager to see what Amy looked like as anything else that sight would have brought me.

Doc left, and Amy went out with him. I lay there straightening a few things out in my mind. Celia had been spending a few hours a day with me, and she had been sweet and gentle to me. I wondered what she would say to this. Everything had been such a nightmare, with all of the jealous and the nasty spells mixed up with times when I wanted to take Celia in my arms that I didn't know where I stood. I'd put it up to Celia; she could have her freedom and her half of the place, if she didn't want to stick around. The more I thought

about it, the more I felt it would be best to give her a chance.

The first thing I said to Celia when she came to see me a while later was: "Now you can give me that kiss I've been waiting for."

She bent over and kissed me. It wasn't a kiss. I could feel her cringe as her lips pressed against my scarred mouth. When she pulled away, I said: "No good, honey."

"It will be all right, Russ." She caught hold of my hand.

"No use kidding. You better take your half of this place and start over." I meant it. You can't blame a girl for not liking to kiss a man with half his upper lip gone.

"No. I'm staying. Grant is going to run the place for us until things are straightened out." She held tight to my hand. I let that sink in. It was decent of Grant to stay and look after things; only trouble was, I didn't like Grant any more; I didn't want him around me. But I didn't argue, I just let it ride that way. After a while Celia left me. We didn't find much to talk about. . . .

Sitting in the darkness, at first it was on the bed, then in a chair by the window, there weren't many things to think about. I couldn't expect Celia to sit beside me and hold my hand; there wasn't anything wrong with me any more—just a leg that hadn't healed, a lot of scars and cuts which were healing fast, a right arm that was pretty stiff. She was off away from the house a lot. I couldn't help but think she was with Grant. From now on she could be with him most of the time. She hadn't moved into our room yet.

Amy was still with me. I was stalling about letting her go. As soon as I could trust my weight on my leg, I wouldn't need her. Doc hadn't said anything about taking her away. I had an idea he figured she was good for my morale. She came breezing through the door while I was listening to a pair of chickadees in the hedge. It was Sunday; Celia had told me so.

"I think you better eat some fried chicken," she said. "I fixed it Southern style, and I made biscuits."

"Are you supposed to cook for the patient?" I asked.

"No, but this is a special case." She laughed, and her laugh was more like music than her words.

"I'll set the table over near the window. Coffee today." She moved the bed table over to the window. After a bit she said. "All ready." I explored the tray, locating the biscuits, the coffee, butter and sugar. I looked up toward her and said, with what I knew must be a ghostly grin. "You're good to me, Amy."

"That's part of my job, the part I like." She laughed.



"There is a feel inside a redwood grove; Mother always called them temples, because they grow in a circle."

Later that afternoon Celia came in. She sat down near me. "I had a grand time," she said. "We went to a ball game."

"Now you're talking," I said. "You don't have to be tied down. I'll be able to get around pretty soon. You won't have to worry about me."

"You'll be able to get along without the nurse?"

"Sure," I said; then I asked her about Amy. "What does she look like?"

Celia laughed. "She'll die an old maid, if that's what you mean."

"Homely?" I persisted.

"No class," Celia said. "She looks like your Aunt Minny."

Aunt Minny is no prize-winner for beauty, but she's a fine woman. I didn't push Celia any further. Finally she said:

"When are you letting her go?"

"Soon as I learn to get around." Celia seemed more than a little interested in when Amy was leaving.

I was beginning to get a few things put in their places. I had a hunch Celia wasn't coming back to our room unless I insisted, and I wasn't going to insist. The old hot feeling when she got close enough to touch me was gone. We talked, and no one could say she didn't do all that could be

expected of her. I didn't go for Grant any more, and he knew it; but he still pulled the same line of talk.

Two things kept me going: I figured there was a long-shot chance I'd see again, and the old urge to get out into the woods was back, stronger than ever. The way I looked at it, I could do pretty well in the woods. I had always relied on hearing and the feel of things as much as sight. I figured I could sit out in the woods and listen, and know exactly what a big cat or a fox or a racoon was doing. It would be about as good as seeing them.

I told Amy about it, and she was all for going out as soon as I was able to get around.

"You can get a seeing-eye dog," she said eagerly.

"I don't like dogs. A dog would run everything away, just being there with me," I said. I had been thinking about a dog, but another plan had cropped up, one I liked a lot better.

"You couldn't go out alone," she said.

"Not at first, but after I got used to it," I argued. Then I made a try for what I wanted. "Couldn't you stay on for a while and give me a hand?"

She didn't answer for so long I began to get worried, thinking I had offended her. When she did speak, it was very slowly.

"Yes," she said. "I could stay for awhile."

"Fine." I grinned at her. "I'll make a try at walking in the woods tomorrow."

She laughed at that. Then she turned serious very sudden. "I don't think you should ever try going off into the woods alone. You might have another accident." The way she said it pricked something inside me, something that had been coming back every once in a while, though not so often since I'd quit being jealous over Celia.

"Another accident!" I said. I guess I just thought out loud. Then I followed up. "You're willing to stay because you think I might have another accident?"

"Don't start imagining things," she said. "You can teach me how to listen, and what to look for."

"Sure," I said. I was fitting another piece into place. I knew I was probably building up a bad dream, but I could very easily meet with another accident if I got to wandering alone in the woods—an accident that would happen after enough people

knew I went out alone. There was a way to test my theory.

When Celia and Grant dropped in for a little visit later that day, I put out a few feelers. They came in from the garden; they'd been off some place quite a while.

"How's it going?" Grant asked.

"Fine; I'm beginning to get itchy feet," I said.

"Want to go for a ride? We could go to the Lodge," Celia offered.

"Not yet. It's just in my head, so far. I aim to get around by myself. I used to be pretty good in the woods. I figure once I get the roads and trails spotted, I can prowl about as good as I used to." I waited to hear what they said.

Celia spoke up quickly.

"Russ, you can't go out into the woods. You'd get lost; you might fall over a cliff, and then there's wild animals."

I laughed. "I'm not afraid of fox and 'coons. I'll use a cane and tap my way along. I've always been able to come home even on the blackest night. I know every foot of this ranch."

"Why not?" Grant cut in. "Russ never did need to see where he was going."

Celia started to say something; then she stopped. I thought I heard a movement of Grant's foot; anyway, I was sure he had given her a warning look.

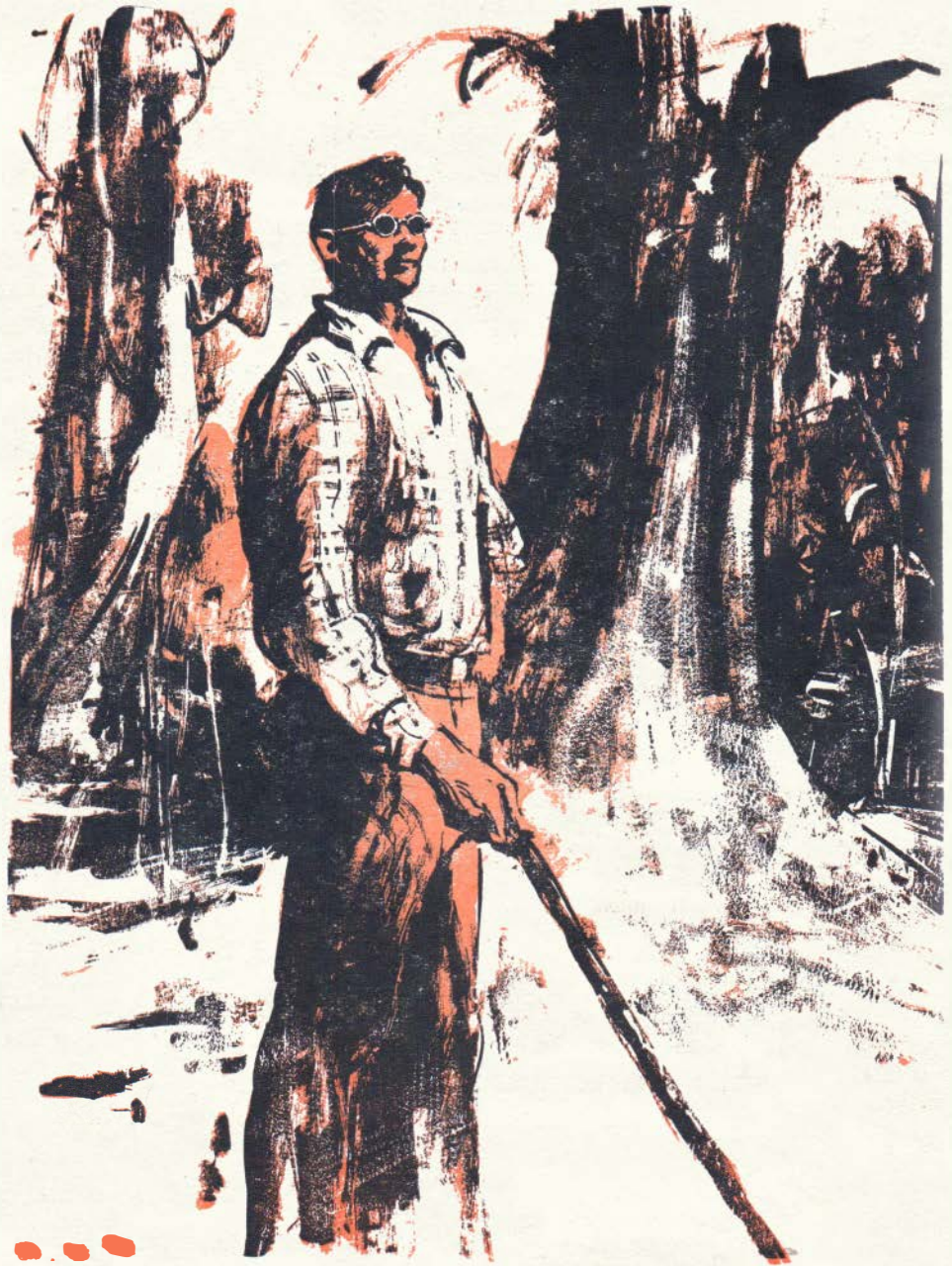
After they left, I sat by the window. When there are no images around you to make you think of things, you fill in with your own objects. I began to build up a lot of mean thoughts. That night Celia came in. She slipped an arm around my shoulders. Her voice was nice and soft.

"Ready to have me move in?" she asked.

That stopped me for a few minutes. But it fitted in, if you looked at it one way. I said my leg was still touchy. I'd shout for her later. She stayed with me almost an hour that night. Before she left, I was in bad shape. I didn't get to sleep for a long time.

The next day Doc brought a specialist out to see me. He made quite an examination of my eyes. What he said wasn't any more reassuring than what Doc had said. Sometime during the next month, perhaps two months, I could go into the city, and the surgeons would look me over. If there was a replacement lens in the eye bank, they might operate; and if they operated, I might recover the sight of one eye.

I MADE my first trip out into the woods about a week later. Celia and Grant both offered to go along, but I said Amy would take care of me. They didn't argue. I had already



I was sure they were both looking at me. "You

told Celia I was keeping Amy for a while longer. She hadn't kicked up the fuss I had expected.

I told Amy she wasn't to help me at all. I was going to do it all. She wasn't to take a hand unless I got stuck. I planned to describe things to her as we went along, just as a sort of test.

Starting from the horse corral, I headed down along the logging road, using a stick to check for the side trail I wanted to take. At first using the stick wasn't so easy, but I did hit the side trail, and after that it was no worse than following that trail on a black night, which I had done many times. I was heading for a redwood temple, the biggest grove of redwoods on the mountain. When I figured we were almost to it, I stopped. Then we walked on into the cool green

twilight. I couldn't see it, but I could feel it. "We'll rest here in the temple," I said.

"How did you know?" Amy asked.

"There is a feel inside a redwood grove. Mother always called them temples, because they grow in a circle around the mother tree, and there's always an open space inside. There's a different sort of silence; it's birdless, and you never hear the insects, because there aren't any." I laughed, and caught her hand. She let me hold it.

"It's like being in a great cathedral," she said softly.

I was pleased because she seemed to feel the way I did about the redwoods. "I always stop here when I pass this way. I'm not much on churchgoing, but there is a different feel when you sit down here alone."



can go on with Celia; I can make it in," I said.

I wasn't doing a very good job of explaining what the big trees did to me, but I thought she understood.

"They have been here a long time," she said.

"Five hundred, possibly a thousand years," I guessed.

"Longer than that. I'm sure of it." She spoke as though she knew redwoods.

WE were close together, and I found her hand, again. She didn't pull it away. She was different from Celia; but then she wasn't interested in me in the way Celia had been. And that started me thinking. Likely Doc had put her up to encouraging me to get out and find an interest in something. He had been giving me a line of fatherly talk right along. I had to remember I was a hard looker

and blind, and that I was married. I dropped her hand, and said:

"Now I'll show you how I get back home. No help—you just come along."

I made it to the trail and located the logging road. We got back to the house without my having to ask her a single question. I took only one spill, and she was so close to me that I didn't go down very hard. I felt pretty good that evening. I figured I could handle myself better than most blind men.

I didn't ask Celia to come back to our room. I caught myself wondering why I had been so wild about her. Possibly it was having Amy around that made Celia's way of talking, her easy familiarity, seem a little crude. We were all eating together now, out in the kitchen. That night

Celia and Grant asked all about the trip.

"It will give you something to do while you're waiting to go to the hospital," Celia said.

"If I have to wait," I said.

"You'll have to wait a month or two, won't you?" Grant asked.

"I might get to go any time." I figured this might stir up something. It didn't get a rise out of Grant, but Celia spoke up quickly.

"I thought the doctor said at least a month."

"He said it might be sooner." I wanted to make the point strong.

AFTER supper was over, Celia sat with me for quite a while. We sat on the old davenport, and she snuggled up close to me. "I'm jealous, Russ," she said after a few minutes of letting me feel her softness against me. That always had worked for her before. As I sat there, I remembered how she always went about getting me to do something she wanted done. "Jealous of a homely nurse?" I asked.

"I don't get to do things for you." I knew she was pouting. I grinned at her.

"I never could get you out into the woods," I reminded her. She would never ride a horse; she wouldn't sleep out, because of spiders and bugs, and she hated walking.

"I'd go with you when you go hiking." She began playing with my fingers, twisting hers inside mine.

"I figured I'd be riding a horse in a few days." I hadn't thought about riding. But knowing how she hated horses, I couldn't pass up the chance to worry her.

"After a while, I'll ride with you, Russ. For a while we could just take long hikes. I'll have to practice up before I take on a horse." She handled it neatly, tossing the ball right back to me. I couldn't help feeling I might be wrong about her.

"I'll let Amy go," I said. "I won't need her, with you to trail along with me."

She slipped an arm around my neck and kissed me. Her lips were warm and soft; I couldn't feel her cringe at all. If she hadn't jumped up right quick, I'd have tossed everything overboard and made up with her right there. I was close to feeling the way I used to feel about her. She laughed down at me.

"Grant and I are going after some beer. I'll be right back with a cold one for you."

Amy came in from the yard, and I told her I guessed I wouldn't need her any more. I had her sit down beside me. There was something I wanted to do. I went at it the wrong way, but I'm no hand with women. I said: "Amy, I've never seen you—



"Did they hurt you, Russ?" she asked. Her voice was anxious.

I'd like to feel your face, just to get a picture of you."

She was sitting close to me, relaxed; she had been laughing a minute before. I felt her go tense; then she got to her feet. Her voice wasn't exactly cold, but it wasn't warm, either.

"It wouldn't be a pretty picture," she said.

"I wasn't being fresh," I said.

"I have to pack a few things. Grant can drive me to town in the morning." She went out of the living-room, and I heard her walking down the hall.

I felt pretty lonely after her door closed. Telling her I didn't need her, and then making a pass at her—she must have figured it was a pass. She probably thought I had made up with Celia. It was a mess. I couldn't expect her to get soft over a married man who had been snuggled up on the davenport holding hands with his wife just a few minutes before talking to her. But as I sat there, I realized that she meant more to me than Celia did.

Celia and Grant came back. Amy joined us, and we all had a beer together. Celia picked on me, but I knew I wasn't going to ask her to come back to my room that night. Later, I might, but not tonight.

Amy was gone when Celia called me the next morning. I had expected

her to say good-by. I had planned to have a talk with her alone. Celia had breakfast ready. She tried to force a lot of help on me that I didn't want. When she asked if I was going for a hike that morning, I was glad of a chance to get away. I didn't want to sit staring into the grayish haze, which was what I saw when my dark glasses were off.

We were out all morning. Celia soon got to know I didn't have to be led around by the hand. She let me feel my way along the old trails. She wasn't much help when I did have to ask her about landmarks, but I made out, and got her back home.

I went on that way for several days. Celia took good care of me, but she didn't try being intimate, and she didn't complain when I wanted to hike, not even when I stayed out most of one day. We hadn't planned it that way, and had not taken a lunch. It should have convinced me about her, but it didn't, I guess because of something most men never develop, that sixth sense you sharpen and hone down fine when you spend a lot of time alone in the woods hunting big game.

The third day Grant went with us. He took the twenty-two-caliber rifle along to pick off some quail for supper. I led them down a rough trail to where the bench breaks off into the

cañon. I wanted to see what would happen. Nothing happened. Grant shot a nice mess of quail. On the way back I turned off, and we sat on the overlook rock—one that juts out over the cañon. From its edge there is a full hundred-foot drop without a tree or a bush to break a fall. I sat between Grant and Celia. My senses were tuned to the slightest movement: I was ready. But Grant just lay back and took a nap. Celia sat with her elbow touching my arm. I knew she was looking down over the forested slopes toward Monterey Bay. I had sat staring down upon that scene a hundred times. After a while I said we had better get going. Celia woke Grant, and we tramped back to the house.

I was about to break down and admit I had been acting like a fool, to start trying to make it up to Celia, when Doc called and said that he'd take me in to Frisco on Tuesday. That was on Saturday night. When I told Celia and Grant, I sensed a tenseness between them, and I was right back where I had been. I decided to play it out: I'd go on a few more hikes. Grant began talking about how good the mess of quail had been. I stepped right in and said:

"We'll go back down to the overlook rock—the best quail hunting is down that way." I turned toward Celia. "Doc says I'll be able to do my own hunting when I get back from Frisco." That was a lie: what Doc had said was that the surgeons would have a look at me.

"That will be swell," Celia said.

"When I'm able to see, there won't be any reason for selling the ranch." I went on.

Celia didn't argue about that, either. I decided either she was playing it pretty smooth, or else I ought to have my teeth kicked down my throat. That night as I lay in bed thinking it over, I knew it didn't matter which way it was: things weren't going to be the same between us, and I admitted it was because of Amy, who had by contrast shown me what Celia was really like, and it wasn't so good.

WE left the ranch about nine next morning. Grant walked on one side of me, Celia on the other. I used the heavy stick Grant had cut for me. It was a madroña limb with a burl on one end that served as a handle.

We followed the logging road down the slope a half-mile. I took the outside after a while, so that I could check rocks and trees and stumps along the road. I was getting pretty good at using the madroña cane. I was as sure of everything we passed as though I was seeing it. So when Grant halted, and laughed as he said,

"You missed that turn, Russ," I stopped.

"There is an oak a hundred yards up the hill on the right, and a big rock fifty feet to the left, isn't there?" I asked.

"No; no oak, no rock," he said.

"Guess I wasn't keeping my mind on my business," I said.

"Want to check that rock?" Grant asked.

"No," I said. "What are the trail markings?"

"This is the spot where we turned off to go down to the overlook rock," Celia said. "I remember that clump of toyon bushes where the trail branches."

THAT was a description of the spot where the trail to the cliff branched off, but I was dead certain there were no toyon bushes growing against a bank. I grinned and nodded my head. "That's it," I said. I began feeling with my cane, and found a path. It had bushes along it, and some dry grass. It was a horse trail. I knew where it went, and it did not lead to the overlook rock. That settled it. From now on, we would play a game. What it would be like I'd have to figure out as we went along.

I had hunted deer and cougar and coyote and fox on this slope. This time I was being hunted—I was sure of it. Grant had figured out a way to handle this so there would be no comeback against him. I'd have to outwit him. I'd have to find out what his plan was.

We hadn't gone very far down the horse trail until something happened which seemed to me a dead giveaway of his plan. Celia was behind me on the trail; Grant was ahead. Suddenly Celia cried out. I stopped and turned. Grant shoved past me.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"My ankle!" Celia groaned. She was lying on the ground. I knelt down.

"Which one?" I took hold of one booted ankle.

"Don't touch it!" Celia screamed.

"I think it's broken."

"Could be," Grant said. "Just lie down while we have a look."

"You have to get me back to the house. I want the doctor." Celia began to cry.

"I can tell if it's broken," I said.

"And I won't hurt you much." I went ahead and felt of her ankles, both of them. She twisted and turned. The right ankle was tight inside her boot; there was a lump just over the joint. "It's a sprain," I said. I felt sorry for her, after feeling that lump. "We'll get you back to the house, honey."

Celia sat up. "It isn't broken?" she asked, then she groaned again. "I feel terrible."



"I need your help, Amy," I said. "Can you pick me up?"

"I'll carry you back," Grant said. "Not yet. It may stop hurting. I've had a sprain before." She had stopped groaning.

"It won't stop hurting," I said.

"I can help her back to the house," Grant said.

"I've ruined your day." Celia seemed worried about that.

"It doesn't matter," I said. "You have to get where you can put hot compresses on that ankle."

"I can get back myself," she said.

"I'll help you," Grant offered.

"Well—" She hesitated. "You can take me to the house, then come back. Russ can wait here for you."

I was sure they were both looking at me. I thought of the lump on her ankle. The swelling inside the boot didn't fit into a plot; Celia wouldn't sprain her ankle just to make Grant's plot look good. "You can go on with Celia; I can make it in," I said.

"Grant can come back," Celia said. "I'll be all right alone at the house."

"Russ has the best idea," Grant said.

"It will take me two hours longer to get back than it will take you and Grant to get in," I said. "I know exactly where I am, so I'll be all right. I'll just have to check landmarks along the way and go slow."

"If you get off your bearings, just sit down. I'll come after you if you

don't show up within a couple of hours," Grant said.

I sat down and listened as they moved away. There was a faint breeze blowing down the slope. It carried the sound of Grant's boots to me as he moved up the path. He was carrying Celia. I didn't move; I even breathed gently, keeping my mouth open so as to reduce head sounds. The breeze was a break for me. After a bit the boot-sounds grew fainter; then they paused for a short space; after that the sounds changed a bit before they faded out. That was what I had been waiting for. I got to my feet and started back along the path.

I was sure I wasn't supposed to know where I was. I was supposed to keep to this trail and get mixed up looking for the main road. But I had an exact picture of the slope. It was a good picture, too, because I located the side path I wanted, without any trouble. When I turned up this path I had the sun squarely in my face; I was heading in a direct line toward the house, cutting across the short side of a big triangle. I figured I'd get home almost as soon as Grant and Celia, if Grant took her on home. I figured he would; I thought they might even make a phone call about Celia's ankle.

The going wasn't too bad. I had to be careful of bushes and loose stones, and I had to check a few times on things along the path, but following a well-grooved stock-trail wasn't so hard. Horses and cattle feed as long as they can without water. When they have to make a trip to the waterhole or trough, they use a short trail, and they keep to it. Many road engineers have found their surveys following buffalo and stock-trails.

My path led me right to the watering trough below my big spring. The trough was behind the barn, hidden from view of the house. There was heavy willow growth back of it, the way there always is around a spring. I moved into the willows and worked my way around the barn. Circling, I moved through the shrubbery at the back of the house. The back yard had been let go back to the jungle. The bushes and small trees grew right against the wall. It had been years since the back door had been opened, but I thought it was unlocked.

I found the door. A tangled spirea bush was matted against it. I took hold of the knob and turned it slowly, then I eased some weight against the door. It moved inward an inch. I let it stay that way while I listened. I heard no voices, and I heard no other sounds. After waiting about ten minutes I forced the door open enough to get inside. Celia and Grant had not arrived. They might not come in for quite a while. If I was wrong about this whole thing, I'd soon know.

I WENT to the kitchen. There was a large storeroom off the kitchen. It had no windows in it, and the walls were lined with shelving for canned stuff, and with hooks for hanging meat. A stack of orchard picking-boxes stood against one wall. I pulled one off the top and sat down back of the stack. It wasn't likely anyone would look into the storeroom, for we never used it. Celia always kept her canned stuff in the cupboard.

After waiting an hour I knew they were not coming back to take care of Celia's ankle. I had an idea there wasn't anything wrong with her ankle. I was sure Grant was down on the slope looking for me. If I was lost and not found for a long time, no one would ever notice a twenty-two-caliber bullet hole. But I had expected Celia to come back to the house; I didn't think she would have any part in the real hunt.

Another fifteen or twenty minutes passed; then I heard someone coming. The kitchen door opened. It was just one person, and the moment that person moved across the room I knew it was Celia. She sat down in a chair, and I soon smelled cigarette smoke.

She didn't stay in the chair long. She went into the front room—I could hear her moving about. She didn't sound as though she had a bad ankle. I had the storeroom door propped open a couple of inches, but I lost her after a bit. She must have gone to my room or to her own room, across the hall from Grant's.

Waiting is something a brush hunter learns to do. You never get as good at it as a cougar—a cougar will lie on a ledge beside a trail for a full twenty-four hours, sometimes more, or on a limb that hangs out over a trail. But you do develop some of the big cat's patience, and a lot of the acuteness which allows him to drowse or even sleep, but still know the instant a deer or a colt approaches. I was more than half asleep before I heard Grant come in. I had no idea how long I had been waiting, but it must have been five or six hours.

He came in through the back door. In a few minutes I heard Celia running across the living-room into the kitchen. They must have stood facing each other for quite a while. It was Celia who spoke, and her voice sounded scared.

"You—got rid of him?"

"I couldn't find him." Grant's voice was harsh and rough, as if he had been doing a lot of yelling.

"But—we have to know."

"He's really lost, and I didn't have to do a thing." He laughed. "I yelled, and I covered most of the slope. I guess he must have stumbled into the cañon."

"We have to find him," Celia said. "We have to know for sure."

"Sure, we have to have the body, or you'll have to wait a long time to get the place where we can sell it." Grant sat down in a chair. I could hear it creak under his weight. "I need a beer," he said.

I had got up from the box, and had started to move toward the door when something made me stop. If I went out there and faced them, Grant would do the only thing he could do: he'd shoot me and go ahead with his plan. I wouldn't have a chance. I'd be letting him get away with it. I went back and sat down.

"We'll have another look down the slope, just to make sure he doesn't find his way back. I never would have thought anyone could get around the way he does."

Grant sounded worried.

"He may be able to see," Celia said.

"Naw. I checked on that pretty carefully. We fooled him on that trail." Grant got to his feet. "Want to come along?"

"I won't stay here," Celia said. "But if we find him alive, it has to be better than your dynamite idea—that was horrible." Celia's voice was as hard as nails. "It can't be like that."

"It won't," Grant said. I heard them go out through the back door. I figured I would have a couple of hours, possibly three. I knew it was not dark yet, or they wouldn't have left to look for me.

I went into the front room and called Doc's office. Amy answered the phone, and for a minute I thought that maybe she was going to hang up on me.

"I need your help, Amy," I said. "I can't talk over the phone, but I'm starting down the road. I don't want to be seen. I'll duck into the bushes if a car comes. I'll hide under the bridge at the foot of the hill below the ranch. Can you pick me up there after dark?"

"Yes," Amy said. "Did they hurt you?" Her voice was anxious.

"No," I said. "I'll tell you all about it. Right now I want to get away from here."

"But can you walk down to that bridge? It's a mile."

"I'll be there," I said.

THERE is a lot I do not remember, about the trip to Frisco and the weeks I spent in the hospital there; but I do remember Amy helping me up the embankment down at the bridge. I wouldn't let her get into the car until I had felt her face, and given the lie to what Celia said about her.

Doc got me off to Frisco without anyone seeing me. I talked the whole thing through with Doc and Amy in his office that night. I had plans, and Doc didn't argue with me. I guess he figured there was a lot of time to worry about what I'd do, if I got my sight back. Amy didn't have much to say that night.

The biggest thing that happened to me was when I first saw Amy. She's blonde and tall, and beautiful—not beautiful the way most people figure beauty; she's beautiful in the way I look at beauty, the way a doe is beautiful at evening when the haze is purple on the meadows, or the way a bank of our California poppies are beautiful when they are growing wild in a clearing. . . . She let me kiss her that day.

By the time I got back to the ranch I had changed my plans. Mrs. Grant, a neighbor, was staying with Celia and Grant. Doc reported they were just waiting it out until they could find my body, or until I could be declared dead. I walked in on them while they were having supper in the kitchen. Celia tried to make a smooth play after she recovered from the shock of seeing me, but Grant knew it was no go. He got up and got out fast.

I didn't make it too tough on Celia. I figured I owed her quite a bit. I'd never have met Amy if it hadn't been for her.



When a winning ball team slumps, the manager begins to think the skids are greased for him. But—there's always a way.

by JOEL REEVE

Get Tough in There!

CAT CATLIK took a deep breath. The skids, he knew, were properly greased. In a way he could not blame the owners—he could not even blame Steve Potter. He had lost control with the injury of Jamie Scott. Maybe, he thought, he was not capable of playing third base and managing the team.

He went into the office of the Stars. Dave Carson was a fattish young man; Mort Gaunt was lean and lugubrious. They stared at him, then looked quickly away. He waited, a stocky man with tanned skin and unsmiling, serious demeanor.

Carson said: "Well, Cat, what about it?"

"We lost another game," said Catlik.

"The Bulls next," muttered Gaunt. "The Bulls will knock us out of it for good."

Carson said: "I can't understand it. We've got the best baseball team in the world. We were ten games in front July 4th. We were a shoo-in."

There was no use telling them that sore-arm pitchers, temperamental infielders, an injury to a third baseman and a general letdown could ruin a ball team—or that individual stars did not comprise an all-conquering unit. These men bought ballplayers of proved ability, turned them over to a manager and expected a pennant. Catlik was silent.

Gaunt said fretfully: "Well, you know the score. You've had every chance. We're thinking of turning the team over to Potter."

The flush rose slowly to Catlik's eyes, matching the burning response which glinted in their depths. He said: "That's up to you. You can buy up my contract—I'll do whatever's best for the team. But where will you get a third baseman now?"

Gaunt said: "We thought you might stay on—"

There was a silence. The magnates gazed out the window of the tall office building. Catlik stood before them, feet spread a little.

Carson said suddenly: "Damn it, Cat, I like you. I always have. You're solid, and I believe in solid people. But you have no fight, no color. Now that the team has slumped, you can't pull them out of it. Potter is a holler guy—"

Gaunt said: "And smart."

Carson made a gesture. "Look, Cat. If you could sweep this series with the Bulls—sweep it, mind you, four games—we'd know the team was high again."

Catlik said slowly: "It would take a miracle."

"Pull one, then! Yank them together somehow, and check the Bulls, and—we'll forget about Potter."

"That's taking a big chance," Gaunt protested. "If Catlik doesn't make it, Potter won't be able to do anything."

"I want to go along with Cat," Carson said stubbornly. "For this series, anyway."

Gaunt spread his hands. Catlik looked from one to the other of the owners of the major-league Stars. He said: "I guess you're being pretty swell about it. I'm grateful. Naturally, I'd hate to be fired now. I'll do what I can. Thanks."

HE walked out of the office and went down to the street, his pulse pounding a little, now that it was over. He had expected to be fired. He knew Steve Potter and a couple of the others had poured oil on the skids. . . .

Beating the Bulls four straight was laughable, with the Stars playing like semi-pros, and nobody hitting the size

of his hat. But it was a reprieve. He would not have to tell Carol that it was over, that he had lost his first big manager's job.

He was only thirty-five. He was a sticker; he had never been badly injured; he had filled in as utility all season, batting in the pinches, playing any position in the infield. He had tried hard to fill Scott's shoes at third for three weeks.

THE trouble was the Stars were an aggregation of stars. Potter at short and Erlandson at second were supposed to be the best double-play combination in the leagues. Noddy Colby, Sweetie Jones and Dal Haley had each won a batting championship in the past. Bo Kovacs, the young catcher up from Columbus, was the sensation of the year. The pitchers were all great ones—or they had been great ones.

Yet they had lost nine straight, culminating a slump which began July 4th, and were about to blow their last chance to overhaul the steady, fighting Bulls. Starting tomorrow, they played four contests which would, everyone knew, decide the pennant race. It was natural enough to blame the young new manager, Catlik conceded. How could people know about the insidious discord fostered by Steve Potter? How could they know about Carol?

Carol Dempsey was waiting for him in the hotel grill. She looked up from her iced tea and grinned. "What's the alibi today?"

He said: "Look, I got a day off. Tomorrow the Bulls. Today I play. Let's not talk about baseball."

"It's your life," she pointed out. She was a small dark girl with elfin features and full red lips. She shook her head. "You can't play any more, not the way you used to. You're a

manager now. If we tried to take a day off and go to the beach, say, you'd be worrying whether Kilroy can pitch tomorrow."

She was right. He saw Steve Potter coming in, and knew she was going out with Steve that afternoon, to swim and dine and dance. Potter could relax and have fun—all he had to do was play shortstop tomorrow.

Catlik stood up. He said: "I'll be seeing you around, Carol." It sounded ungracious and curt. He added: "You know how I feel—about things."

Her face was expressionless. "I think you're wrong, Cat."

He nodded. "Most people do." He said: "Hello, Steve. Anything new?"

Potter had a strong, lean face. He carried his head high and a little to one side, so that he seemed perpetually to be challenging the world. "Nothing new."

CATLIK knew then that Potter had also been up in the Star front office. He sensed it in the cool way the shortstop regarded him, in the cocky sharpness of his voice. Gaunt was Potter's ally. Gaunt must have informed him that if the Bulls won a game of this series, Catlik would be out—and Potter in as manager. It was unfair, Catlik thought angrily, and it had helped nothing to tell Potter this.

He said: "We're going to start winning tomorrow." His jaw was rigid, his eyes hot. "I'm shaking the line-up. Ford will bat fifth. I'll take the pressure off you and hit sixth. You drop into the seventh slot. That'll strengthen the bottom of the list, and if Kovacs snaps out of it, he ought to shove you around the bases. . . . Kilroy will go tomorrow, and again Saturday if he can make it."

"Kilroy's arm is sore," said Potter challengingly.

"He says," Cat said dryly. Then he clamped his lips shut. Kilroy and Potter were friends. Kilroy was one of the best pitchers in the world when he felt right, but he was a hypochondriac, and his imaginary ills hampered his effectiveness—another managerial problem. Cat went on: "I may as well tell you, Steve, if anyone fails to hustle from now on, he's benched. Maybe traded. I'm passing the word around. From now on, it's fish or cut bait."

Carol murmured: "This is his day off. He doesn't want to talk baseball, or think about baseball."

Potter said sharply: "Batting me down seventh may not be so smart, Cat. I may get robbed a time at bat."

"You're not setting the woods afire," Cat pointed out. "None of us are hitting at our regular gait."

"You're the boss," Potter shrugged, sneering a little. He might just as well have added, "now, but not later,"

Cat thought. Carol looked from one to the other, her eyes inquiring.

Cat said abruptly: "Have fun, Carol." He rose and left the hotel. He went down to the park in a taxi, seething at Potter's attitude, at Carol's seeming indifference.

Kilroy was on the rubbing-table. There were no other ballplayers around. Doc Stone was working on Kilroy's shoulder. Cat stood and watched. Kilroy was a big, gangling man from the backwoods of Kentucky, an uneducated man. He groaned as Doc kneaded his shoulder. "It hurts—right there."

Cat snapped suddenly: "It better not hurt tomorrow."

"Huh?" The big, ugly pitcher stared at Catlik. "Gee, Cat, I thought you were the only guy 'preciated my troubles. Gee, Cat, you sore at me?" He looked as though he would weep at any moment.

Catlik sighed. "Sure—sure, Kilroy. You'll be all right. You'll get by in there on your nerve."

"I got the nerve," beamed Kilroy. "I'll be in there, Cat. You seen Steve around, Cat? He gives me a good feelin'—knowin' he's behind me, makin' those sweet plays."

"Steve's busy," said Cat. "He'll be behind you tomorrow."

He went into his office and stared at the wall. He couldn't be rough with Kilroy. Nor with most of them. Potter was different. Potter started yakking at Catlik every time the opportunity afforded.

Part of that was Carol, Catlik honestly admitted, and he should never let Carol, or any other outside influence, impinge upon baseball. There was no room for anything but the game itself. . . .

He got out the dope book on the Bulls, and bent his stubborn face over it, figuring angles. Carol had been right—this was his life. Why should a woman want a man who had a stitched horsehide cover wrapped tightly around his heart?

THE Bulls had a bunch of right-handed sluggers. Bitsy Hart, Tim Maloney, Fritz Kunz, Dandy Pitizzi all hit down the left-field line. Even Kilroy with his long left arm could not stop them from powdering the ball. But the Kentuckian had control and could keep it low and make them hit into the dirt, Catlik hoped. He sat on the bench, making out his line-up.

Potter was jawing at the men. "This is the pay-off. I'm goin' to cut up any Bull that tries to block those baselines. I'm going to stuff the ball down the throat of any slob who tries to spike me. . . . This is the time to get tough in there."

Potter was out to win, the same as if a job as manager did not depend



on the Stars' losing, Catlik admitted. Potter wasn't dishonest. He was just a high-strung, pugnacious holler guy.

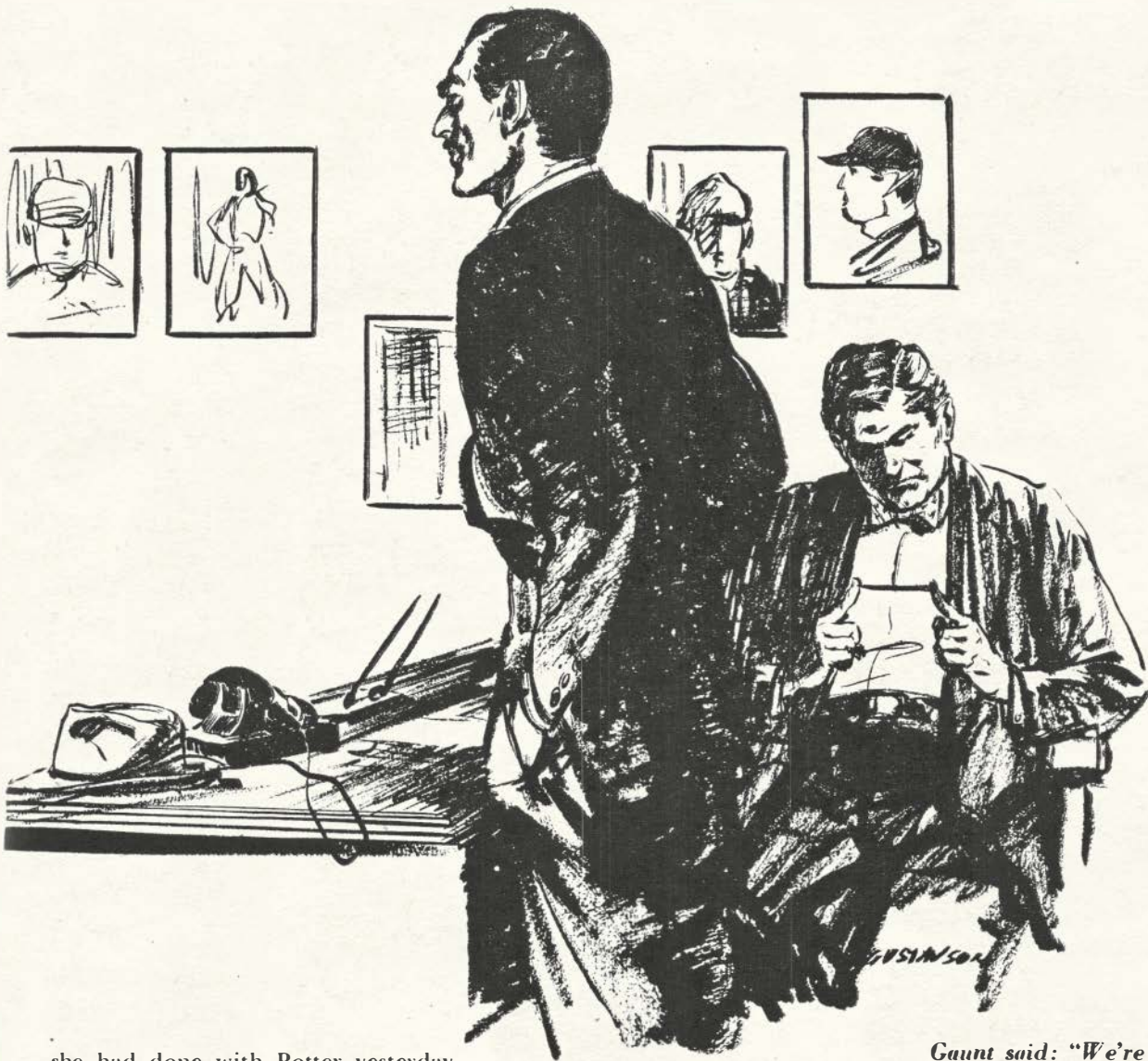
Erlandson said nothing. He was quiet and easy-going, a smooth and mechanically perfect second baseman. Ford Mack, the towering giant who played first, shrugged and grinned—nobody tried to spike him. The outfielders shifted uneasily as Potter lashed at them. Bo Kovacs, the young catcher, shifted nervously, and muttered that he too was tough enough, he reckoned.

Catlik arose to take the line-up to the umpire. He said quietly to Kovacs: "Never mind that. Remember about the Bull hitters. Remember you've got to hold Kilroy."

Kovacs said: "All right, Cat. All right."

But they were tense, Catlik knew. He took the field and threw the ball around with the others while he kept an eye on Kilroy. The big pitcher felt tenderly of his shoulder after every throw.

Hart led off for the Bulls. The stands were full. Carol sat just above the dugout. She wore green that day. Catlik clamped shut his jaw and refused to think about Carol and what



Gaunt said: "We're thinking of turning the team over to Potter."

she had done with Potter yesterday, and whether he would see her this night.

Kilroy fiddled around. The umpire gave him the sign to start chucking. Catlik balanced, playing close to the bag for Hart.

Kilroy threw a low curve. Hart swung. It came down to third like a cannon shot. Catlik went into it. The shot was so stiff it handcuffed him for a second. He threw while off balance. The toss was a little wild. Mack was pulled off the bag, and Hart was safe.

Potter snapped: "Too bad, Kilroy, ol' kid. Not your fault, boy."

Catlik walked over and said: "I'm sorry, Kil."

The lean hurler gulped and looked mournful. "I'll try, Cat. My arm sure hurts."

Catlik went back to position. It had not been his fault—another man, waiting for the hop, might have muffed the ball altogether, and it would have been scored a hit—instead of an error. Kilroy had given Hart too much of the ball to see. But Kilroy had to be coddled.

Maloney, the left fielder of the Bulls, squared off. Catlik crept in

on the grass to cut off the bunt. He signed to Erlandson. Maloney loosened his grip and crouched and Hart was off as the ball trickled down toward third on the grass.

Catlik was over and swooping. His peg to second was low, but right in there. Erlandson had only to bend and kick the bag.

But Erlandson was not quite there. The ball went into centerfield. Potter, backing up, retrieved it and held Hart on second. Catlik ran over to where Potter was screaming, "You lunkhead, you saw his sign. Where were you?" at Erlandson.

Catlik said: "My fault, kid. I let go too quick. It was a low throw."

Erlandson was scarlet. Kilroy was mournfully holding his shoulder.

Kunz was a long hitter. He waited for a good one, and when Kilroy finally gave him one, he belted it cleanly into left field. Hart scored. Maloney made third. Kunz roosted on first.

Catlik went over and said: "Just tough luck. Keep throwing, Kil."

The pitcher's jaw was set. He said: "He shouldn't of hit it. It wasn't even a good ball."

Catlik said: "Show 'em, Kil. You can do it." Behind his back he signaled for a relief man to get ready. He went back to third.

Dandy Pitizzi was up. The third baseman was a heavy hitter, but not swift. Catlik played him medium deep, then swiftly charged in as Pitizzi attempted to bunt.

The ball came down fast. Maloney was charging the plate where Kovacci waited, set to block him off.

Catlik bent and threw to second. Erlandson was there this time. His catch and peg to first were poeny. He caught Pitizzi to complete the double play—as Maloney scored.

Catlik waved his arms and snapped, "Y'see, Kil? Two down, boy! Get to 'em, Kil!"

Big Ford Mack boomed, "Now you got 'em, Kil. We'll get two lousy runs back for you, boy!"

Potter said not a word. Potter would have played to block off Ma-

loney and the run, Catlik knew, and was implying dissent by silence. Kilroy gritted his teeth and struck out Hill, the Bull first baseman. Catlik waved his men off the field. They came in a bit too slowly, he thought with some impatience—they were still stars, still the big shots, even though they were in second place, and slipping.

Yet he said nothing sharp to them, even though Moish Kohn, ace Bull pitcher, set them down in order. He went back on the field and carefully watched Kilroy.

The Bulls kept slugging, but Kil had them hitting into the dirt now. Catlik gobbled ground balls and threw out runners. Steve Potter came up with a couple of beautiful plays. The game settled down and ran into the ending of the ninth without either team scoring again.

Catlik led off the ninth. He was hitless for the day. He ground his jaws together and watched Moish's arm. The Bull pitcher seemed strong—but after feeding through a swift one, his wrist dropped loose at his side.

Catlik dug in. The next ball was a curve. Moish's curve had been breaking sharp. Now Catlik took a stride into it. The hook was just a trifle off. . . . Catlik belted it cleanly into right field for a rousing double.

Steve Potter, also goose-eggs for the game, was at bat. Catlik took a long lead. Potter swung on the first pitch. He got it on the handle, and it skidded down toward third. Catlik was racing for the bag. He had to leap to avoid the spinning ball. He slid hard as Sidirski, Bull shortstop, made the play and tried to tab him with a quick throw.

THE ball got away from Pitizzi in the collision. Catlik was safe. Potter went to second. The crowd came awake, howling.

Bo Kovacsi walked. A relief pitcher was warming up. Catlik waved at the bench; and Hudson, a veteran utility outfielder, started up to bat for Kilroy. Catlik bellowed: "No—no! Let Kil hit!"

Chewing his cud, the string-bean pitcher went to the plate. He struck out ignominiously. Again Potter was silent, on second, with arms akimbo.

Erlandson came up. He popped to the pitcher.

Noddy Colby, right fielder, was selecting a bat. Moish Kohn was pulling it out. . . . Catlik waved. Colby, a star hitter for years, blinked amazement. Hudson took a bat and went up. Potter said audibly: "You've lost your mind, Cat."

But the grizzled, canny Hudson had seen the limp wrist action of Kohn. Leaping on an attempted curve ball, he smashed it into right field. Catlik

scored standing up. Potter scored sliding.

Sweetie Jones hit a long fly and went out. The score was tied.

Potter was shaking his head. Catlik bit his lip, speaking to Kilroy. The Kentuckian held his shoulder out of habit, went into the box and struck out three of the best Bull hitters. . . .

Dal Haley led off for the Stars. Kohn threw a curve, and Haley hit it to the wall and went into third on his face. Ford Mack went up, grinning and swinging three bats. Selecting the big black mace which was his prize, he lashed Kohn's first offering to right field—and with sudden dramatics, the game was over. . . .

Catlik ran for the dressing-room. He was first inside the door. As each man entered, he grabbed his hand. He didn't say anything. He just grinned at them from one large ear to the other. By accident or design, Potter was the last man in the line. He said loudly: "We were lucky, very lucky. Moish weakened just at the right time."

There was a short silence. Then Ford Mack said explosively: "Cat left Kil in there to stop 'em in the tenth. . . . And he figured Moish was through, and Hudson would hit him."

You could argue along those lines for hours, Catlik knew. He said

briskly: "We win, don't we? Let's talk about tomorrow."

Noddy Colby was affronted, he knew. He spoke to Noddy, advising him to stop trying for the fences and hit for singles. He found Kilroy on the rubbing-table and he poured inordinate praise into the Kentuckian's ears. He spoke separately to every man on the team. . . .

They were all dressed and gone when he finally showered. He sat wearily in the little office, going over tomorrow's game in his mind. He would pitch Adams. . . . He would watch the Bull defense closer. . . . Playing and managing was tough, with the thousand details he had to remember. . . . He forgot all about Carol Dempsey and Steve Potter and personal problems.

IT was impossible, but going into the fourth game, the Stars had made a sweep. Carson came into the clubhouse before game time and said: "You look beat-up, Cat."

"We're winnin'," said Catlik.

"On scratch hits and your maneuvering. The team can't keep going like this. Have you got it solved?"

"No," said Catlik flatly.

"Potter?"

"It was unfair to call him in and tell him he was in line for my job," said Catlik in a low voice. "He's second-guessing me—and you can't blame him."

Carson said: "That was Gaunt. . . . For my money, you've proved you're a great manager, Cat. But we made a deal, and Gaunt is listening to Potter and I can't budge him. You've got to win today."

"Or lose my job." Catlik sighed. "No color, huh? Just a rule-of-thumb manager. I don't argue with umps or hit spectators on the chin."

Carson said: "I think you're right. But Gaunt—"

Catlik said: "Potter moves in on my girl—and my job." He was talking half to himself. "Maybe he's better than me. . . . Okay, Carson. Either we win today—or you have my resignation."

Carson left. After a moment Catlik went into the dressing-room. Kilroy was on the table. Potter, Noddy Clark and a couple of others separated as Catlik came toward them.

Kil moaned: "My arm hurts terrible, Cat."

"I know," said Catlik soothingly. "But you've got the guts. You'll show them."

"I'll try," Kilroy said stoutly.

Potter glanced significantly at his pals. Catlik moved to where Kovacsi nursed bruises gained in blocking the Bulls off the plate. The kid said in a low voice: "Whyn't you put the slug on Potter? They're runnin' you down—and he started it."

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"Hold Kil in line," advised Catlik. "I'll handle the rest."

But he did not know how, not even when he took the field and Kilroy started by walking Hart and giving Maloney a hit, and putting men on first and second. He went in for Kunz's bunt. He laid it over to first and got Kunz, but the runners advanced.

Pitizzi hit one into left field. Hart scored. Maloney scored.

Kilroy buckled down. Hall hit to Potter, who started a lovely double play to end the inning—but again the Bulls had a two-run lead in the first inning. And Moish Kohn, rested, set down the Stars in order.

It can't be done twice in a short series against such a pitcher as Kohn. . . . The thought kept pounding into Catlik's mind. He saw Carol in the stands—dressed in green again. For luck? For whose luck? Potter's luck would spring from loss of the game. How could the Stars, with their puny hitting, twice spot the Bulls a two-run lead and win? . . .

Potter was jawing on the bench, riding Moish Kohn, yakking at his fellow-players. Haley and Mack went out. Catlik went to the plate. He stood there listening to Potter's harsh voice. . . .

Moish Kohn threw a hard one close to his head, and Cat went down on his knees to avoid being skulled. Someone jeered. He got up. Kohn dusted him off again.

Catlik arose very slowly, brushing himself. Kohn was glaring at him, and Cat remembered that he had started Moish on the way out with his hit in the first game of the series. . . . Everyone, even a nice guy like Kohn, had a streak of vengeance in him.

He resumed his stance. Kohn had to feed one over. Cat leaped and struck. The ball zoomed down to deep short, forcing Sidirski to his right. Cat pounded down to first, safe by an inch.

He took a deep breath, watching Potter come up. Kohn said something to him about being "lucky." He stood on the bag and made a trumpet of his hands. "You'll never go nine innings today, you blow-off jerk. And don't throw at my head again, or I'll come out there and pin back your big fat ears!"

Kohn blinked. He started toward first, stopped. Hill, Bull first sacker, stared unbelievably at Catlik. Even the umpires froze, their eyes on the Star manager. Catlik howled: "Play ball, you yellow jerks!"

Kohn, enraged, threw to catch him off first. Catlik went off with Kohn's arm. He went down to second and slid in, spikes kicking.

Sidirski muffed the throw!

Cat stood triumphant, waving his arms. Kohn pitched to Potter. He



Catlik said: "We start winning tomorrow. If anyone fails to hustle from now on, he's benched, Steve."

threw two balls, then two curving strikes. He threw a third one low on the outside. The umpire called it a third strike!

Potter swung about. His jaw bulged, his mouth twisted. The umpire started to walk away from him.

ALL the way in from second base, Cat shoved Potter away and went around in front of the umpire. He raged: "You double-barreled blind baboon, you could see that was a ball! Even you couldn't miss it. You robber, you ought to be arrested for that one!"

The big red-faced umpire said: "Anybody but you, Cat, and I'd chuck him outa the game. G'wan, beat it."

Cat said, "If you pull another like that, I'll club you to death, Morgan, believe me!" He kicked dirt on Morgan's black shoes and stalked back onto the field. Potter went past him to the shortstop position. Cat said in low, baleful, icy accents: "If you take a third strike with your bat on your shoulder, I'll bench you, so help me!"

Potter said: "But, Cat, you said yourself it was wide—"

"Take your cut! You stranded me, you bum!"

Potter squealed: "Don't you call me a bum, you bum!"

"Shaddup, or you're benched now!"

Potter shut up. Kilroy, overhearing the exchange, was red to the ears. His long face solemn, he pitched beautiful ball and got the Bulls in order. . . .

Kovacs was to lead off. Cat said in his ear: "Get tough, kid. They don't expect it of us."

The catcher nodded and swaggered to the plate. Cat sought Erlandson, who was on deck. He said: "If I can do it, you can. Get up there and fight for your rights. Show off a little."

"That ain't my way," protested the second sacker.

"Is it mine?" demanded Catlik. "You saw Kohn throw at my head. They started it. . . . Give it back to them."

He buttonholed Noddy Colby and said grimly: "I took you out once for a hitter. . . . You start battlin', or Hudson plays right field."

He was talking to the biggest stars of the game. He got Sweetie Jones aside and verbally cuffed him. He gave Dal Haley a fit. He prodded big Ford Mack. He came to Potter.

He said: "Don't take any more third strikes: that's all I've got to say to you."

Potter said: "You can't bulldoze me, Cat. . . . I'm as big as you on this club. I'm not taking—"

"You're taking what I dish out—today. It could be a fine and suspension too. Or a punch in the nose!"

"Any day you wanta try it!" Potter raged.

"That'll come after the game," Cat promised. "Right now you either begin to play ball—or I'll know what to do."

"Begin to play—" Potter gasped, but Cat was already gone away from him. Potter took off his cap and wiped a sweating brow.

Kovasi bulled a hit into left, and jawed at Kohn on his way to first. Kilroy wagged his bat with great flourishes even as he struck out. Erlandson, his smooth, calm face disarrayed with a hard grimace, slammed the first pitch with everything it had. The ball went straight to Sidirski, who promptly began a double play which retired the side. . . .

Erlandson turned from the baseline toward the outfield grass where his glove lay. His head was bent, his lips moving. The customarily silent, dead-panned second sacker was cursing himself twenty to the second.

Catlik said nothing, squatting at third. His belligerence came through in his stolid stance, the thrust of his square chin. Kunz nailed one down the line. Catlik spun, back to the plate, speared the zinging ball in his glove, deliberately made the long throw across to Mack with split-second timing to get Kunz.

KILROY seemed to forget his aching arm. He was throwing his heart down there. He had two strikes on Pitizzi when that batter topped a bad ball down to short. Potter, graceful as a mountain goat, went for it.

The ball hopped high and Potter muffed it. Erlandson picked it up, but Pitizzi was safe. Kilroy stood on the mound. He did not look at Potter. He looked at Catlik.

Catlik barked: "Heads up in there. Let's get two!"

Potter said nothing at all. Hall banged to Erlandson, who made a perfect toss to Potter, forcing Pitizzi. Potter swung to complete the double play. His throw was just wide enough to haul Mack off the bag, and Hall was safe.

Now Erlandson looked down at Catlik. Kilroy, outraged, kneaded a new ball in his long fingers. Mack walked around first, kicking at pebbles. The usually reliable Potter had booted two in a row—after making his big talk for all to hear.

Catlik said: "Two away, Kil. You got 'em, boy."



Kilroy accepted this—two were away. Simple, straightforward, he could blot out everything but the present situation; it was one of his great competitive virtues. He struck out Hayden.

Moish Kohn was working like a clock. The betraying weakness never showed this day as he curved ball after ball into the hitting slot, sending the Stars slinking back to the bench. He had the erstwhile great sluggers talking to themselves, paying him that greatest of baseball compliments, "He ain't got a thing on it but his glove and a prayer," as none of the home team reached second.

Yet every Star was trying. Catlik drove them with his voice, and they responded. Even as they went down, they were coming together, each listening to his harsh chatter, his catcalls at the opposition, his arguments with the amazed umpires, each Star listening as though with an inner ear.

Underneath, he was coldly calculating. Yet this was not an act, he was

aware; he was not suddenly putting it on to drive his men. It was the culmination of months of travail, of his fight against frustrating influences and happenings. Kohn had set it off with his hot-headed use of the duster—for Kohn was not a ruffian; Kohn was a college-bred gentleman. Circumstance had made Kohn a tough fighter—to provide the spark to set off Catlik.

Even then, in the throes of battle, he began to suspect his own failing in the past. Brains and control will go so far; then the emotions must enter the fray. It was a lesson, he thought, a good lesson. He spoke sharply to all the Stars—excepting only Potter.

Potter seemed to have faded, like a cheap colored shirt on the wash-line under a blazing sun. Potter had committed two errors in one inning, and had gone hitless going into the ninth, with Noddy Colby leading off for the Stars, and the score still 2 to 0 against the home club.

Potter was glancing more and more often toward the green dress in the stands above the dugout. Potter was looking for sympathy and understanding now, the bombast gone from him as adversity struck. Catlik drew a deep breath as the Stars came in for their last raps. This was the end of the trail. If they failed him now,

strong-armed fireman. Catlik had never been able to hit Grayson. He hesitated, watching the warm-up. Grayson was never swifter or better, he thought.

Time was called. He went into the batter's box slowly, his mind working hard. He took a last glimpse at the green dress. . . . This was it, hail or

pellet. It was beginning to drop. . . . Hall was running. . . .

Hall hit the fence. The ball did not. It kept on going. It was a ball nobody in the park would ever see again.

CATLIK was in his office. Carson and Gaunt had come and gone. Potter edged in like a schoolboy performing a disagreeable task. Catlik said in his old mild voice: "Hello, Steve. You did it. Knocked yourself right out of a job, huh?"

Potter said thickly: "You don't think I'd do anything else? That's what had me down. Those errors. . . . It looked like I was easing up to get to be manager."

Catlik nodded. "That's why I left you in. . . . And I also remembered you always could hit Grayson since you were in the minors together. You've got to remember things like that in this job, Steve. It's not an easy job, you'll learn some day."

Potter said: "I'm not a guy eats crow very easy, Cat."

"You don't have to apologize to me for anything," said Catlik evenly. "You're a great ball-player. So are the rest of us, now. I blew my top today—I won't have to again. We know we've got to fight now—we can't get by on our clippings. That's good enough for me."

Potter said: "Just lemme say I'm with you, huh, Cat?"

"That's my boy!" They grinned at each other, and Potter left.

They were all gone when Catlik had dressed and went out of the ball park through the players' gate. He looked for a taxicab, and one pulled up as though by magic. He got in and a voice said: "Just drive around awhile, will you, cabby?"

Catlik sank into the cushions. He said:

"Hello, Carol. Where is Steve?"

"He suggested I wait for you. He and I came to a decision after the first game, Cat."

Her eyes were on him, and he could not pull away from her glance. He said slowly:

"I don't understand."

"I couldn't weigh it any longer. You were alone out there. I saw you fighting alone, making your decisions for yourself and the team, never letting anything sway you. Today just proved what I always believed."

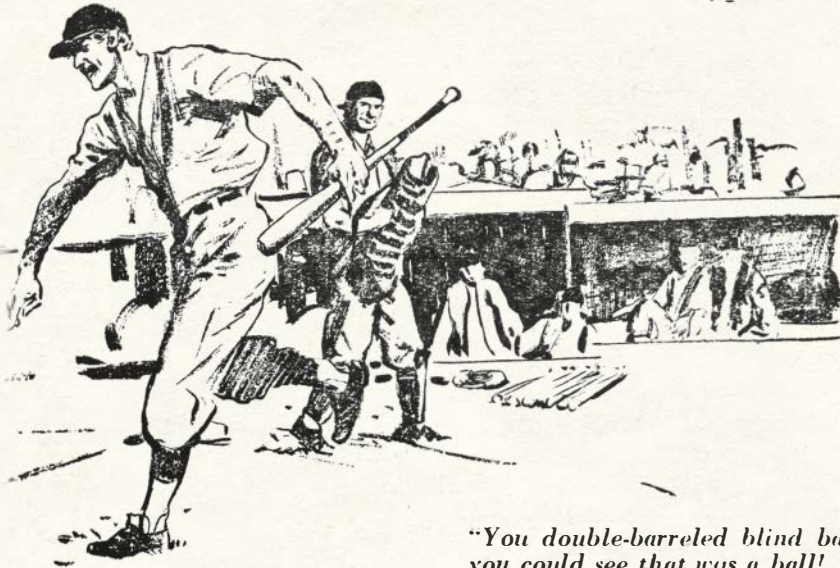
Cat said: "It's just baseball, baby."

"No. It's more than baseball. It's a way of living. And it's courage in the face of odds. And—anyway, Cat, I couldn't stand you being alone and fighting, with no one to talk to, no one backing you all the way."

His eyes lighted. He said: "I'll buy that!"

Then he didn't have to talk any more. It was all right, then.

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



"You double-barreled blind baboon, you could see that was a ball! Even you couldn't miss it!"

Potter got his job. Potter already had his girl—Catlik had not seen Carol since the beginning of the series, except from a distance.

Noddy Colby was up. Moish Kohn threw him a good ball and Colby nailed it to the wall—where Hall pulled it down for an out. Catlik's heart sank. He saw Kohn's arm drop lifelessly again. He gave Sweetie Jones the nod to wait out the Bull pitcher.

Kohn, going on heart now, made Jones cut at a good one with a pay-off pitch at full count, and Sweetie fouled out. Haley glanced at Catlik.

"Wait him out," signaled Cat stubbornly.

Haley walked. . . .

Ford Mack looked pleadingly at the bench. Catlik came out to find his favorite bat. He gave the signal to wait out Kohn. Potter, a strike-out victim all afternoon, batted next, then Kovacs, then the pitcher. Mack could and did hit a long ball—but two were out. Mack took the sign. He walked.

Catlik had put himself right on the spot. Two away, the tying run on first, himself at bat. He strode to the plate and saw that Kohn was through. The Bulls were to get a relief pitcher. He stood aside, waiting to see who would be the new hurler.

If it was Grayson— It was Grayson, a man he knew well, a cold-eyed,

farewell. He could not now insert someone else into the spot he had created.

He let two strikes go by. The fans were edging toward the exits. He watched two waste pitches. Then Grayson came in with a high, hard one, a strike-out pitch.

He met it, not quite squarely, but with wood enough to knock it past Grayson. Sidirski made a great pick-up. The runners moved up, but Haley could not score. . . . The bases were loaded; two were out, and Potter was at bat.

He could do it now, Catlik knew. He saw Hudson crawl out and blink at him. Hudson was the man to match Grayson with coolness in the clutch. He could yank Potter, who had struck out three times that afternoon. It would be difficult for them to make Potter manager over his head if he made such a decision—and he would be admittedly correct in so doing. . . .

He stood on first and trumpeted through cupped hands: "He's your cousin, Steve. Knock it down his throat! If I can hit him, you can hit him!"

Grayson wheeled down his swift. It was a bit outside, but it was grooved to Potter's free swing. The shortstop's jaw stuck out half a mile. He came belting around into the ball.

Catlik paused at second to make sure. The game hung on the flying



The Men and the Boys

The hard grind a race-driver goes through is a fine screen to sort out the men from the boys.

by COLEMAN MEYER

BIG ED AHRENS likes to boast that he's a self-made guy. And like all self-made guys, his opinions have the flexibility of a Diesel crankshaft. That's why I knew I was in for trouble when I saw Ed's Beechcraft do a tight turn over the speedway, waggle the wings once and streak for the Oakland Airport. It's only a spit and a holler away from the speedway.

"That's the Old Man," I told one of the pit boys. "Better take the station wagon and pick him up." Then I returned to my private worrying.

My private worry was drumming the hard-surfaced five-eighths mile at a nice easy 3000-r.p.m. pace, breaking in a new set of pistons. His name was Bob Walcott: he was a nice kid, a sweetheart with a race car—and Ed had said to fire him!

I walked out to the ramp, waved the kid in. He took a lap slowing down, came in with a puzzled expression on his face. "What's up?"

"The Old Man was," I replied. "He's down now, and he'll be over here in a minute. And maybe you won't have a seat in No. 5 in two minutes."

Bob made a face at the mention of Ed's name. "I don't get it, Clayt," he protested. "I haven't spoken two

words to the guy. In fact, I've only seen him once—when he came down to watch the half-mile meet at Goshen. What's he so down on me for? What did I do to him?"

"You didn't do anything," I answered kindly. "You see, son—it's this way: Ed's got a couple of million dollars, high blood pressure and a conviction that he can never be wrong. The couple of million bucks lets him indulge his hobby of these three cars. The high blood pressure makes his face red and his conversation loud. And the conviction that he's never wrong is the reason he wants me to fire you. I didn't tell you this before, but at Goshen he told me to get another driver for Five."

"But why, Clayt?" Bob persisted, a puzzled frown showing beneath his raised goggles.

"Because," I explained reluctantly, "the Old Man's got a big-shot complex. He runs a hell of a lot of factories, mines and everything else, so many he doesn't know what he owns himself. And he likes to boast that he's never made a mistake in his snap judgments yet. He storms into one of those places maybe once a month or once a year, goes through it like a whirlwind, promotes nine guys and fires six. Then they don't see him any more. You just happen to be one

of the six. You remember how you found it heavy going at Goshen—"

"The car was strange!" Bob countered swifly. "I'd only been in it for two minutes. I got fourth place, at that!"

"I know," I agreed sadly. "But Ed was gone by that time. He just took one look at the heat race, snapped his fingers and said: 'Clayt—that boy just doesn't *have* it!'" I heard a call from the other side of the track, looked over the shining cream hood of No. 5, said: "Here he is now. Just keep quiet. Let me handle this."

I've been with Ed since World War I: so I don't get too disturbed by the Big Executive voice. He's big, jugg-eared and has a voice like a hundred-watt amplifier. "I thought I told you to get another boy for Five," he frowned.

"Nobody available yet," I shrugged. "Unless you want me to go back driving—and I can't hear the engine for the racket my arteries make. Anyhow, the kid's all right, Ed. He's coming along fine. I'd say one more year, and he'll be ready for the bricks."

He snorted his disgust, looked at me narrowly. "You'll never learn, will you, Clayt? A boy either has stomach or he hasn't. This kid hasn't!"

"Aw—he was new to the car when you saw him—" I began.

"New—old!" he growled. "What difference does it make? A boy with guts enough to leave it cranked on, is what this business needs. These guys that want to do a job of research on every automobile before they put their foot on the floor give me a pain. Why, in the old days—"

I forestalled the familiar tale hastily. "Going to stay down until the race meet Sunday?" I asked.

Ed's rages are like summer showers. He clapped me on the shoulder. "No. Just dropped down on business," he boomed heartily. "What I really wanted to tell you was that I'm having a little party for Janice over Saturday at Hacienda. I want you to come up." Janice is Ed's daughter, a million dollars' worth of honey-blonde rolled up in a sun-tanned skin and a lovely smile. Hacienda is Ed's ranch-home, a million dollars' worth of house unrolled on a plateau.

"But we're racing Sunday," I disented. "I've got things to do—"

"Have you back in plenty of time," he said over his shoulder as he turned to leave. "I'll send Dotty down in the Beechcraft tomorrow morning. You can spend the day and Saturday night at the ranch, and she'll fly you back early Sunday morning." He paused as though an afterthought struck him. "Tell you what, Clayt—bring the boy up, too. That Bob Walcott, I mean." Then he was gone, and I could almost see the papers swirl at his passage.

Dotty is Ed's secretary, confidential adviser and general keeper-in-line. She was right on time the next morning at the airport, and we tossed the bags into the back seat. I spent the next forty minutes straightening out young Walcott while the Beechcraft was straightening out California and working on the edges of Nevada.

Bob didn't like any part of this. "He doesn't like me—so he invites me to a house party," he grumbled with a set to the clean line of his jaw. He ran slim fingers through his curly blond hair.

"You've got the wrong slant, son," I soothed. "Ed isn't mad at you personally. In fact, you could be Wilbur Shaw, and he'd still say fire you—just because he believes he's never wrong in his snap judgments.

"You see—Ed just won't grow old gracefully. He's fifty-eight; he looks fifty and works hard at playing thirty-five. He's played hard all his life, and he just can't slow down. He was a dirt-track man back in the old days, with a reputation that started where Oldfield left off; he was my colonel in the first war, and he could outdrink, outfight and outfly every guy between Dieppe and Chalon Sûr. I've got the stomach ulcers to prove it. That was

twenty-seven years ago. Don't sell it short that he can't do it yet!"

Dotty let the wheels down and settled the Beech on Ed's private airport. We parked the plane, skirted the swimming-pool that led to the huge house perched atop the range that runs between Reno and Ferndale. One of Ed's mines is fifteen miles away over a narrow, twisting road, and the house sits in solitary splendor atop something that was once just a range top. Ed's bankroll and his bulldozers combined to carve out an auditorium smaller only than San Simeon.

"Welcome home." Janice said, and gave me an uncle kiss. I introduced Bob. "So nice of you to come," she murmured. A nicely set-up young chap in a uniform with a gold bar on his collar and wings over the shirt pocket was with her. She introduced Lieutenant Bill Hanley. We all shook hands.

Hanley sort of paused as he took Bob's hand. "Haven't we met before?" he asked pleasantly.

"I don't think so," Bob replied shortly.

Ed's mild whisper covered the swimming-pool and patio with sound.

There's only so much you can do with an airplane. He did it all.

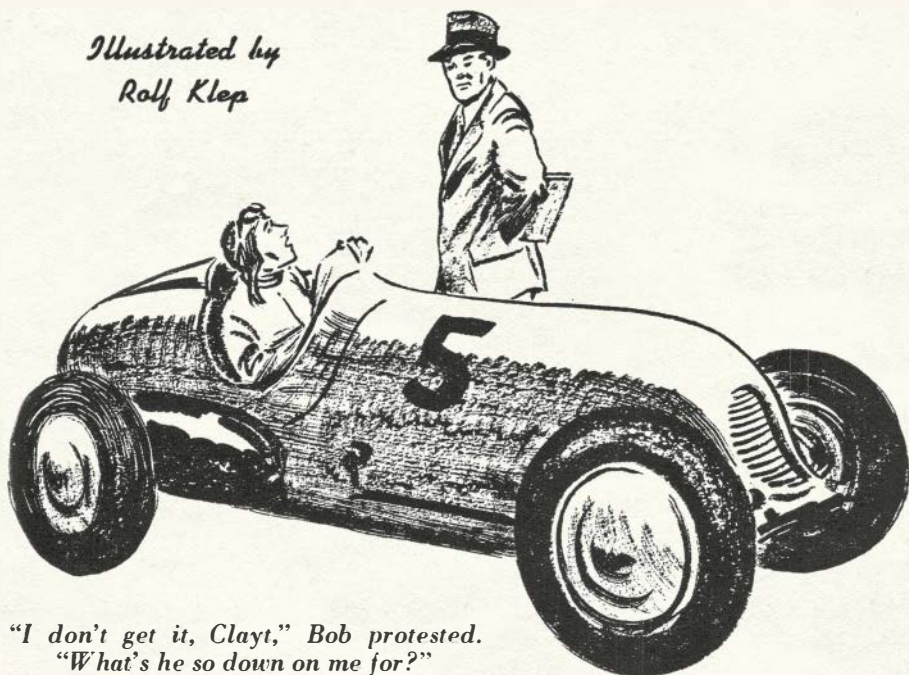


"Come on over and sit down," he invited. My prerogative as practically one of the family allowed me to make loud noises for a highball, and found me a comfortable beach chair. Soon everyone had a beach chair. And a highball.

Ed just naturally dominates any gathering, but it's agreeable domination. He has that easy knack of conversation that seems to belong to guys who have knocked around the world. I could see that young Hanley was charmed by the personality of his host. Bob had me worried. His clean jaw was set in a firm line, and I knew that he was suspiciously resentful of the command invitation.

After a while Hanley said: "I see that you have a P-T-17 on your field,

Illustrated by
Rolf Klep



"I don't get it, Clayt," Bob protested.
"What's he so down on me for?"

Mr. Ahrens. I took my Army Primary training in one."

"Fine," Ed boomed. "Like to play with it a while?" Hanley's eyes lighted appreciatively, and we all moved out to the runway.

The hangar holds three ships: Ed's Beech, a Cub for the entertainment of his guests, and a battered PT-17 with an oversize Wasp in the nose for his personal pleasure. Hanley put on a pretty fair show. He knew all the standard set, slow rolls, half rolls, Immelmans and all the stuff that goes with Army Primary. We watched with interest, and Ed roared, "Nice job, son!" as Hanley braked to stop.

HE couldn't wait until he got the Army boy out, though. He wedged his two hundred plus into the cockpit, slow-rolled twice on take-off and Immelmanned from the roll. Ed's been flying for twenty-five years, and he knows all the answers. Janice watched for a while with bored interest, finally said: "I've seen this all before. I'll be back in a bit." And she walked over and cranked the Cub through. Ed was still in the air when the tiny yellow plane skimmed the runway and winged over the valley.

Hanley, eyes aloft, came sauntering over near me. "Your friend Walcott," he said. "I can't get over the idea I've seen him or met him somewhere. Was he in the service?"

"Could be," I shrugged. "But you'd never know it from him. A clam makes more noise."

The Stearman blooped and rolled and spun. Finally it buzzed the field, tight-turned and landed out of a wrenching forward slip. Hanley eyed Ed with respect as the 17 slid gravel to a stop. "Sorry I put on that show awhile ago, sir. I didn't know I was

showing my muscle in the big leagues."

"That's all right, son," Ed bellowed, eyes crinkling with pleasure at the implied compliment. "The Old Man hasn't forgotten all the things he knew." His glance caught Bob. "You fly, Walcott?" And taking the negative for granted, he continued: "Come on, anyhow. I'll take you for a ride. We'll take it easy."

Bob hesitated, said: "I—" Then he clamped his lips shut and climbed in, after strapping on a chute.

"Taking it easy" was enough to make a tumbling pigeon dizzy in ten minutes. It was thirty before they landed, and Bob was ashen-faced when they got out. Ed appraised him with a glance, looked at me with that pleased "I-told-you-so" air.

I walked over by the tail where the blond youngster was paying his debt to an outraged stomach.

"Okay, Bob?" I asked.

He straightened up after a moment, swallowed hard. "Okay," he replied quietly. "I forgot to mention that I always get sick when somebody flies me."

I could hear Ed's voice in the background talking to young Hanley, "That's the stuff that separates the men from the boys—" when a scream interrupted. We all turned.

Dotty was running through the patio. "Janice!" she cried. "There's been an accident! Do something!" she sobbed.

"Where? What?" I snapped.

I guess Bob got it before any of us. Nausea forgotten, his long legs were carrying him on a dead run toward the front of the house, while the rest of us were waiting for her answer.

"They just phoned from the mine," Dotty choked. "The Cub came over.

The engine quit and it piled up on the flat about seven miles from the mine. Somebody looked with glasses, and says it's standing on its nose!"

Ed said: "My God!" For a moment he looked old and shrunken.

"They're sending a party on horse-back," Dotty continued swiftly. "Say it will be about two hours before they can reach her."

A crunch of tires tearing gravel caught our ears. Ed's huge convertible whined around the driveway. Bob was at the wheel. Hanley and I jumped in the back. Ed said, crisply, "Here, I'll take it!" and started for the driver's side. His voice was once more possessed and authoritative.

I hardly recognized Bob's usually mild voice. "You'll—hell!" he said grimly. "Get in!" And without waiting, he dropped in the clutch. Ed just made the door in a flying leap, and the big convertible was through three gear-changes before we cleared the driveway.

YOU have to know the road to appreciate what five miles in eight minutes means. It runs on the hillside, downgrade for five miles, a narrow, rutted ledge, one car wide. It wouldn't hold an ox-cart if the ox was enthusiastic. But right now it was holding six thousand pounds of plunging automobile in impossible maneuvers.

Twice the back end, smashing bottom on those plunging leaps, jumped the rut and teetered on the edge of nothing. And twice a lightning shift into a full-power second gear spun the wheels right back into the groove. Once the front end jumped clear of the path, and I shut my eyes as a thousand feet of emptiness loomed in front of the radiator.

I opened them in time to see Bob's strong fingers holding the wheel at full lock toward the bank, and heard the enormous tires shoving dirt as they shuddered sideways. I caught his face in the rear-view mirror, his lips a straight, hard line. The front end dropped back into the groove with a crash that felt as if the axle was folding under, the back end pounding and dancing with a full hundred and sixty-five horsepower shoving hard.

I saw Ed's head turn, gauge Bob at the wheel. "The next turn's the mine. It's pretty short," Ed said. The mildness of his voice surprised me.

We tore half a yard of earth out of the bank, and the big car was two feet in the air as we came out onto the flat where the road widened at the mine entrance. For a moment the throttle lifted, with all four springs squashed flat. "Which way?" Bob's voice grated.

"Right hand, Walcott," Ed replied tersely, and the answer was in second

gear with all the horses tugging at the collar. The convertible spun rubber, arched the corner in a ponderous slide and swept down the now double-width road. The shift into high gear was a faint click at seventy miles an hour.

Without turning his head, Bob flung: "The road—anything I should know?"

"Fairly good. Wide corners. Not too sharp," Ed replied. Then he added, somewhat uncertainly: "Better take it a little easy—"

"I didn't tell you how to run your airplane!" the granite-faced youth answered. The convertible screeched the shallow turn in a light slide, his brown fingers feeding it just enough wheel to hold it there. "It's *your* daughter down there," he added.

Ed started to reply, then clamped his lips. We dived the two miles in little more than a full revolution of the second hand on my watch. I saw Ed's hand tighten on the door handle. I braced my feet, felt Hanley tense. A turn was rushing back at us with frightening speed, a meadow off to the left.

"Snub it!" Ed roared, and dived for the floorboards.

THE brakes bit hard. Gravel washed under the wheels. Nearly three tons of automobile started to spin. Then the brakes released. I was thrown violently back as full throttle hit the wheels. Bob's blond head never moved, and the convertible hit the bank of dirt piled up against the side of the road, with the engine full on.

The springs smashed bottom. Then the rebound lifted the front end, pulled the ponderous convertible into a broad jump that lifted it to the grassy meadow beyond. The engine racketed as the rear end left the ground, and, still in the air, I saw Bob's hand slide the box into second gear.

The front end hit first, bottomed the springs. Just an instant before the rear wheels landed, the engine came on, full bore. The convertible grounded, the rear hoops spinning. That's all that kept it from rolling over. The heavy body, bouncing from the churning wheels, spun in a long, waltzing circle. Then it lurched forward, clambered back on the road. Without a pause he shifted gears up.

Ed's head came up from the floor. "Okay, Walcott," he said. "Another mile. The ship's up the hill from there."

The mile took sixty seconds. We could see the yellow tail of the Cub pointed at the sky near the end of a sort of long plateau, perhaps two miles over the mesquite-dotted ground that rose at a fair angle. A natural creek bed, now dry, separated the road from

the land beyond. The convertible ground to a shuddering stop. Big Ed started out.

Bob's hard eyes surveyed the slope. "Hold it!" he barked. The car jerked backward, nearly thirty miles an hour in reverse. "It'll take three-quarters of an hour to walk it. I can make it across the creek bed."

Ed looked at the span of dry wash, at the right angle turn that led to it. "Sure you can make it?" he asked uncertainly.

"How the hell can I be sure of anything?" Bob snapped. "All I know is that that kid is up there, and only God knows how bad she's hurt!" He braked, snapped it in low and was already moving forward as he added impatiently: "If you want to get out, now's the time! Make up your mind! After all—we have to separate the men and the boys!"

No one moved, and the throttle hit the mat. The convertible ran the full range in low, lurched anew under the full-gun second gear. The corner came rushing back like a target on a short range.

The speedometer was just over seventy when the plunging car hit the corner.

The front end went right down to the fenders. There was a hell of a racket. Then the bottomed springs lifted, and six thousand pounds of rumbling iron soared over the bed of the dry creek.

The landing impact was terrific; it lurched and careened and threatened to roll over, but the foot of the blond youngster never left the mat. Taking advantage of the roll, he picked a cat-footed, swaying path through the sage before the steep pitch bogged it down. There was another broad jump at the top, and then we were on the plateau, racing toward the uptailed yellow plane.

Janice was seated on the far side of the ship, in the shade and idly swinging a dirt-tufted clump of grass. She came blithely forward. "Nice show," she offered idly. Ed looked at her stupidly.

"Why—why—" he spluttered. The red started to rise in his face.

"Don't blow a fuse, Dad," she offered calmly. "I just ran out of gas, couldn't quite fit the Cub in here. I knew somebody would be along before long!"

There was a strained silence in the car on the way back to the house.

BOB was packing in his room, throwing things in his case viciously. I wandered in and said: "Leaving?"

"Just as soon as I can," he said shortly. Something dropped from his hand, and I picked it off the floor. It caught my eye before I handed it back. I opened the leather folder, scanned it for a moment, then

whistled. "I didn't want any part of this deal to begin with, and you can tell the Big Shot he can have his contract and his seat in No. 5 and the hell with him!" He zipped the case shut with an angry pull. "I've got one more little thing to do, though."

We walked to the patio where Ed and young Hanley were standing. "You mind if I start the PT, sir?" Bob asked of Ed.

Ed's eyes studied him quizzically. "Not at all," he replied slowly. As we walked out to the hangar he added: "I didn't know you could fly."

"You didn't wait to find out," Bob answered grimly.

BOB turned the Stearman around after warm-up, locked the brakes and called: "Care to go along, Mr. Ahrens?"

Ed shook his lion head slowly. His eyes studied the youth in the cockpit. "I don't think so," he answered deliberately. Then, as though his mind was made up to something, his eyes twinkled. "No—I'll take a rain-check on this one. Go ahead—son!"

Bob suddenly grinned. Then he gunned the Stearman.

There's only so much you can do with an airplane. Walcott did it all—from an altitude of three hundred feet minus. He slow-rolled with the wing span just clearing the ground, looped at three feet, rolled the wheels on the ground coming out and then Immelmanned from the loop. I heard Hanley, standing near me, whistle, then slap his leg.

"Hell!" he blurted. "Now I know him! That's the kid that was with the Eagle Squadron on Spitfires! The one that always had grass on top of his radio aerial. They were just changing bases the day we got to England. That's what made me think I'd seen him before. Now I know—because I've seen this show before!"

"He put this show on just as we got in, and then passed out cold on the runway with a cockpit full of blood from a Messerschmitt slug."

I grinned. The little leather folder had told me as much.

Ed's eyes were aloft, watching the gyrating Stearman. He put an arm on my shoulder, brought his eyes down from the skies, looked at me sheepishly. "Well, one thing about it, Clayt—when I'm a damn' fool, I'm a bigger damn' fool than most guys. When the kid gets down, you talk with him. Get him to stay over tonight. We'll all fly down tomorrow. I want to watch him win with No. 5." His glance went aloft again, crinkled in appreciation as the Stearman did a slow-roll with eight precise stops. "Yes sir!" he mused. "The men and the boys . . . Well, anyhow, I know now that Five isn't being shoved by a school-kid!"

The Golden Snare

WITH peace had come prosperity, and once again the Italian city states lifted their heads. Trade was reestablished, and now the Ambassadors of France and Spain and England, and a dozen other countries, rested in lavish splendor in the castles of Clement VII. Rome came alive, the streets filling with hawkers, stalls lining the square, green and golden fruit glowing beside purple grapes and the black of ripened olives.

Conquering Spain had very wisely known that beaten peoples must be allowed to rise slowly; and so Italy was lifting from the muck and ruin of war, and people worked, creating once again where destruction had rolled in a hideous wake.

Benvenuto Cellini prospered day by day. He wore his sword more now in affectation than in anticipation of battle, and his forges were red with the coals which softened precious metals for his artisan's tools. Commissions were his for the asking; and the fact he made dies for the coins of the Treasury was more of a vanity than a necessity.

He was skillful at his trade, and none could match the delicacy of his work. Genius pulsed in his mind, and ambition was his, and so he labored, doing the minor tasks which provided his living, and executing the greater tasks of art which to him were life itself.

He whistled now as he worked, his long-fingered hands flashing a carved gold base for a crystal vase. A leafy vine trailed its delicate pattern, and cherubs flew endlessly in imperishable gold. A griffon poised to one side, ready for the blue and red enamel which would be baked this night; and a final splash of acid cleared the surface of the gold.

Cellini nodded to himself in pleasure, and flushed away the flashing acid with cool water. Satisfied, he dried the base and set it aside, then paused, distracted again by the faint tinkling of bells.

Twice this morning had he heard them, but each time they had ceased almost instantly. He had dismissed them as a figment of his imagination then. But now they sounded again; and he turned about, locating them in his house.

"Rafael!" he exclaimed in relief, a thought coming; and chuckling, he



"Bah! Do you take me for a blockhead? This is a thing

strode from the goldsmith shop and along a side hall to the sleeping-rooms at the rear.

His steps echoed, and the air was cool. Perspiration still marked him from his labor, and he wiped his hands on his apron, then brushed a lock of dark hair back from his tanned face. He was tall, and the lamplight ran his shadow grotesquely along the wall. He strode, long-legged and wide-shouldered, and the swing of his

body was more that of a *condottiere* than a worker in rich metals and precious stones.

He halted before the door of Rafael's room; his hand lifted the latch soundlessly and opened the door. Astonishment held him for the moment.

He saw the dummy first, swinging like a decapitated man from a rope tied to a hook sunk into a ceiling beam. It wore scarlet breeches and a purple shirt. Stuffed legs, tied with

A NEAT ITALIAN FRAME-UP PLACES THE MASTER GOLDSMITH BENVENUTO CELLINI IN DIRE PERIL UNDER CHARGES OF COUNTERFEITING.

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK



upon which you practice picking the purses of honest men."

lengths of rope, dangled, and the arms were handless. It was grotesque and shocking, despite its obviousness.

But the strangest thing about its appearance was the dozens of tiny silver bells hooked to its clothing, literally covering it. This, then, was the origin of the tinkling sounds Benvenuto Cellini had heard during the day, for it was obvious the slightest of movements of the dummy would send the clappers pounding at the bells.

Cellini shook his head, not understanding. He saw Rafael, but the other's back was to him, and he stood unnoticed at the door. Rafael was stalking the dummy, stalking it casually, as though it were alive and another stroller on some city street.

This was mummery, and the younger man played it to the hilt. He strolled, bowing to imaginary acquaintances; and at the moment of his passing the dummy, his left hand

darted out and fastened upon the purse at the dummy's waist. Almost did the purse come free, Rafael's fingers moving with the uncanny ability of a man of magic. But then he made a slight error in judgment, and bells sang instant warning of the thievery.

"Hell's perdition!" Rafael swore in irritation, and released his hold upon the purse.

He glared at the dummy, stepping back, hands akimbo upon his hips, shaking his head in self-anger.

"Rafael!" Cellini snapped.

The other whirled, ludicrous surprise in his face. He too was tall, but not as wide through the shoulders as the man he faced. There was grace in him, a sense of being poised, which was a natural thing, for he had been a thief since childhood.

His hair was like a red flame atop his head, and his eyes were as blue as any summer sky. Laughter had marked his face with tiny lines; and now that the surprise was over, his eyes laughed at the big goldsmith.

"Don't *do* that, Benvenuto," he said chidingly. "Never sneak up behind me in that manner." He grinned. "It reminds me too much of other days when the Watch was ready to arrest me at every turn."

BENVENUTO CELLINI forced the amusement out of his face, making it look stern and uncompromising. He crossed to the dummy, tapping it with his hand. Bells cried out in warning.

"What is this?" he said.

Rafael shrugged. "A dummy," he said innocently. "A dummy with bells," he tried again. "A game," he said hopefully.

"Bah!" Cellini dusted his hands. "Do you take me for a *buacchio*, a blockhead? This is a thing upon which you practice picking the purses of honest men."

Rafael grinned. "Clever, eh!" he said. "Eight times out of ten I can steal the purse and not ring the bells." He saw the thunder growing in Cellini's eyes, and the puckish laughter drained from his face, contriteness appearing. "I but practice in memory of other days. After all," he finished in pride, "stealing is like the study of music; and you know the neglect of your flute does not make for sweet melodies."

Cellini laughed openly then. Rafael was incorrigible. They had met a

scant two months before, when Cellini had waked one night to find a prowler looting his shop. For some perverse reason he could never really fathom, he had been amused at the wit and roguery of the knave. Rafael had talked well, not pleadingly nor arrogantly, but as matter-of-fact about the business of thievery as though it were some creditable profession. He was proud of his ability; and as one artist to another, he had pleaded his case well before Cellini.

FOR reasons never truly defined in Cellini's mind, Rafael had come to live in Cellini's home. His mind was quick; and strangely, he held his skill in check because of a promise made. He was gifted: a lute made brilliant music in his long fingers, and he sang in a clear deep voice. His wit was mocking and sharp, and he knew a dozen trades, for he had apprenticed out a dozen times, only to be bored with work and to return again to the endless road and countless tempting purses.

He worked at Cellini's bidding, and he worked well. He was personable, and laughter came easily, and so he was a good companion. He was loyal too; and perhaps that was most important, for this was an age when treachery was the expected thing from everybody. . . . Now he stood and faced his benefactor, and a chuckle escaped his throat.

"An artist must practice," Rafael pressed his point.

Benvenuto Cellini shrugged in defeat. Sometimes he had the feeling he argued with a child, for with but few exceptions, Rafael's knowledge of right and wrong was a shadowy thing never brought forth into the light.

"Cut it down," he said. "You are through as a pickpurse. If you need money, come to me. You will earn it, true, but I shall be generous. After all, I am your sponsor now, and anything ill you do will reflect on me."

Rafael laughed aloud, the faintest tinge of relief in his tone, and came forward, embracing Cellini. And despite the laughter, there was a deadly seriousness behind his words.

"Never would I hurt you, Benvenuto," he said.

"Good!" Cellini said, and turned away. "Now come into the shop and tell me what news you have of the false coins."

"Signor?" Rafael said. Something dangled from his slim hand.

"Eh?" Cellini said, then shook his head in wry chagrin.

"Your purse," Rafael said, and returned the purse. His reddish brows came together in mock thought. "May I suggest a belt of bells?"

And then they walked together down the hall, soft laughter and

friendship mingling. In that moment Benvenuto Cellini sensed why he liked this man. It was because Rafael was like his own youth, like his brother Cecchino, who had died so long before. He was knavish and amusing; he was loyal and observing. He was cock-impudent; and to have him about was to know life still held thrills for those who sought them out.

Thinking that, Cellini sat at a bench in the goldsmithy and watched the younger man perch upon a stool.

"What of the coins?" he asked.

Rafael shrugged. "Ser Jacopo Balducci was most insulting," he said. "He as much as accused you of uttering the coins yourself, using the dies you make for the Mint. An emissary of His Holiness was there, and his ears pricked up like a dog's at a whistle when Balducci said it seemed most strange that the false coins should be made only from the dies you engrave for the Mint. I tell you, Benvenuto. I am no bravo: yet if you but suggest it, I shall sword Balducci to death this very night."

Benvenuto Cellini laughed without humor. "And what would that gain us?" he asked. He fumbled a coin from his purse and rang it upon a marble slab. It rang true. "There is some trickery behind all this," he finished, "but just what, I am not certain."

Rafael reached for the lute he had left on wall pegs, and his fingers plucked a light gay melody. "If you want to know what I think," he said, "I think Ser Balducci intends to see that you boil in oil for counterfeiting coins. I think Ser Balducci hates your liver because His Holiness appointed you as Master Engraver of the dies. With you dead, he will regain the position."

Benvenuto scowled, the counterfeit coin turning slowly in his fingers. Many of these had appeared in the past month, all stamped from a gold alloy not worth a quarter of pure gold. And so clever had been the metalworker in fashioning the alloy that it was almost impossible to tell the bad from the good. Worse still, Cellini could have sworn the coins had been stamped from a die he had himself engraved.

"His Holiness knows me for an honest man," Cellini said, his brow furrowed.

Rafael shrugged. "Is there such a thing?" he asked cynically. "Every man has his price—and perhaps a good talker to the Pope's ear might convince him that your price has been reached."

Anger darkened Cellini's eyes. "It is a sorry jest you make," he said.

Rafael smiled, but his eyes were not amused. "I make no jest," he averred. "Balducci is a powerful man; he has a dozen moneylending shops through-

out Italy. And his vanity is even greater than his power; he had great pride in his appointment as Master Engraver, and took it very ill when you relieved him of the post and demoted him to the status of a helper."

Cellini threw the coin the length of the room in a sudden burst of passion. The goldpiece spun and flashed, then rang against a wall. It fell and twisted and lay still in the bar of yellow sunshine from a window. Cellini eyed it sourly.

"By all the saints, I'll have a talk with His Holiness this day," he said. "I'll find the temper of his mind and declare my innocence. My reputation will stand me in good stead then."

Rafael plucked a single note, then stilled his hand. "I'll bring you food in the Torre di Nona," he said. "It will be your single word against the coins tapped with your own dies." He laughed without humor. "Your reputation will not save you from a prison cell."

Cellini spread heavy hands. "What then?" he asked. "Accusations are being made, and yet I sit like a wart on a frog's back. If Balducci is indeed behind this uttering of coins, how am I to prove it?"

Rafael scrubbed his chin with a lean thumb. "It is in my mind that Balducci is the man who plots this out," he said. "He wants his old post back at the Mint, and he wants you disgraced and perhaps hanged or boiled for counterfeiting." His fingers ran abstractedly through his red hair. "Now, if we could prove he plotted all this, then justice would be served."

BENVENUTO CELLINI grinned mockingly. "I shall face him and ask him if he plots," he said cynically.

Rafael nodded. "A good way," he admitted, "if you back your questions with a blade. However, maybe I can help."

"In what way?"

"I have friends," Rafael admitted. "—not quite respectable, but friends nevertheless. They have ways of finding out many things. Suppose I ask them to trace Balducci's movements, along with other things?"

"It might work," Benvenuto agreed. "Find where the coins are made and the men who make them, and confessions might be obtained. But the deed must be fast, for if your information is correct, His Holiness must be growing impatient at the delay in finding the counterfeiter."

Rafael laid the lute aside. "It will take a few days, no doubt," he admitted.

Benvenuto considered the proposition. He knew the friends to whom Rafael referred. Thieves and muffers and cutthroats, beggars and charlatans and walkers of the street.



"A warrant!" Benvenuto Cellini came lithely from the bench. "On what charge, and by whose authority?"

They formed a tight little society, trading information—and it was possible they might be able to accomplish much.

"All right," he agreed, "talk to your friends. Ask them to watch any who might work in metal. And tell them to report as soon as possible."

He swung his head at a rapping on the door, then drew taut at sight of the Watch officer who lifted the latch and entered the goldsmithy. This was a man of the Pope's personal guard, his livery the scarlet and gold which only papal guards might wear. He was big, and his hand was upon his sword.

"Master Cellini?" he asked. "Master Benvenuto Cellini, the goldsmith?"

"I'm Cellini," Benvenuto said. "What do you want?"

The officer advanced, ignoring Rafael, after a moment's glance. His beard was black and oiled, and the ruff of his collar was almost as wide as his shoulders.

"I am Pietro di Culpin, Master of the Guards, in His Holiness' service," he said. "I bear a warrant for your arrest."

"A warrant!" Benvenuto Cellini came lithely from the bench, and suddenly he was dangerous and formidable, his gaze flicking to the sword

laying in its scabbard on a nearby table. "On what charge, and by whose authority?"

Di Culpin squared his shoulders, black eyes studying the man before him. Cellini's prowess with a sword was known to all; and imperceptibly, the officer edged between the goldsmith and the weapon.

"The charge is the misuse of your office as Master Engraver of the Mint. It is further charged that you have uttered false scudi, thus endangering the economy of the nation." His voice lifted. "The warrant is signed by His Holiness Pope Clement VII."

"What—" Rafael began, and then the stool turned from his shifting weight, and he sprawled forward, catching at the officer to regain his balance.

He came erect, a flush on his face, bowing his head in apology.

"I cry pardon, Your Excellency," he said humbly, and backed away. "The stool gave beneath my weight."

The officer dusted his hands, his glance baleful. "Touch me again, scum," he said, "and I'll give you balance with a sword-point."

Benvenuto Cellini took a driving step forward. "This is preposterous," he declared. "I am an honest man."

Di Culpin spat insolently. "A session with the Examiners will get the

nut of truth from that statement," he said. "Now, come along, and quietly!"

Rafael reached for Cellini's sword and whirred it from its scabbard. "It is some scurvy trick, Benvenuto," he said. "I do not think this is a guard from His Holiness. I think he is a paid assassin who will run you through, once you are in the street."

Di Culpin swallowed, held in thrall by the naked sword. There was no fear in him, but now a caution had come, for Rafael's weaving blade was poised for instant use.

"I have a warrant—" he said.

"You said that," Cellini said harshly. "I will go with you, but not under arrest. I will talk to His Holiness."

THE officer shook his head. "His Holiness has left the city for a few days," he said. "My orders are to place you in the Torre di Nona until he returns."

Benvenuto Cellini scowled, and his stomach contracted. He knew the Torre di Nona. Few men left it alive, and none questioned by the Examiners lived to escape. The rack and the wheel and the boot drew confessions, even from innocent men—and then confession preceded death only by a few short hours.

He knew not what to do. To defy the Pope, was to court disaster; and

yet there might be truth in what Rafael had declared. This might be a scheme to take him unarmed into the street. There the cry of, "Prisoner escaping!" and a long sword-stroke would drop him lifeless in the street. He had many enemies, for fame had come his way, and this would not be the first attempt at assassination.

"I warn you—" the officer began, but Cellini cut him short.

"The warrant?" he asked. "Where is it?" He would recognize the papal seal, he knew.

"Here!" di Culpin said, and fumbled at his message pouch.

Then his head bent, and his fingers opened the pouch wide. Anger grew in his face, and he searched his pockets. A flush came to his face, and his eyes were hot.

"It is gone," he said. "I must have left it at the guardroom."

Benvenuto Cellini laughed aloud, and his hand reached out and caught the sword from Rafael.

"A fine story," he said, relief in his voice. "Now get back to whoever sent you, and declare your failure." He spun the sword in a deadly arc. "Move, or I spit you like a goose."

Di Culpin spluttered helplessly for a moment, then retreated. He hurled a final threat at the door, then banged the panel shut. Cellini grinned and laid the sword aside.

"A warrant from His Holiness, indeed!" he said. "More likely a costumed bravo of Balducci's."

RAFAEL nodded his red head and walked to where he had laid his lute. Carefully he hung it upon its peg, then righted the fallen stool.

"His Holiness is out of the city," he said thoughtfully. "That means we have a few days."

"Then hurry," Benvenuto Cellini said. "Rouse your friends."

Rafael grinned. "We make a good pair, Benvenuto," he said. "I am glad I took service with you. The trouble is, though, you are a bit too honest for your own good."

"Eh?" Cellini said.

"Too honest," Rafael replied. "By now you would have been on your way to the Torre di Nona and the Examiners, had that officer brought his warrant with him."

"Bah, the man was a paid killer," Cellini said.

"Paid, but not a killer," Rafael laughed. His hand dipped into his shirt front and came free with a folded document. His voice was mocking. "We have a few days; His Holiness cannot sign a new warrant—and one Pietro di Culpin is in the way of being punished for negligence of duty."

"The warrant!" Benvenuto Cellini gasped, and Rafael nodded.

"The warrant," he admitted, and laid it in Cellini's hands. His voice



grew wistfully plaintive. "Sometimes, my Benvenuto," he finished, "I must show you the true artistry of my profession."

"You knave!" Benvenuto Cellini cried, but laughter had come. "Now get about your task."

They smiled then in understanding, Cellini dark and bold and great, and Rafael slim and fire-headed and thievish. Somehow there was a kinship, and they relished it, feeling it drawing them together.

"Watch your back," Rafael said; and then he was gone, the door banging shut behind.

Benvenuto Cellini chuckled still, then turned away, the papal warrant held tightly in his hand. The sheer effrontery of the other amused him, but now he was glad of the other's deftness. It had given him another chance, a period of grace in which he might salvage himself from disaster.

Balducci was moving swiftly, too swiftly, and when Clement returned to Rome, a showdown would come about.

But until then, Cellini would be free. And even as he laid the warrant upon the reddish coals of his forge, his mind was plotting scheme and counter-scheme. Somewhere, somehow, he would find a way to clear his name and confound those who worked toward his downfall. And yet, despite the bravery of his thoughts, he felt a chill along his spine. Men died of lesser charges, on lesser evidence. Still—he shrugged and turned from the burning warrant. Somehow, he would find the solution needed.

IT was the hour sixteen, and sunlight lay hot and sultry on the streets of Rome. Three days had passed, and still Benvenuto Cellini had found no solution to his problem. With the

"A scurvy lot," Rafael said of the workmen. "How do you know the dies do not go out with them?"



warrant destroyed, he was still free to move about the city; and despite the blustering of di Culpin, who had lost the warrant, he felt no fear for the moment. As Master Engraver for the Mint, he continued his appointed tasks, keeping regular hours at his work and hoping against hope that Rafael's friends would not fail at ferreting out the place in which counterfeit coins were made.

Now he stood in the coin-room of the Mint, and the heat was greater here than in the streets outside. Forges glared redly, and workmen went about their tasks with perspiration glistening from their bodies. Gold and silver bubbled in crucibles at the forges, and the clatter of steel on steel was a constant sound.

He watched a workman crepin. Molten gold had been poured into molds, emerging as small

shiny buttons which were weighed and pared by craftsmen at a long bench-table. The finished buttons were then passed along to the die-man, who stood close by a small forge.

Two dies were used for each coin, one cut into the top of a round bar of steel, the impression cup-shaped, the design reversed in intaglio form. This die-bar was socketed in a deep hole in an anvil. The second die was a shorter bar of steel, one end carrying the intaglio design. This bar fitted perfectly into the cup-depression of the first.

Cellini examined the dies, for the steel was soft, and new dies must be used from time to time. Satisfied, he passed the dies back to the die-man, and he fitted one into the anvil socket and laid the other aside. Gold buttons lay in the glowing coals, and he lifted one with tongs, dropping it into the cup-bar. Lifting the second die,

he seated it over the button, then smashed heavily with a small sledge on the bar. Metal sang.

Casually, the die-man laid die and sledge aside and dumped the new coin from its cup into a pail of water. Steam hissed, and a moment later the workman lifted the coin from its cooling bath and passed it to Cellini.

Benvenuto nodded as he examined the coin. This was a fine scudo, the design clear and brave. He handed it back to the workman and turned away.

Worry had lined his forehead, and he wandered about the room for minutes, thoughts churning turgidly in his mind. Each thought ended against a blank wall of nothingness: finally he swore and sat down at his bench, fingering the dies which would have to be replaced.

Smoke lay thinly in the air from the forges, and the lanterns gave barely more than necessary light. Close at hand was a small chest; and bending over, Cellini lifted the lid and drew forth one of the several thousand gold-pieces. He pulled a lantern closer and examined the coin.

This was one of the false scudi, and his trained eye told him the dies had been his. He laid a good coin beside it, and the two were identical in appearance. To those who did not know the art of coining, either might have been of solid gold.

Cellini ran his gaze about the room. At one side were the racks where gold bars were laid in neat rows. Three heavy forges and three small ones furnished the heat for the smelting of metal. A dozen workmen went about their tasks in silence, sooty and sweaty, muscles like ropy snakes in their backs.

New coinage was at Cellini's left, one scalcman even now lifting a small chest into place onto a rack empty of others. The floor was of stone, and the room itself was impregnable, being a sub-cellar guarded by a complete company of soldiers who lived in the cellar above.

CELLINI shook his head. Then a figure hurrying down the steps caught his attention, and he pushed the coins aside, eagerness welling as he waited for Rafael to come to his side.

"What luck, Rafael?" he asked.

The young redhead shrugged like a Frenchman of the Court, regret shadowing his eyes.

"Nothing," he said bitterly. "My friends have scoured the city, have played spy at every place where coins might be made, and without success. How is it with you?"

Benvenuto Cellini spread his hands. "More counterfeits have been dis-

covered," he said, lifting the lid of the small chest, "but the passers were innocent tradesmen." Grimness lightened his mobile mouth. "The Pope returns tonight, and tomorrow there must be an accounting."

Rafael nodded. "Balducci is too clever, Benvenuto," he said. "Stop playing the fool. I have horses and food for traveling at a stable just outside the city. We shall make a run for France."

Almost did Benvenuto Cellini nod in agreement. Danger pressed, and a lame excuse was worse than none. He would boil in fuming oil within a day unless he found the answer to his problem.

THEN pride stirred, and anger; he shook his head. "I do not run," he stated flatly. "I am no coward, and there must be a way to force a confession from Balducci, if he is behind this false coining."

Rafael fingered the coins upon the bench, flicking them in and out of sight in his slender fingers.

"And if he is not?" he asked.

"Then there is no escape," Cellini said. "The coins are made with my dies, and I shall be held to blame."

Rafael turned grim eyes about the room. "A scurvy lot," he said of the workmen. "How do you know that the dies do not go out and return with one or more of them?"

Benvenuto laughed harshly. "Then they are more clever than you," he said, "for they are stripped naked and must change clothing each time they enter or leave the Mint."

"Well, I have no answer then," Rafael said shortly. "But I still say I would not turn my back to most of them on a deserted street."

Benvenuto Cellini grinned, nodding in slow agreement. The men were hard-looking; even he had to admit that. Most of them had been retained by Balducci the year before, only four being newly hired by Cellini when he had taken his new post.

Still, they were good workmen, and he had no complaint. Anyway, finding fault with them did not answer his problem, and as he had said, none of them could steal dies from the Mint for the short periods needed to stamp out the false scudi.

He sighed, then saw the man who had come down the stairs and approached the bench unobserved. Ser Jacopo Balducci was smiling, but there was no liking in the expression.

"Cellini, my friend," Balducci said shortly, ignoring Rafael entirely.

Benvenuto stiffened, hand dropping to the pommel of the sword at his waist. His aversion for this man was almost hatred, and he could feel the swelling of veins in his throat.

"What do you want here?" he snapped.

Jacopo Balducci lifted the long cloak from his shoulders and draped it over his arm. Insolence was in his movements, and his eyes were contemptuous of the man he faced.

"You forget that I too am an official of the Mint," he said. "Or has your success so gone to your head that you believe you alone have the right to enter this room?"

"Benvenuto?" Rafael put in pleadingly, knuckles white upon the knife in his belt.

"Draw that knife, you gutter scum," said Balducci, "and I'll personally pull the rope which hangs you."

"Enough," Cellini said.

Rafael shivered in cold rage, then sat upon the bench. Balducci spat insolently, turned again to Cellini.

"His Holiness arrives back this night," he said. "He will not be pleased to know that you evaded arrest—how, I do not know—and still have the temerity to retain your position here."

Benvenuto Cellini forced a grin. "You bother your mind about me, Balducci," he said. "Could it be you are worried at what I have discovered about the counterfeiting?"

Caution tightened Balducci's eyes for a second, and then he smiled.

"Counterfeiting is your problem, Cellini," he said, "not mine. There was no such problem when I was Master Engraver." He dusted bony hands in dismissal of the subject. "However, I have no time to talk of such matters. Is my gold ready?"

"What gold?" Cellini asked.

"My new coins," Balducci said impatiently. "I brought gold bars the first of the week, and there were to be four thousand scudi ready for me this day." He grinned. "After all, I am a business man, and I cannot continue without coins."

Cellini glanced at the chest of new coins upon the rack. "Coins are there," he said. "Send your men, and they will be ready, as soon as I check the records."

"Good!" Jacopo Balducci turned away and then swung back. His tone was mocking. "I will make a deal with you, Cellini," he finished. "Resign your position, and I shall find a scapegoat for the false coining."

Benvenuto Cellini stood, and so great was his rage, his speech would not come for a moment. He knew then, as surely as if the words had been spoken, that Jacopo Balducci had uttered the counterfeits. And yet he had no proof.

"Balducci," he finally said, "when this is over, when my name is cleared, I shall come for you with a naked blade."

Jacopo Balducci blanched, backing three short steps. Then courage returned, and his lips moved in silent laughter.

"When this is over," he said, "I shall be Master Engraver again, and you will be no more." He backed farther. "Now get my gold ready, for I shall send two men for it immediately."

He turned and was almost running when he reached the stairs. One glance he threw back, and the hatred in him was naked and blazing. Then he was gone.

"I think," Rafael said slowly, "with or without your sanction, I shall cut his throat before too long a time passes."

He came from the bench and strode angrily away. Cellini watched him leave, then opened a ledger and confirmed Balducci's order. His hands shook with anger, and then slowly they stilled. Calmness returned to his mind, and the slow thread of a thought stole into his brain.

He was not a vicious man, nor a dishonest one. He was mercurial in his anger, and his genius was strong. He was tall and dark and a man of strength. But now, remembering Balducci's words, he felt a hell-born thought, and there was no urge to destroy it.

The thought was part of a plan, and the plan might have a chance. Jacopo was a soft man, soft of body and of mind. He would break with proper pressure, and conditions might be arranged so that pressure might be applied. What Cellini proposed was not a comfortable thing to contemplate if he were wrong. But he was morally certain that Jacopo Balducci was the counterfeiter, or at least aided the counterfeiting, and events might be arranged so that a confession could be extracted.

He glanced up from the ledger and ran his gaze about the smoky room. Workmen moved with indolent precision, but none gave heed to him. He flicked his gaze to the single chest of new coins upon its rack, then to the chest of false coins at his feet.

HE worked fast then, knowing he had only a few minutes. A glance at a ledger page told him how many counterfeits had been found, and he made up the difference with a hundred of the good gold scudi. He closed the chest and sealed it with the Mint's seal, then carried it to the rack. Sliding it into position, he removed the chest of good coins, carried it to the bench and placed it where bad coins had been a moment before. A quick glance told him the exchange had gone unnoticed.

Satisfied, he left the bench crossed to a forge at the far side of the room. He passed Rafael, but the younger man avoided his gaze. He sighed, knowing the other blamed him for not taking more direct action in this matter.

Then he was busy, examining the dies and discarding a few. He watched new coins being made, and for the moment forgot his problem. He remembered only when Rafael's voice swung him about.

"There," he answered the query, and pointed to the chest of counterfeits upon the rack.

He watched cynically as the chest was lifted by two of Balducci's servants. Swords swung at their sides, and they were like most of his men, hard-faced bravoes. They lifted the chest and carried it up the stairs, where Balducci waited. Then they were gone; and Benvenuto Cellini sighed in relief.

RAFANEL grinned from beside the bench, then strolled to Cellini's side.

"My stomach tells me it is time to eat," he said.

Benvenuto nodded, casting one last glance about the room. "Then let's be about it," he said, "for we have much to do this afternoon."

He led the way, going ahead up the stairs and through the door. A soldier-guard snapped to attention, and other guards watched from where they sat about the room. Weapons were handy, and despite the air of sleepy discipline, Cellini knew these soldiers could go into action at a second's notice.

A second guard passed them through an outer door, and they paced along a stone-walled hall. A door opened at Cellini's touch, and for a moment they blinked in the brightness of the sunlit day.

"A tavern?" Rafael said, and he was smiling as though he held some secret.

Benvenuto Cellini shook his head. "There is much to do, Rafael," he said. "There is no time for eating now."

"But why?" the redhead asked.

"I want you to take a message to the Pope's Guard," Cellini said. "Tell them that I have discovered the source of the counterfeit coins, and that they must raid the place immediately."

"You have?" Rafael said excitedly.

Benvenuto Cellini smiled grimly. "Tell them to raid the shop of Jacopo Balducci," he explained. "Say they will find a hoard of the false coins there." His eyes were suddenly cold. "A session with the Examiners will bring the truth from Ser Balducci."

"Then you have—" Rafael began, but Cellini cut him short.

"I played a trick, a most dishonest trick," Cellini said, "and one I do not countenance even in myself. But this situation calls for extraordinary measures. I switched chests of gold on Balducci; his men took the chest of false coins. It was my one chance to force a showdown with Balducci, for even he cannot long stand the questions of the Examiners at the Torre di Nona."



*"Open, you fool!"
Rafael snarled. "This
message is from His
Holiness."*

"Oh, no!" Rafael said in horror.

"Yes, of—" Cellini caught his breath, held by the expression on Rafael's face. "What is it?" he snapped.

Rafael spread his hand, and now there was no laughter in his eyes.

"I too thought to be clever," he said. "I switched the chests."

"You switch—"

Benvenuto Cellini laughed then, but there was no humor in the sound. He had been too clever, and Rafael had been too clever. And even now the gods must be laughing at the foolishness of mortals. For the situation was not changed in the least.

Ser Jacopo Balducci had his chest of gold—good honest gold, and the Mint still retained its chest of counterfeits. And within a period of hours Benvenuto Cellini must face His Holiness Pope Clement VII, and explain how dies cut by his own hand had been used to flood the land with counterfeit scudi.

"Come," Benvenuto Cellini said then, and wry laughter lay about his mouth, "and eat. At least the Examiners shall find me a well-fed witness."

Together they went down the street.

It was the hour six, and the moon was almost squarely overhead. Benvenuto Cellini sat brooding at the window of his home and watched the star-sprinkled sky. His brain was tired, and fatigue had settled into his muscles, for he had sat silent for hours, striving to find a way out of the trap which had closed so tightly about him.

Rafael was gone, making a final round of his friends, hoping to find some single clue which would give Cellini a chance. Rafine, Cellini's aged servant, moved soundlessly about the house, unable to sleep, sharing his master's trouble. Except for the shuffle of his feet upon the floor, there was no sound in the house.

Then a door slammed, and feet marched along an outer hall. The room door was pushed wide, and Rafael came through, urging a furtive dirty little man ahead.

"What now?" Cellini asked in surprise. "Have you news?"

Rafael pushed the little man forward. "I do not know," he said. "But Donolo here, at least, has been in Ser Balducci's home."



Cellini drew the trap upward, disclosing a shallow hiding-place. Gold metal gleamed softly.

"Excellency!" the little man said, bobbing his shaved head.

He was dirty and ill-smelling, and Cellini felt distaste in his mind. He came forward, eyes narrowed.

"Well?" he prompted.

With the air of a conjuror, Rafael produced a small brick of metal from beneath his cloak. It gleamed coldly in the light of the lamps.

"Donelo stole this brick of gold," he said.

"A little brick," the thief whined. "I swear I did not know Ser Balducci was your friend."

Benvenuto Cellini took the gold and turned it in heavy fingers. Disappointment ate at him. Time fled swiftly, and the best his efforts could produce was a bar of gold worth, perhaps, a thousand scudi. He dipped his hand into his purse and retrieved several coins.

"I shall return the gold," he said. "Take these coins and leave."

He watched the thief scuttle out, then swung back to Rafael, lifting the gold bar on the palm of his hand.

"And now," he said ruefully, "I act as protector of Balducci's property. Fate indeed has a strange way."

Rafael shrugged and walked toward the wine bottle. "Keep the gold," he

advised. "It is small payment for the trouble you are having."

Benvenuto shook his head. "I am not a thief," he said, "even though I should—" He eyed the gold suddenly, puzzlement in his eyes. "There is no mark!" he finished. "This is not Guild-crafted gold."

"So!" Rafael commented indifferently, wiping his lips.

"But—" Cellini moved to the lamp, words forgotten. He dug with his dagger at the gold bar, examining with the eyes of a goldsmith the sliver of gold cut loose.

"What is it?" Rafael asked.

"This is the metal from which the counterfeits are made!" Cellini said in excitement. "This is not true gold."

Rafael came to Cellini's side, bottle forgotten. "You're certain?" he asked.

"Of course," Cellini said impatiently. "I work in metals."

Rafael turned his head toward the door. "Donelo said there was other gold there. He had sneaked in through an upper window and had hidden in a closet. Messengers brought the gold, and he stole one bar, after it had been stored, and while Balducci was occupied in another room."

Benvenuto Cellini turned away, pacing toward the window, face taut

with thought. Logic came to his mind, and suddenly many answers were clear.

"Hell's perdition!" he swore suddenly. "How could I have been such a fool!" He turned to the redhead. "Of course, the dies did not leave the Mint. The false coins were struck there, either by some of the workmen or by Balducci himself." His hand slapped his hip. "No wonder my dies were used, and no wonder your spies could not find another place where the counterfeits were struck."

Agreement was in Rafael's face, and then excitement came. "We must lose no time," he said eagerly. "Inform the Pope's guard and have them raid Balducci's home. The gold bars will be found, and he will have no—"

"No!" Cellini said flatly. "He will deny knowing the bars are not true gold. He will say he bought in good faith."

"What then?" Rafael asked.

Decision firmed Cellini's mouth. A plan grew in his mind, risky and perhaps impossible, but the only thing of which he could think. He reached for his sword-belt on the couch, and his fingers were steady as they buckled it on.

"I want three braves," he said. "They must be good. Bring them to the corner south of Balducci's house within the hour. I shall be there as soon as possible." He grinned then, and sudden recklessness lighted his dark eyes. "If I am not there in two hours, you will find me in the Torre di Nona."

"But what—" Rafael said in bewilderment.

Benvenuto Cellini swung his cloak over his shoulders. "I go to see the Pope," he said. "Say a prayer for me."

Then he was gone, the door slamming closed behind. The echo of his steps drifted back, then were cut away at sound of another door slamming.

RAFAEL shook his head, then finished the last of the wine in the bottle. Cynicism twisted his mobile lips.

"Honest men!" he whispered, and thought of his carefree days as a thief.

Then he too was leaving the room, and the house was strangely silent, for Rafine had at last fallen asleep.

And so it was that two hours later a man muffled in a greatcloak tapped softly upon a side door of the home of Ser Jacopo Balducci. The moon was sliding toward the horizon, and midnight chill was lessening in the air. He tapped again, and seconds later the door opened a crack, and light trickled through with a sleepy servant's voice.

"What do you want at this hour?" the voice said uncivilly.

"A message for Ser Balducci," Rafael whispered softly.

"Bring it tomorrow," the servant said.

"Open, you fool!" Rafael snarled. "This message is from His Holiness."

Instinctively the servant edged the door further; and then a swordtip gleamed whitely, leaping forward and hovering at the servant's chest. The servant gasped, then held motionless, fear in his face.

"Draw the chains," Rafael snapped. "Move only one arm."

Chains fell with a slight clatter; and then Cellini and his three bravoes moved forward, masked, and pushed into the house.

"Bring him along," Cellini said softly. "You," he finished, "guard this door."

One bravo nodded, naked sword gleaming. Blind with terror, the servant huddled against the wall.

"This way," Rafael said. "Donelo told me of the hiding-place."

Silently they went along the hall, nerves tight with tension. The house slept, and yet Cellini knew guards were held here by Balducci.

THEY passed along the hall and about a corner. A scabbard scraped the wall, and one bravo swore softly. They turned left at a cross hall, then stopped before a door behind which snoring ebbed vibrantly.

"The guardroom," Cellini whispered, remembering his visits to this house in the past. "Both of you stay here," he finished to the bravoes.

He went along the hall, followed by Rafael and the servant. Two doors farther, he stopped again and slowly lifted a latch.

The door swung open, and the servant's lamp sent cold light into the room. Apparently a weapon-room, in its very innocence lay its strength. For this was the room where Donelo had seen the bars of false gold hidden. Arquebuses and *storta*, short daggers and coats of mail were neatly racked. A table was in the center of the floor, backed by a single chair.

Without hesitation, Benvenuto Cellini went forward. He squatted, running his hand over the floor until he found the edge of the trap, then drew it upward, disclosing a shallow hiding-place. Gold metal gleamed softly. A sudden sound whirled him about. Rafael had struck the servant down, the man lying semi-conscious on the floor. Rafael held up the lamp.

"Hurry, Benvenuto," he whispered.

Cellini nodded. He bent and lifted the five bars of gold from their hiding-place and placed them in a cloth bag produced from his belt. He stood, and his voice was softly exultant.

"We'll take these to the Mint and test them," he said. "Within the hour, we shall have proof to lay before His Holiness."

Swiftly, then, they left the room and went along the hall. The two bravoes fell in behind. At the outer door, the

single bravo lowered his sword at sight of them, then swung the panel open. An instant later all were in the street and running lithely for safety. Behind, a faint cry of alarm arose.

Two blocks away, Cellini stuffed gold scudi into the hands of the bravoes and watched them fade out of sight down the street. Then, with Rafael running easily at his side, he hurried toward the Mint. He was grinning now, eagerness pulsing in him for the coming moments ahead.

The Mint's workmen were but entering the die-room when Cellini and Rafael paced down the heavy stone stairs. One workman was relighting the lamps, while others blew new life into forges almost grown cold during the night hours. The men glanced curiously at Cellini and Rafael, but they ignored the workmen, while dumping the golden bars onto a long bench.

Shadows were long, and smoke was filling the air with a thin scum again. Men yawned sleepily, stripping shirts away in the stifling heat which never left this subcellar.

"Heat that forge," Cellini snapped at Rafael, and the redhead began to pump the bellows, while adding fresh charcoal to the pit.

Flames burst, smoking at first, then settling redly. Heat burgeoned, then licked at the crucible Cellini placed in position. He lifted a golden bar, then placed it in the crucible and absently rubbed his hands.

"Only a few minutes now," he said.

He whirled, then, at the clatter of boots upon the stone steps. Rigidity came to his spine, and his hand was at his sword. Rafael grunted in anger, then moved to his side.

Ser Jacopo Balducci had hurried. It was evident in his dress and from the rasping of his breathing. A sword swung at his side, and lamplight flashed on the jewel-studded dagger at his waist. He came to the bottom of the steps; then he was advancing, holding his anger in check with a will which drew all blood from his face.

"And now you rob houses, Master Cellini!" he said, stopping four paces away. His gaze flicked to the crucible and its golden contents, and a shiver stirred his shoulders. "You'll hang for this, my friend."

Benvenuto Cellini laughed aloud, and triumph was in the sound. He saw that the workmen had ceased their duties and were staring curiously, caught by the tenseness of the trio.

"I'll not hang, Balducci," he said. "Not when His Holiness is told what I have discovered."

Ser Balducci rocked a bit in his rage, and his knuckles were white upon his sword-hilt.

"One chance," he said, "to save yourself. Return that gold, and nothing shall be said."

"Take it," Rafael said, eagerness for a fight in his voice.

Jacopo Balducci backed a step, but his voice lifted until the words were clear.

"If necessary, I shall," he said.

Benvenuto Cellini shook his head, confidence in his face. "You'll take nothing, Balducci," he said. "We're two swords to your one, and there are soldiers above."

Balducci laughed then, softly and arrogantly. "The soldiers can hear none of this; no sound can escape this room."

Cellini stopped the movement of Rafael with a touch of his fingers. He nodded at the melting metal on the forge.

"A confession might save you torture," he said loudly. "You know as well as I that that metal is not gold. It is the metal from which you have struck the false coins."

Jacopo Balducci was easier now, and a grim smile came to his face. "I know nothing of that gold, nor of the false coins," he said harshly. "I do know that you and your men robbed my house of six gold bars not an hour ago. I have a servant who heard you called by name, and who can recognize you and your redhaired bravo."

"And I," Cellini said gently, "have a witness who saw you receive and give a receipt for the bars of false gold." He smiled. "I think my witness will be more reliable than yours."

BALDUCCI bit his lips, for this was stalemate, in a way. Then cunning came to his eyes.

"Master Cellini," he said, "we are not stupid men. There is always a way in which men of intelligence and strength can work together."

Cellini spat in contempt. "You are a dog," he said bitterly. "You try to ruin me, and then you would join forces. No, I do not join with you in anything." He squared his shoulders. "I was a *buacchio* for not reasoning everything out before tonight, but now I can think clearly. You were the only one, except me and Rafael, who entered and left this room without a search. You brought in the false gold, and stamped out the counterfeit scudi. You removed them secretly. You passed them out through your money-lending shops. Had you been Master Engraver, instead of me, you could have certified them as being good and thereby made a fortune. Unfortunately for you, I was appointed as Master Engraver, and so you could not accomplish the plan you had so recklessly started."

Jacopo Balducci freed his sword a bit in its scabbard. "You are clever, Master Cellini, a bit too clever," he said. His gaze went about the room, seeing the workmen who watched and

Illustrated by
JOHN FULTON



"His Holiness!" a workman gasped; and fear in the room was a naked thing,

listened avidly. "That was my plan. I started it but a few weeks before you were appointed. The metal was made for me in Florence, and brought here by special messenger. It was forged and coined here and then passed out through my lending shops. It was a foolproof plan, as you described it, for as Master Engraver I could have declared the coins good."

Exultation flooded Benvenuto Cellini. "And now you confess your dishonesty before these witnesses!" he said.

Jacopo Balducci laughed, and his sword whirred free. He threw his cloak over his free arm, providing a bulky guard. Steel rasped on steel, as Rafael and Cellini drew.

"Confess?" Balducci cried. "Do you take me for a complete fool! These men are mine. I brought them here, and they work for me. Does it matter that I say to them what they already know?"

Benvenuto Cellini swung his head, and amazement held him in thrall for a moment. Twelve workmen were in the room, and eight of them had banded together. They looked at Balducci for orders, and the counterfeiter drew them forward with a flick of his sword.

"We cannot be heard above," he called. "Slay those four and these two, and I shall promise you safety."

His eyes bulged then, and he fell back a step, terror in his face. For like a shadow grown to solidity and life, a man had stepped from the dark concealment at the rear of a wall rack. He had listened, unobserved, and now his face was a cold hard mask, without pity.

"And I," he said stiffly, "shall promise eternal damnation."

"His Holiness!" a workman gasped; and fear in the room was a naked thing, pulsing like a blood-beat.

"You heard?" Benvenuto Cellini asked breathlessly.

"Everything," Pope Clement VII said.

Jacopo Balducci's mouth worked for breath like that of a fish. He stood rigid with terror.

Benvenuto Cellini sighed. This, then, had been his plan, simple and effective and yet not without its risks of failure. He had led Jacopo Balducci to the Mint on the trail of gold, baiting the trap with his name and a speech said in the presence of Balducci's servant. He had brought Balducci here, and the man had talked. Now there could be but one ending.

"Bring the soldiers," Cellini said to Rafael, and the redhead darted away and up the stairs.

Jacopo Balducci screamed then, like an animal tortured. His teeth were bared in the lamplight, and he lunged forward, his blade searching out for Cellini's life.



pulsing like a blood-beat.

Almost did the blade find its mark, for relaxation had come to Benvenuto. Only instinct saved him; and even so, Balducci's blade ripped the cloth of his sleeve and scored the flesh of his arm. Then he crossed the blade and hammered it away. Coolness came, and he fought with the vicious instinct of a man to whom a sword was but an extension of his senses.

THEY met, and steel sang on steel, Sparks cascaded, and wrist muscles locked in terrific strength. Hilt to hilt they stood, and Balducci struck cunningly with the dagger snatched from his belt with his free hand. Cloth tore, but the point missed.

A shout came from the stairs, where soldiers poured downward in a flood. "Mine!" Cellini cried above the clamor; and then he thrust and drove Balducci away.

A single glance Cellini flung toward the Pope, wanting no danger to come

to him. Then his gaze was on Balducci, and he was drawing the man out, lunging and stroking, driving the other before the whirlwind of his blade.

He led and caught a parrying stroke, then went savagely forward. Only luck saved Balducci, his blade coming about and forcing Cellini's downward. Benvenuto's blade hesitated, caught at Balducci's waist, then whirled free, and Balducci's ruptured purse showered gold scudi to the floor.

Balducci was like a maddened animal, and he came forward, knowing he would die eventually, and wanting only to take this laughing giant with him. He struck and parried and ignored a bloody cut which laced his cheek. He drove forward, cursing.

Cellini gave ground, settling himself, waiting for the fleeting moment when an opening would appear. He saw it at last, and he moved his feet into balance, gathering strength in one flashing instant.

Then his right foot slipped, sliding on a scudo which had fallen from Balducci's purse. Despite himself, he went to his knees; and in that instant, he knew he was lost.

BALDUCCI snorted in triumph, and his blade whirled and lifted for a stroke like a headman's chopping blow. He threw all his weight into the stroke—and then at the peak, he faltered, chin dropping, his eyes staring incredulously at the foot of reddened blade which extended from his chest.

"Benvenuto!" Rafael cried aloud, and he was still in balance from throwing his sword like a javelin at Balducci's back.

Cellini whirled aside, barely escaping Balducci's plunging sword. Jacopo Balducci tried to lift his weapon for another thrust, but the sword fell from his hand, and he toppled forward.

He struck the bench, his eyes blank now, and his hands stretched out instinctively to save himself. He fell, but one hand had touched the crucible on the forge, and it toppled with him, falling to its side, the molten false gold cascading in a splashing stream.

It struck true and fair. There was the stench of burning flesh, and then Jacopo Balducci was dead, his face a golden mask, one hand grasping in its final throes a single scudo from the floor.

Benvenuto Cellini turned away, sickened. He gave no heed to the quiet orders of the Pope, as the soldiers herded Balducci's workmen toward the stairs. He leaned against a wall, conscious that Rafael had come to his side.

"You are all right?" the redhead asked, and he forced a smile.

"Well enough," he said. He looked around, as Clement approached. "I

would have spared you that last," he finished.

Distaste lay in the Pope's eyes, but his hand was gentle on Cellini's arm.

"It was a wicked thing he planned," he said, "but his payment was harsh." His voice softened. "I shall pray for him." He turned away and went toward the stairs, then hesitated. "I am sorry," he finished, "that I ever doubted you."

Benvenuto Cellini smiled ruefully, but said nothing; and after a moment Clement VII went up the stairs and was gone. Now, except for the soldiers who were preparing to carry the body out, Cellini and Rafael were alone.

"I owe you my life," Cellini said gently to Rafael.

Rafael flushed and turned away, bending to pick up the coins fallen from Balducci's purse. Almost absently, he dropped them into his.

"We need a rest," he said. "Let us talk about it at breakfast."

Cellini nodded and stood erect. He slid his sword into his scabbard and watched the last of the soldiers leave the room. His gaze swung about, and he knew he did not want to see this place for many days.

"Very well," he said.

They went together up the stairs; and now the horror of the past minutes was over, and the clear air above was like wine in its potency. Sunlight was brightening the sky, and already Rome was stirring from its slumber of the night.

"Where?" Rafael asked, breathing deeply of the morning air.

"Russetti's?" Cellini smiled. "Although I must say his prices are dear."

Rafael laughed softly. "What matter the price?" he said. "I have plenty."

His hand fumbled for his purse filled with Balducci's gold. Then he frowned, looking down. The purse was gone.

"Perhaps you look for this?" Cellini said, and dangled the purse from strong fingers. He grinned. "Even a belt of bells would not have helped!" he finished.

INCREDULOUSLY, Rafael looked at Benvenuto Cellini. Then laughter came to his face, and admiration sparkled in his eyes.

"I'm proud of you, Benvenuto," he said. "Not many thieves could steal my purse."

Benvenuto Cellini chuckled at the incorrigibility of the redhead. Then because the night was over and hunger stirred, he walked ahead. And at his side, Rafael nodded again, considering. Perhaps, if he talked the right way, he might make a good thief out of Cellini.

Side by side, they went down the street.

Truck Show Bull

THE SMALL CIRCUS TRAVELS VIA TRUCK THESE DAYS; BUT THE ELEPHANTS ARE ON THE JOB TOO; AND TRUCK TROUPING CAN BRING ABOUT EXCITING SITUATIONS.

"OH, for the love of Mikel!" Nolan groaned. "Of all the lousy lines! Tail up there, you dumb bulls! Tails! Tails!"

Few in the audience heard his words. They were lost in the blare of the small circus band blaring the exit march, with squawk of the two cornets and gobbling of an untuned air calliope. The elephant herd had emerged from the center ring, after the finish of its act, and was thundering along the hippodrome track in single file, headed for the exit. And that, to a circus crowd, constitutes invisibility; almost as definite as the dropping of the curtain to stage audiences. Once an act is over, it's forgotten. Most of the patrons were already watching the "Three Fearless Flyers," in spangled tights, climbing into their rigging for the next display. Few paid attention to a row of gray shapes receding into the background.

But Phil Nolan, the new superintendent of the herd, was noticing. He was young, and conscientious, and took this job seriously. Halfway out of the tent, he hooked big Jennie, the leader, in a flapping ear, and halted her. Then he turned, and cracked his bull whip furiously at the others. "Tails, you idiots!" he snapped. "Dammit, don't you know you're supposed to hold each other's tails, and keep a line, going out? Butch! Straighten 'em out, can't you? They look like the devil!"

At this, Fannie, the intermediate-sized elephant immediately following Jennie, and Moe and Sue, the two little ones bringing up in the rear—all looked upset. They squawked and milled and rolled little pig-eyes, as the lash flicked them. It didn't hurt, of course; it didn't even tickle, for elephantine hides are quite impervious to a mere whip. But they were shocked, and pained by the outburst. Butch Donovan, the other bull man, looked surprised also—as much as his heavy-featured face ever registered

anything. But he responded, dutifully: "All right, you punks!" he grunted. "You hoid what the boss said! Grab them tails, straighten out! Hup! Hyah!"

He prodded right and left with his bull hook. Twittering, protesting, the elephants lined up, holding each other's tails in the traditional manner. Nolan, eying them sternly, insisting on perfection with commands and whip-cracks.

"Come on! Come on!" Miss Patsy Adair, sitting atop Jennie's great head in her "finale" pose, drummed impatient gilt-booted heels against the bony forehead. "What's going on down there? Get me out of this, will you? I've got a date!"

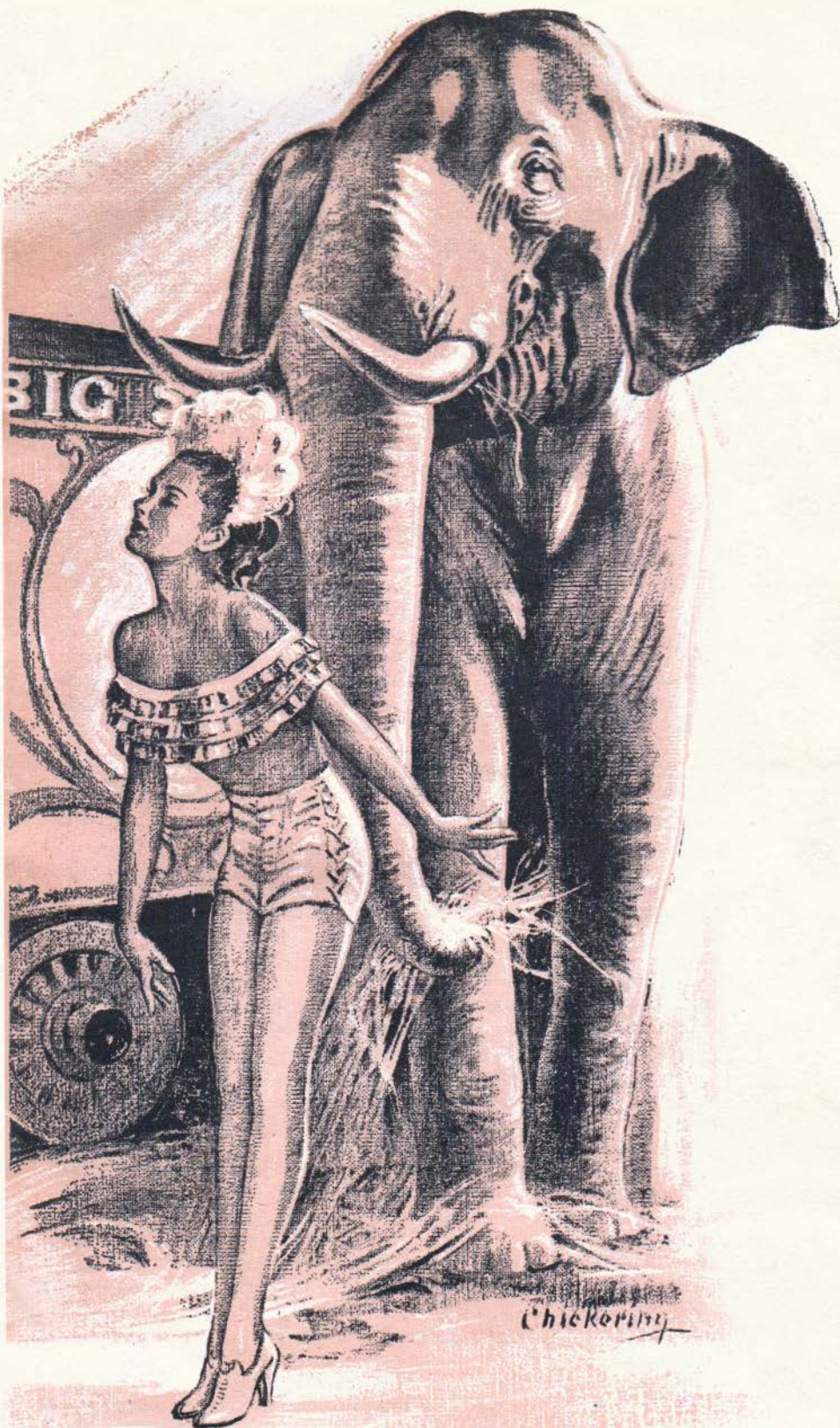
Nolan sighed. Reluctantly he gave the signal to move on. The big elephant lurched into motion, lumbering like a tank, the others following in their clinging queue. They swept on around the curve, through the menagerie connection, and out of the Big Top. The band had already

switched to "The Skater's Waltz"; shimmering figures were shooting back and forth overhead in preliminary warm-ups. The crowd had forgotten them.

They thudded across the narrow connection, splashing mud-puddles, a few standee spectators with umbrellas scattering to make room for them. They passed into the small-animal tent, Miss Adair lifting its wet flap with her hands to keep it from knocking her plumed hat off. They crossed the tent to their picket line; moving leisurely, now that they were out of sight. The two bull men unbuttoned their gaudy frogged uniforms as they walked, and the girl stripped off her gauntlets. The big elephant swung into place beside her stake, then low-



by ROBERT
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*"What difference does it make whether the
bulls hold tails or not?"*

ered her head and knelt without being cued, letting her rider slip off to the ground. Then she stood up, stuffed a mouthful of hay into her triangular mouth and stood chewing, watching the others as they filed into their pickets alongside her. She was a huge wrinkled beast; her incredibly knowing little eyes twinkled amiably.

Miss Adair confronted Nolan, a question in her gaze. "Mind telling me what that was all about, Phil?" she asked. "What the heck difference does it make whether the bulls hold tails or not, coming out? The act's all over, anyway. Who cares?"

"Oh, he does!" Butch Donovan drawled. He leaned his bulk against

a tentpole, and scratched himself with his bull hook, grinning. "He's a railroad showman, you gotta remember. We're jes' low truck-show people. He can't be expected to understand this here higher artistry, as it's practiced in the mammoth tented institutions where he comes from! We hain't got standards, like him!"

Nolan grinned back at them, a little shamefaced. "All right, you two!" he said. "Rib me, if you want to. Maybe I am finicky! But, dammit, I still can't see why those bulls can't hold a simple formation! They're the dumbest bunch I ever tried to work with. They won't coordinate; they won't work together. There're only four of 'em, but they're more trouble than any big railroad herd I ever trouped with. They won't work together; they're all individualists. They just don't seem to have any herd sense. No herd sense, at all!

"All the elephants I ever handled had it. They would coordinate—they worked as a unit. Even the largest herds, with forty or fifty bulls in them—why, a single man can tail' up the whole lot and lead them together, in a line a block long! That's what I mean by herd sense."

"Oh, yeah?" Donovan bit off a plug of tobacco, and chomped vigorously. "Don't sound much like 'sense' to me. Sounds like dumbness. Like your rail bulls was just a bunch o' sheep, with no minds o' their own."

"No, no! It's not that," Nolan insisted. "They're intelligent, very much so. It's just that they're herd animals; it's their nature to do things together. The working elephants in India are the same way, and even the wild ones. The herds do everything together, even stampeding. It's just the instinct of the species. But these—damn it, they don't do anything together! I can't understand it."

"We-ell—" Donovan expectorated a brown stream. "You gotta remember these is truck-show bulls, boss. They hain't really a herd at all, 'cept on the billboards. Your rail bulls walk to an' from the train every day, in one bunch. They work together, pullin' wagons. They ride together in a bull car at night. Our'n don't. They ride in trucks from town to town, sometimes just one in a van. An' when



Jennie would push it forward just enough to get it started, then step delicately aside.

they work on the lot, they work single. Only time they're all together is when they perform. How they gonna develop herd sense?

"They got plenty o' sense other ways, believe me! They got their own brand o' smartness. It's a different kind, an individual kind; thinkin' fer themselves. They hain't no critter on earth smarter'n a good truck-show bull. Hain't that so, Miss Pat?"

"It certainly is!" the girl agreed, eagerly. "Why, you take old Jennie, there!" She pointed toward the great rocking beast, watching them with shrewd little eyes. "She's so wise, it almost scares you. Nobody thinks of her as an animal at all; she's just one of the troupe. She's been traveling with truck shows ever since there were any. She knows more about this outfit than its owners; and she's a better trowper than any of us. She's always dependable, always reliable. And the things she can do! Like untying her picket chain, for instance. 'They say no animal can untie a knot, only humans. But she can; she does it all the time.'"

"You're telling me?" Nolan said grimly. "I can't keep her chained up; she roams off all the time. Wandering around the living-trailers, mooching food from the cookhouse. What kind of discipline is that?"

The girl laughed. "Well, maybe it isn't discipline; but you've got to admit it's intelligence. And you should see her with kids! She loves them; she's like a mother with 'em. Why, when my girl friend Marge Clarke, of the Riding Clarkes, was on the show last season with her baby, she used to leave it with Jennie when she went uptown shopping. Jennie'd stand over it and guard it, wouldn't let anyone come near it until Marge got back. I tell you, she's wonderful!"

Nolan patted the great rubbery trunk absently. "Oh, I suppose she's bright enough, at that. And the others work well in the ring, and take

cues all right. But I just can't get used to their lack of herd sense."

Miss Adair gathered up her belongings. "Well, I'll leave you two to finish the argument!" she said gayly. "I've got to go to my trailer and get dressed for that date I mentioned. Don Colson, the wire-walker, is taking me to a roadhouse he's found, between here and the next stand, for dinner and dancing. A lot of the performers are going. We probably won't show up at the next lot until dawn—real old-time 'circus arrival' stuff! Be seeing you!" She ran lightly down the tent, ducked under the sidewall, and disappeared.

THE two men looked after her, Butch Donovan chewing reflectively. "Now, ef'n you'd worry less 'bout bulls keepin' formation, an' more about that gal," he offered after a pause, "you might do yourself some good with her, boss. She likes you; anyone kin see that. Better'n that tightrope lug you're lettin' cut you out. An' she's the prettiest gal on the trick—an' the nicest. Irish too, by God!" he added, as one who bestows the ultimate accolade.

"Yes, she's lovely," Nolan agreed. Then: "But, Lord, I haven't got any time for that sort of thing, Butch; you know that! I'm too busy, with this herd: I can't play around."

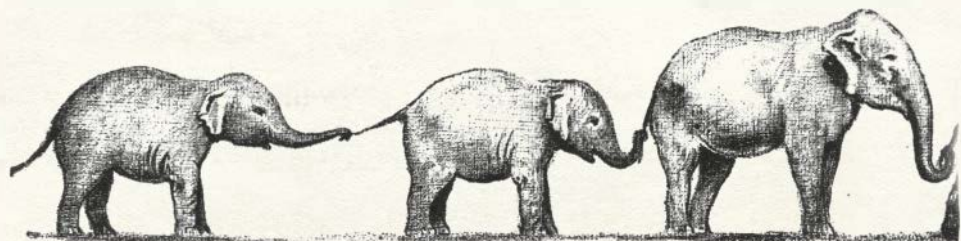
Donovan eyed him curiously. "You take this job awful serious; don't you,

boss? Wouldn't think you would; a little herd like this'n, after all them big ones you was with—"

"Yes, but they weren't *my* herds, you see!" Nolan explained. "I wasn't a superintendent, with them; just an ordinary bull man. Highest I ever got was working a ring group. That's why I took this truck-show offer—so I could have a herd of my own, even a small one, and start building up my name as a trainer. It means a lot to me, Butch, making good with it. More than I can tell you!"

Donovan yawned. "Aw, you'll make good, all right. You're doin' a swell job, boss; you got nothin' to worry 'bout. You gotta quit jitterin' an' frettin' so much—learn to take things easier! That's the nice thing 'bout a truck show; a feller kin relax, an' enjoy life. You don't hafta have ants in your pants all the time, like on the big shows. Always fixin' up, an' tryin' to git ahead o' each other. Us truckers ain't like that, people an' animals. We take things easy; we don't strain ourselves. Mebbe we hain't ambitious; but we sure git more out o' the game!" He heaved his two hundred and fifty-odd pounds erect, and held out an arm. "Here! Gimme your uniform, boss. I'll take it out to the trucks an' hang it up with mine. I gotta check 'em both, anyways, 'fore we start loadin' the bulls."

"Right! I'll be getting their head-dresses off, while you're doing it."



Nolan laid his scarlet coat and cap on top of Donovan's (which were blue, and of a different cut, for truck shows don't bother as much about matching uniforms as their larger rivals—the age of Norman Bel Geddes hasn't hit them yet) and Butch loafed out under the sidewall with them. Then Nolan turned, and began to divest Jennie and the others of the curious brass-studded leather headgear that all performing elephants traditionally wear in the ring. He frowned over them too, a little; they were of at least three different styles, and one was a faded red while the others were black. No uniformity there, either; he'd have to do something about them, if he wanted the act to look like anything.

BUT everything was different on a truck show—for instance, the animal tent was still standing, with the performance almost over. On a railroad show it would have been torn down long ago, and on its way to the next town. But with motorized circuses, the menagerie is usually also the Horse Top. There is no pad-room, since the performers all dress in their own living-trailers. One whole side of this long, low tent was occupied by ring stock: Six spotted Liberty horses, the three fat bareback steeds, the m'nage and Wild West mounts, not to mention a dozen little black Shetland ponies, and a couple of donkeys.

The other side held the four elephants and four or five small cage-trucks, shuttered now, and the wild beasts inside them hidden. A couple of camels, a lone zebra, a llama and the performing goats were staked out in the center; and the led-stock man (there was only one) was leading them out, one at a time, and loading them in a big truck parked just outside. The beasts were all lazy and sleepy and much too fat; they didn't get enough exercise, just standing in the tent all day. In the old days of wagon shows, when they'd had to walk from town to town, they'd been lean and worn and tired all the time—and perfectly healthy! Now, with nothing to do but eat and sleep, leading the literal life of Riley, they suffered from all sorts of digestive trou-

bles, and were a constant problem. Modern mechanized life imposes exactly the same penalties on animals as on human beings!

Nolan finished removing the head-dresses, and piled them in a corner to be loaded. By that time Donovan had loafed back in, wearing an oilskin slicker, and carrying another. "Better put this on, boss," he told him. "You'll need it; rain's startin' in again. Looks like it'd keep up all night!"

"Damn! Oh, damn!" And Nolan scowled. "I wish to heaven it'd let up on us, for a little. The same thing, every night. It's getting me down!"

"You want I should stick around with my bulls, an' help you move the trucks off?" Donovan suggested. "Them little punks ain't no good fer pushin' yit. But Fannie could help some."

"No, no! You go ahead," Nolan said. "It never takes more than one bull at night, no matter how wet it is. It isn't the work I'm worrying about. It's driving Jennie's truck over the wet roads afterward. I'm still not used to that part of my job yet. I'm a fair truck-driver; I've got a license. But I haven't had the experience the rest of you have. I still get nervous, handling a big 'semi' on wet highways. Especially in mountain country, like the show's in now."

"Yeah. I know!" Donovan sympathized. "Ef this wasn't such a small outfit, you wouldn't have to do it. On big truck shows, trainers don't drive. But on little ones like this, most everybody does. It'll be easier, after we git out o' these here mountains. These roads is plumb hell, an' all twists an' curves. I been drivin' bull trucks all my life; but they make me nervous too. I'll sure be glad when we git down on the flat again. It's too tricky; a feller gits drowsy, or takes his eyes off the road a second, an'—*wham!* He's liable to wind up a mile below! An' in some cañon where it'll take days to find him. Trucks go over along here all the time, the towners say. An' they ain't 'live cargo,' like we are. Bulls is awful heavy; if they git to shiftin' round, hit's liable to

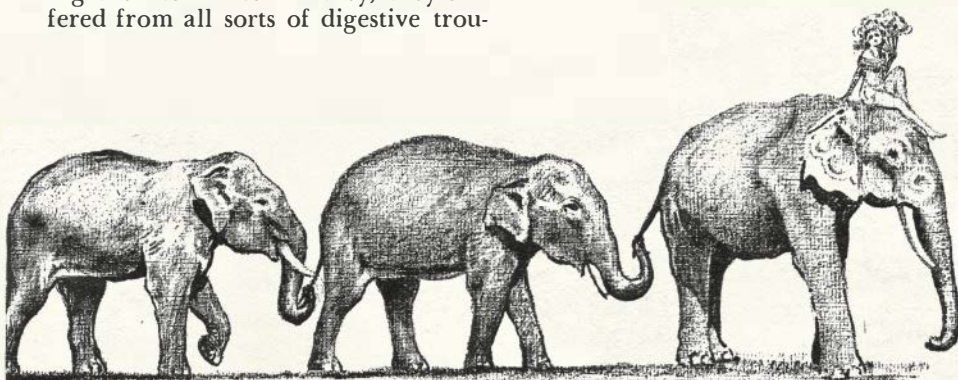
jackknife the trailer. I most went over twicet last night, when my punks got restless. You're lucky you're drivin' Jennie. She's an experienced rider; that old bull, she don't shift hardly at all."

"No, she doesn't," Nolan agreed. "She's very quiet. But of course, she has to move occasionally, and every time she does, she shakes the truck, she's so huge. If she ever does it on one of those hairpin curves— Tell me, don't they have a lot of accidents with these elephant trucks?"

"Oh, sure, plenty," Butch assured him. "More'n all the other circus trucks put together. Couple o' turn-overs every season; bulls been killed, an' drivers. Ol' Jennie's been in a couple herself; she got that big scar on her back in one. Pity we cain't jest walk 'em over the roads, like we used to. But that's too slow, nowadays. An' anyway, now some fool'd smack into you with a auto, the first mile!" He yawned and stretched. "Well, guess we might as well load my bulls, an' let me git movin' if you don't need me round here."

THEY led the three smaller elephants out under the sidewall to where two long scarlet vans were parked—huge semi-trailers, specially reinforced for the carrying of colossal weights, shimmering in the rain, gaudy with lettering and frescoes and crude paintings of elephant heads. One, the largest, was a Diesel, almost as big as a boxcar; the other was slightly smaller. Oddly, the big truck was Donovan's. Three pachyderms, even when not full grown, take up much more room and weigh more than one big one! When they'd all been walked up a wooden incline into the bed, and chained them to floor-rings, there was barely room to close the door on them. The beasts fretted and twittered, accustoming themselves to the darkness, while Donovan walked around the truck, making a last check of tires and air-brakes and coupling. Then he climbed into the big cab, switched on headlights, and kicked over his motor to warm up.

"Well, guess I'm off, boss!" he drawled. "Here's hopin' the roads ain't so bad as last night's. Country like this makes a feller wish fer the early days o' truck circuses, when we used to travel in column—the whole show in one long line, like a old-time pee-rade. It was great advertisin', an' the boys could help each other in emergencies. But o' course, we cain't do it nowadays; it'd make too much congestion on the highways. Now we move like any other trucks, one at a time, an' on our own. . . . Well, so long, boss! Good luck!" He revved his motor; the Diesel's exhaust poured a cloud of steam.





"Want Jennie to give you a push, to start you off?" Nolan shouted, above the sudden roar.

"Naw! Don't need it. This lot ain't really soft, jes' wet. We'll git off O.K. You worry 'bout them other trucks. So long!" He jerked levers. The great vehicle shuddered, then lurched forward, its fourteen giant tires splashing mud. Slowly, like some prehistoric monster, it lumbered over ruts and grass clumps toward the distant street. Nolan stood watching until it had bumped over the curb, swung left under street lamps, and headed roaring into town traffic.

Then he sighed, and turned back into the tent. He always felt a little lost without Donovan, in a job still strange and new. Now he was on his own until the next town, and it made him feel his inexperience keenly.

He found old Jennie standing unchained where he'd left her in the deserted picket line, rocking placidly, and champing hay. He picked up a huge leather harness, with log-chain traces, and put it over her shoulders in preparation for the night's work. He fingered the long scar along her spine, as he did so. Must have been quite an accident, to leave a mark like that! Yet it hadn't bothered her; she'd taken it in her stride. Quite a beast! His respect for Jennie was rising considerably.

They had the long tent almost to themselves now. The cage-trucks had been driven out, the led stock was gone. Even the horses and ponies were being led out to their long, slatted traveling-vans—all but the Wild West stock, who could be heard pounding and galloping in the "Concert" now in progress in the Big Top. The performance being over, the band had ceased to play. Silence reigned in the tent; only a single wan light was burning.

Having finished harnessing, Nolan led the great beast out into the rain. Outside, dismantling activities were going on all over the lot—activities that seemed strange, to Phil Nolan's railroad showman's eye! Everything was strangely peaceful and unhurried, with none of the excitement and bustle he was used to. No lot bosses bawling orders, and blowing whistles, no chanting gangs of Negro canvasmen swarming like ants. No plunging six- and eight-horse hitches, no elephant teams, or even caterpillar tractors with flailing treads. Just a lot of trucks cruising quietly about, with chugging motors and glaring headlights.

They did not look in the least like circus wagons, these trucks, despite the elaborate painting and lettering that tried to make them so. They had none of the traditional shapes of pole and seat and jack and canvas vans. They were just ordinary highway freighters or delivery trucks, of half a dozen makes, converted to tent-show use. And the living-trailers among them, oblong or cigar-shaped affairs of aluminum, with lighted windows—they looked like nothing ever seen on an old-time circus lot! Nor did the numerous cars and private automobiles.

But they were all functioning with smooth efficiency. The trucks not only moved themselves, without being pulled; they also did much of the work of men. A little half-ton pickup, with a steel crane mounted on its hood, lifted rolls of canvas and poles and hoisted them into vans, doing the job of half a hundred roustabouts. Another, fitted with a stake-drawing device, pulled up tent stakes with rhythmic ease. A third, with a winch and cable, did all the heavy pulling; and so on. The few workmen, most of whom doubled as truck-drivers, had little to do; they loafed about, smoking cigarettes and chatting. The lot superintendent sat on the fender of his roadster and puffed a cigar, as he directed operations.

It was all wrong, from the viewpoint of the few spectators watching under umbrellas. The old picturesque and exotic sight of a circus teardown were completely missing. This was a new kind of circus, modern and streamlined and mechanized as the civilization that had produced it. What it lacked in color and interest, it more than made up in efficiency. Its people, snug and dry in those uncircuslike living-trailers, that were really bungalows on wheels, enjoyed all sorts of luxuries and a privacy their ancestors did not even dream of. And the trucks were moving the show off the lot, even on this very bad night, with clocklike precision. Approximately once every five

minutes a loaded vehicle headed out on its way to the next stand. The advance guard of them had already arrived on the next lot; and nearly all would be there by midnight. There is no early-morning arrival for truck shows; small boys who got up at dawn to "see the circus come to town" would find it already there, and its personnel slumbering peacefully, waiting until long past daylight to begin a leisurely setting up.

It was trouping de luxe! The old-timers might deplore it, and sigh for the gilded, glamorous hardships of a circus now largely history. But the fact remains that almost three-fourths of all tent shows are now motorized; only the largest still cling to rails. And so they will continue to be, until the next development comes, which may not be far off. For already, in South America, there is a circus that is traveling entirely by airplane.

BUT amid all this mechanization, there moved one curious survival from the past—old Jennie! No machine has ever been invented that can replace the working elephant on a circus; the great beast is just as valuable to motorized shows as in the old horse-drawn days. Jennie worked with trucks exactly as her predecessors had with wagons, pushing them about, getting them out of mud when they mired down, and so on. And she was as much at home with motorized vehicles as their drivers and mechanics were! She acted almost as if she knew how to drive them herself, or to repair them when they broke down!

Certainly she knew that they were machines, and understood the basic principles of their operation. She proved that, by the way she worked with them. She would set her bulbous forehead against the tailboard of a stalled vehicle, push it forward just enough to get it started, then step delicately aside to avoid the churning rear wheels as they gathered traction on their own. She pushed not as she would have pushed a wagon, as dead weight, but allowing for the pull of a motor to help her. No human expert could have calculated that pull with greater accuracy. And she sauntered casually into mazes of moving, roaring vehicles, indifferent to noise and headlights and exhausts, inhaling gasoline fumes and carbon monoxide as blandly as the people did. She was a truck-show bull, a product of the machine age her ancestors in the jungle would not have recognized. She even had a streak of black oil on one flank that she'd picked up somewhere, and it gave her an appropriate aspect.

She pushed loaded trucks over mud and ruts, to the lot's edge. She hauled up loaded trailers, and helped to hook them on behind. She even hooked onto a truck now and then, and towed

it like a wagon. It is a strange sight, an elephant pulling a truck; but it's seen all the time on motor shows. Their vehicles' bumpers are all specially reinforced so they can be hooked onto; and often a strategic tug will accomplish more than does any amount of pushing. . . .

Phil Nolan walked beside Jennie, directing her with words, or an occasional light touch of his bull hook. She knew much more about the work than he did; all he had to do was fasten and unfasten her trace-chains, or cue her when to start pushing; she did the rest. She worked on hour after hour, happily, enjoying the pouring rain that annoyed the humans, for an elephant loves the feel of water on its skin. She got the show off, with smoothness and efficiency.

Only once was there a serious challenge to her ability. That was when they answered a hail from a stalled property truck and found its rear wheels almost submerged in mud and water. The van was literally down to its bed, and sinking farther every time its tires churned.

Nolan whistled. "Good Lord!" he said. "How did this happen?"

"Water runnin' off the eaves of the Big Top," the truck-driver explained ruefully. "Made a sort of quicksand. We didn't notice, till after we'd loaded up."

"Well, you'll probably have to unload again!" Nolan shook his head. "Wish I hadn't sent Donovan on ahead. This is a two-bull job, at least. Jennie can't handle it by herself. She can't pull you out alone; an elephant's shoulders are weak. And pushing will only drive the truck in deeper. We need a bull to pull, and one to push."

"Oh, no, you don't!" The driver was blandly confident. "Jennie can git by herself, easy. You ain't known that old bull long's I have. She's got a system. You just start her up, an' watch what happens!"

"WELL, all right. But don't expect any results—" Nolan led Jennie around to the rear of the vehicle. She surveyed the job for a moment, making little calculating noises in her trunk. She bent her great head lower than usual, hesitated a second or so, then lunged forward with a grunt. To Nolan's amazement, the truck seemed to rise into the air and float out of the hole, landing on solid ground beyond. The driver hadn't even started his engine.

"Now how the heck did she do that?" Nolan gasped, staring.

"Easy! She ran her trunk under the rear axle, and used it like a lever. Lifted, as well as pushed. I seen her do it before, lots o' times. That's why I didn't run the motor; so the wheels wouldn't scrape her. Oh, she's

a darb, that ol' bull! Buy you a bag of peanuts for that tomorrow, Jennie!" He waved a hand, and drove off.

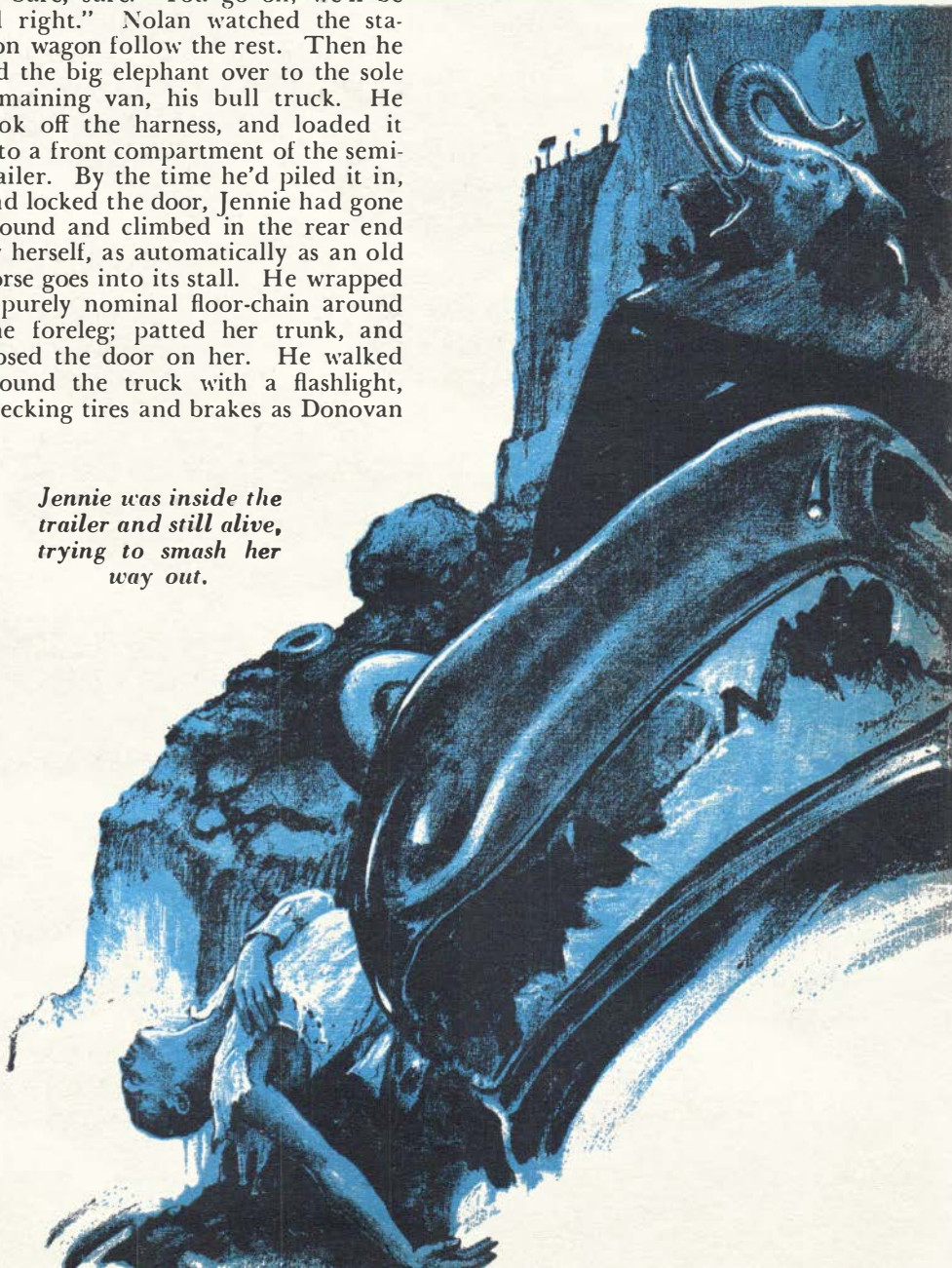
Nolan looked at Jennie with a new respect. "Well, well, old lady!" he murmured, patting her neck. "Guess you're pretty good, at that! If you only had a little herd sense—"

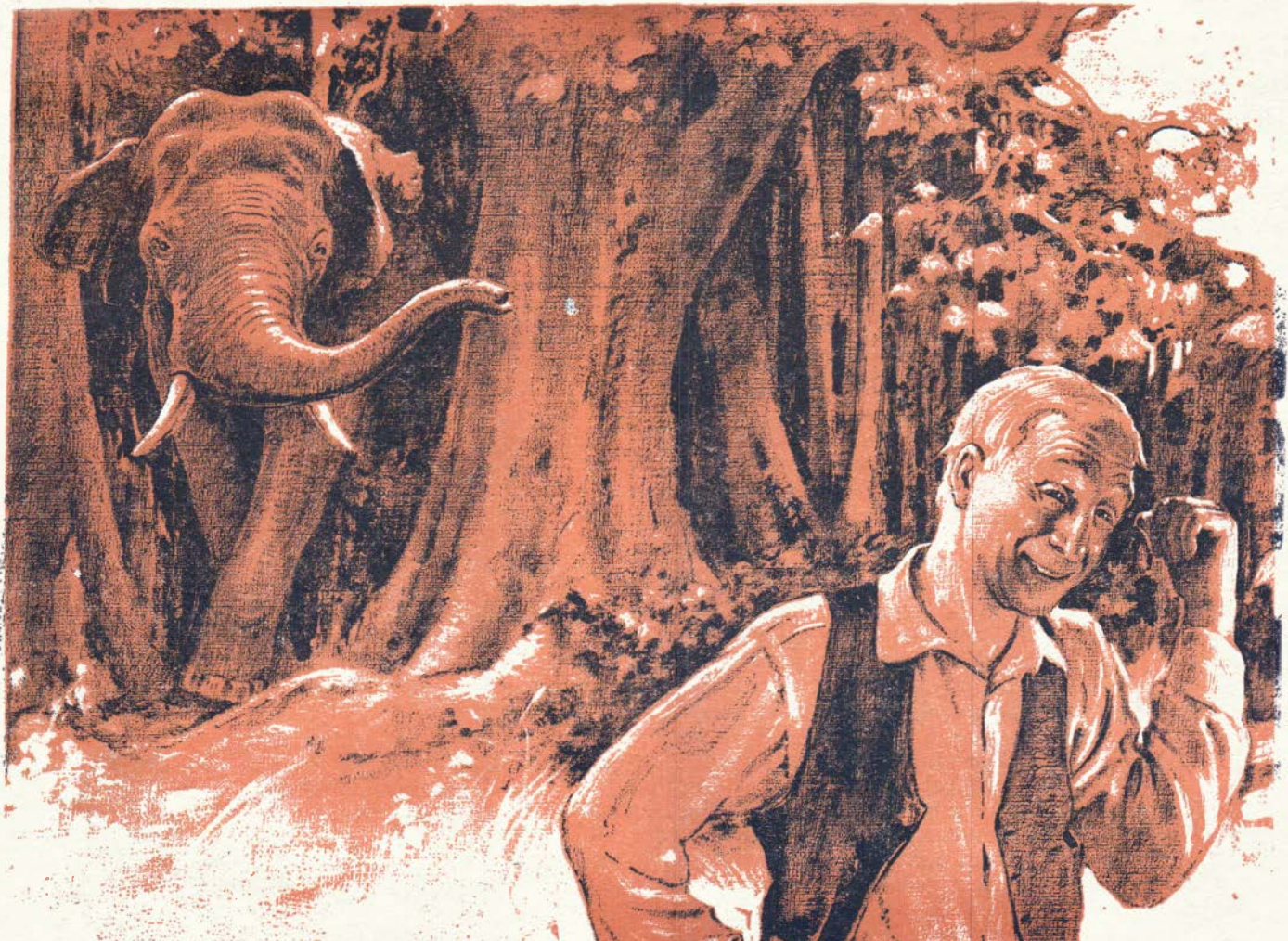
At last the whole show was off. Even the Big Top was loaded and gone, the great center poles bobbing and jolting off on top of a specially built truck. The menagerie, the side-show, the service tents—all were on the way; nothing remained except a couple of autos and living-trailers. The transportation boss slid his station wagon alongside Nolan and Jennie as they stood alone on the darkened lot.

"Well, that's it, Phil," he said. "You can load the bull now, and get going. Don't mind if I go ahead of you, do you? I want to keep an eye on the pole truck, going over the mountains."

"Sure, sure! You go on; we'll be all right." Nolan watched the station wagon follow the rest. Then he led the big elephant over to the sole remaining van, his bull truck. He took off the harness, and loaded it into a front compartment of the semi-trailer. By the time he'd piled it in, and locked the door, Jennie had gone around and climbed in the rear end by herself, as automatically as an old horse goes into its stall. He wrapped a purely nominal floor-chain around one foreleg; patted her trunk, and closed the door on her. He walked around the truck with a flashlight, checking tires and brakes as Donovan

Jennie was inside the trailer and still alive, trying to smash her way out.





There was almost no traffic in the streets through which he was moving; lights were dimmed and store-fronts darkened. Small towns retire early. In the old days, even in the rain, there'd have been a few spectators watching the horse-drawn wagons roll out. But no one cared to stay up to see just a lot of trucks!

He reached the outskirts in less than five minutes, following the big white arrows chalked on telephone poles to mark the route. Houses thinned, and street lamps disappeared. Soon he came to the highway and swung into it, now with regular signs and signals to guide him. Even here, he found little traffic—only an occasional automobile, and now and then a big freighter unit, semi-trailer and trailer. Mostly he had the road to himself, which was fortunate. For within a mile or two it had begun to narrow and was mounting steeply, with tall tree-clad slopes on one side, and yawning ravines and cañons on the other. It was also twisting and curving like a snake. He was again bucking mountain country. Worse, far worse, than the night before!

The rain seemed mixed with fog; it was a solid curtain. Despite the constant *Click-clack! Click-clack!* of the windshield-wipers (thank heaven they were working well; sometimes

“Lordy! I never seen nothin’ like that. She brung him in—through the woods.”

they didn’t!) and the headlights and searchlight stabbing ahead, only the white guide-lines showed the road, at times. The highway had now narrowed to two lanes, was winding around mountains like a corkscrew. Every few yards there’d be another glass-button “S” or inverted “L” sign, denoting another nasty curve around which the great bull truck lumbered with screeching brakes and skidding tires. Now and then the rain would thin out for a minute; and the headlights would blaze out over miles of gorges of incalculable depth, or pyramiding green-mantled peaks. Amid them, the little man-made ribbon of paving was lost and insignificant.

The cigarette went out in Nolan’s lips; his white-knuckled hands were numb on the twisting wheel. His eyes, glued on the road, were already aching; and every nerve was tense. A much more experienced driver than

he would have been nervous on such a highway, even in dry weather. And the streaming, glasslike macadam enormously increased the hazard. A half-dozen times the truck made turns only by a bare margin, grazing the white wooden posts along the outer side. They were in very bad condition, those markers, with paint worn off, and ominous gaps hinting at old accidents. On one or two of the worst turns they were missing altogether. Even the white traffic lines were fading out, as mile succeeded mile. This was back-country, with few tourists; apparently the authorities did not bother to keep it up.

Fifteen minutes passed, half an hour. Nolan’s brow was drenched with sweat, every nerve in his body frayed. And still no respite; the rain

grew heavier; the road got worse; visibility was lessening. His pace had slowed now to a mere crawl, barely moving; yet the big vehicle skidded and slipped dangerously at every turn, and only sheer will held it to the macadam. It definitely was not responding rightly to its wheel, now. Like most small-circus trucks, it was

He had not caught even a glimpse of the other circus trucks since he'd started. Apparently they were far ahead of him on the road, or even in the next town by now. Or—gruesome thought!—had cracked up, and were lying in some of those dark cañons over which his headlights swung.

Then suddenly Phil Nolan realized a strange truth: that no amount of mechanization, or inventions, can ever take the risk out of trouping! Rather, they have made it worse. A horse-drawn wagon show would have

cab, he realized dimly, or what was left of it. He must have fallen out, and it had landed on top of him; only the soft earth had saved his life. His right leg was numb, he could not move it at all; and tearing pains stabbed along his ribs whenever he tried to struggle; apparently several of them were broken too. Miraculously, he had escaped other injury. Yet he was hopelessly fastened here beneath the overturned cab, to lie impotently until help arrived—if it ever did! "In some cañon, where it'll take days to find him!" Butch Donovan's words echoed in his mind. God! In that case he'd be dead, long before he was discovered.

The ravine, or valley, or whatever it was into which he'd fallen was inky black. The truck lights had all been smashed out—amazing that the truck had not caught fire and burned up! And yet, strangely, in this darkness he could see, a little. The shimmering rain, still falling, made a faint iridescence that showed things. He could make out the bulk of the semi-trailer, now come uncoupled and lying some distance away on its side. It was half-buried in loose earth; and more was still sifting down, at intervals. Evidently the fall had caused a landslide. And that slide had saved him; the truck had ridden down the slope—God alone knew how many hundreds of feet, on a carpet of moving earth and shrubbery that had cushioned its fall.

There was a steady thumping and pounding going on somewhere near. The earth was vibrating. For a moment, he thought it was the landslide that was making it. Then he realized that it was Jennie, inside the trailer and still alive, trying to smash her way out. . . . The top side of the prone vehicle split open like a cocoon, and the great head and shoulders of the elephant emerged monstrously against the sky. She hauled herself through the opening with her forelegs, with weirdly human movements; then stood trembling and twittering, flapping her great ears and tossing her trunk wildly. He couldn't see how badly she was hurt, save that she dragged one hind leg a little. But even so, her escape seemed almost a miracle. Then he remembered those previous accidents; evidently she'd learned how to fall.

For a long time she rocked and flipped and squawked, a perfect demonstration of elephantine hysterics. Nolan lay very still, trying not to attract her attention. Expert in animal ways, he knew that the great beasts are wholly unpredictable after an accident. They often go completely out of their minds, and will attack their best friends as readily as a foe. And he was in no position to



old and secondhand, despite its gaudy paint. Its brakes were frayed, its steering-gear worn out, kept in condition only by constant attention in the portable repair-shop. It could not long stand such punishment as it was getting now!

To make matters worse, Jennie was getting restless, back in the trailer. He could neither see nor hear her, in the closed vehicle, but he could feel the vibrations of her great weight as she increasingly moved and fretted. Experienced rider though she was, she was only an animal, with an animal's nerves; and evidently she was taking fright at all the skids and swerves. And, it may be, some of her master's anxiety was communicating itself to her, through an elephant's uncanny instincts. At all events, she was shifting worse than she ever had, making his driving that much more difficult. He longed to stop and chain her more tightly; but could not, without blocking the highway and inviting worse disaster. He had not passed so much as a filling-station or seen a light in the last ten or twelve miles. Apparently this was utter wilderness. There was no place to stop or turn off even for a moment.

crawled over these mountains in perfect safety; railroad troupers would have ridden over them sleeping peacefully in their bunks. But the truck showman, with all modern science at his command, rides with danger ever at his elbow. And faces it, utterly and completely alone.

Even as he pondered this, the thing happened, with awful suddenness. Suddenly a turn loomed up with no markers at all! He saw it only as a black gap ahead, ominous and yawning; and swung wildly to avoid it, skidding his wheels. He heard old Jennie trumpet in fright, and felt her lunge, the trailer jackknife with her great weight. Frantically he pulled the air-lever, kicked the tractor brake—and felt them fail. The edge was rushing toward him: there was a sickening sense of plunging, a crashing of bushes and underbrush as the headlights went out, a brief interval of falling. Then blackness, complete and absolute.

When he regained consciousness, it was to racking pain and a feeling of suffocation. He was lying on the ground; something heavy was pinning him down. It was the trailer

defend himself. He lay rigid, despite the pain, hardly daring to breathe.

Then he realized that she saw him, was coming toward him. The great bulk towered over the wrecked cab; the corrugated trunk came groping under it, reaching for him. He cowered back, trembling. But gradually he was aware that her intentions were not hostile. The trunk touched and moved over his body, but with a definite stroking movement: and she was making little chirruping sounds of sympathy.

A wild hope came to him. "Jennie!" he gasped. "Get this thing off me! Pick it up. Understand? Lift it! Hup! Hup!"

She understood, all right. The great trunk stiffened, leverlike, in response, as it had under the stalled truck earlier. Jennie lowered her head against the wreck, pushed and heaved and grunted. Miraculously, the great weight lifted from his crushed ribs. Slowly, agonizingly, using his one good arm and leg, he crawled out from under it, into the wet. "Hold it, Jennie! Hold it!" he kept telling her, while he was inching; for if she let it drop back, it would have killed him certainly. Then, when he judged himself clear: "All right, girl! Let it go!" And it came down, with an ominous crash of metallic tons. It grazed one leg, scraping it painfully; but that was a mere detail. At least he could breathe again, despite the stabbing in his lungs; and the weight was no longer on him.

But he couldn't last long, lying there in the pouring rain, he realized. His teeth were chattering; shivering rigors racked him; the broken bones were agony. Try as he would, he could not stand. He attempted it several times, clutching at Jennie's leg to aid him; but fell back limp and quivering, almost unconscious. He couldn't even crawl into the shelter of the wrecked trailer; the slow inching was too painful. He gave it up, finally, and lay there with the water splashing on his face, utterly helpless.

OLD JENNIE was wandering about restlessly, squawking, and waving her trunk in the air. She glared around into the darkness and the clustering trees; making little darts about, still dragging that right hind leg. Once she essayed the slope down which they'd fallen, only to slip back after a few yards. What had been a hillside was now, thanks to the slide, almost a precipice; no creature of her bulk could possibly have climbed up it to the road, hundreds of feet above. She gave it up, after a little, and limped back toward the forest again. She faced it, sniffing with her trunk; making what were apparently calculations. Then suddenly she started

off through the trees, with an air of determination.

Nolan roused himself, then. "Jennie!" he called, feebly. "Don't leave me! Come back!"

She hesitated for a moment, twittering and fretting, then came back to where he lay. Suddenly she bent and scooped him up in her trunk. He cried out with the pain of it. "No! Jennie! Put me down!" he gasped in agony.

But she ignored him, flung him up, on her back. He clutched desperately at the streaming wet hide, straddling her neck, holding on to a great flapping ear. He felt the great bulk beneath him swing, plunge into the timber like a bulldozer, with snapping of brush and crashing of tree-trunks. Wet branches lashed his face, rain and rushing air choked him. He lost consciousness again.

IT was hours later. A wet sun was rising through clouds over the mountains; the rain had almost ceased. On the next lot, in a little mountain town backed up to the very edge of surrounding forest, the circus was unloading and setting up its tents for the day's performance. But in curiously hesitant fashion, men gathered in groups and talked anxiously. Butch Donovan was haranguing one of them, waving his hook excitedly.

"I tell you, he's went over!" he was saying. "He'd of showed up by now, if he hadn't! He's layin' back there somewheres: hurt, mebber kilt! We gotta find him!"

"Oh, I don't know," one of the others said. "A half-dozen cars and trucks have gone back over the road since daylight. There's no trace of an accident. There's a half dozen places he could 'a' gone over, sure. But there's no sign of it. Maybe he just got drunk, and laid out somewhere."

"No, no! He wouldn't do that," Butch insisted. "You an' me would, but not the boss! He's conscientious, he's always on schedule. On'y thing could be keepin' him is a crackup. I tell you he's in one o' them cañons. You couldn't see down into 'em, from the road: not till the sun's high. An' the rain'd wash away most o' the traces. I'm goin' back to look fer him myself, soon's the show's up!"

"What's the use?" another man shrugged. "If he went over, he's dead, sure—him an' the bull! If he wasn't, he'd of climbed to the road and signaled somebody. Or if Jennie was alive, she'd have done the same—they'd have found her wanderin' along the road. . . . Hold on, what's that?"

There was a distant crashing in the forest that fringed the lot—a sound of trumpeting. Suddenly the trees parted, and through them came an

elephant—a huge elephant, bleeding from a half-dozen wounds, and dragging one hind leg, but marching triumphantly, with a proud gleam in her eye. On her shoulders an unconscious man lay dangling limply.

"My Gawd, it's Jennie!" Donovan gasped. "They did have an accident, after all! An' she brung the boss in! Lordy! I never seen nothin' like that in my life! She brung him in! Not over the road, but through the woods; Gawd knows how many miles! Steerin' by dead reckonin', over mountains. Ain't she a wonder?"

"But how'd she know this was the right town?" the men marveled, as they lifted Phil Nolan tenderly down. "Or that the show was playing here?"

Donovan only shook his head. "If we knowed that," he said, "we'd be as smart as a bull! An' they ain't no man thet smart! All we'll ever know is thet she done it! An' that's all thet matters—here!—you guys git the boss to the doctor's tent, while I clean Jennie up. Ain't neither of 'em hurt bad, I'm sure. Jennie's jest got cuts an' sprains; they'll heal up in a week; she'll be back in performance. An' the boss, he's just passed out—ain't really bunged up. A few broken bones, mebber; but when'd thet ever stop a feller as conscientious as he is?"

THE band was playing, the calliope gobbling. The herd was lumbering out of the Big Top, after their act was finished, a few weeks later. Butch Donovan was prodding at the little elephants, trying to make them hold tails. "Grab on, you dumb bulls!" he was bellowing.

"Oh, let 'em alone, Butch!" Phil Nolan called back amiably from where he was walking beside old Jennie, holding to her ear to steady himself. The cast was off his leg now, but he was still limping and using his hook as a cane; his chest was tightly bandaged beneath the scarlet coat. But he was back working the act, and apparently very happy about it. He was smiling up at Miss Patsy Adair, riding on the great bull's scarlet head-dress. And she was smiling down at him, with a new look in her eyes.

"Quit fighting 'em, Butch," he drawled, over his shoulder. "They're doing all right. The act's all over, anyway; who cares? Eh, Pat?" They winked at each other.

"Yeah, but boss!" Donovan spluttered. "You yourself said you wanted 'em to have herd sense!"

Phil Nolan patted Jennie's trunk. "Oh, I had a lot of ideas!" he grinned, ruefully. "But that was quite awhile ago. I've learned since then—the hard way! Herd sense? What good is that? Individual initiative, thinking for themselves; *that's* what counts. And that's what makes a truck-show bull!"

ye Unspoyled Sauvage

{Canadian Dept.}

From "The Voyage of Monsieur de Monts into New France, 1607," to be found at great and diverting length in "Purchas his Pilgrimes." All of which is here cunningly illustrated by that crafty old tenderfoote, Peter Wells



A

And as {the Indians} did runne headlong, to come to the Barke, there was a Sauvage which hurt himselfe grievously in the heele against the edge of a Rocke... They then layed him downe on the ground, one of them holding his head on his lappe, and made many bawlings and singings, whereunto the wounded man answered but with a Ho, with a complayning voice, which having done they yeilded him to the cure of {our} Chirugion, and went their way, and the Patient also after hee had beene dressed: but two houres after he came againe, the most jocund in the world, having put about his head the binding cloth, wherewith his heele was wrapped, for to seem the more gallant... It was shewed them, in pressing the Grape into a Glasse, that of that we did make the Wine which wee did drinke. Wee would have made them to eate of the Grape, but having taken it into their mouthes, they spitted it out, so ignorant is this people of the



best thing that God hath given to Man, next to Bread. Yet, notwithstanding they have no want of wit, and might be brought to doe some good things, if they were civilized, and had the use of Handy-crafts. But they are subtile, theevish, traitorous, and though they be naked, yet one can not take heed of their fingers; for if one turne never so little his eyes aside and that they the opportun steale any Knife, or any thing else, they will nor fayle of it; and will theft between their butt will hide it within the sa their foot so cunningly, th shall not perceive it. Inde not wonder if a people poe naked be theevish; but wher heart is malicious, it is unexcusab.

This people is such, that they must bee handled with terrour: for if through love and gentlesse one give them too free accesse, they will practise some surprize, as it hath been knowne.....





OUR WORLD IS ABOUT TO END, FOR A GREAT NEW COMET IS FLASHING DIRECTLY TOWARD US. ONLY FIVE DAYS MORE! BUT LIFE IS STILL BOUNTIFUL, AND EACH BRINGS OUT THE DEAREST LONGING OF THE HEART, EVEN THOUGH IT IS TOO LATE TO MAKE HIS LIFE AS HE WISHED. . . . AND THEN COMES THE END. NO HOPE.

STAR OF

THE NEWS FIRST BROKE ONE SULTRY DECEMBER day when I made a routine reporter's call on Conway Jones, the Chief Astronomer out at the Observatory—and he calmly informed me that a huge new comet was flashing toward the earth. "We're moving toward the same point in space," he explained, "the comet at about two million miles a day, the earth at about one and a half million, and we're going to get there at the same time."

"What will happen then?" I asked.

"Either we blow up or we burn up."

Maddison, our editor, and Bailey the city editor, were very skeptical of my story and printed only a small hesitant part of it. But soon confirmation came to us in South Africa from other observatories throughout the world; the dreadful threat dominated everyone's thought; and each reacted according to his character: The stock-market broke badly, and wealthy Kennaway Laver, the father of my fiancée Philippa, began buying stock at bottom prices—and brought home two young women of doubtful character. . . . An operation had been planned to restore the sight of Judy Lane, a blind girl, and there was great public clamor that it be performed at once,

so that she might see this world before it ended. Hysteria mounted rapidly as the final week began. There was no time for the formal wedding Philippa and I had planned, and she talked of coming to me anyhow. And then came a report of important news from the conference of foreign ministers in London.

The Fifth Day

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

REALITY ALWAYS CHEATS THE IMAGINATION. THESE days should be tense, terrifying and exciting. They should be full, swift and consuming, wretched and ecstatic. But it seems that one can become accustomed to terror too, and take things for granted. One can get used to the idea of the end, the sudden cutting off, the last page, the full stop. And once that happens, there is an end to ecstasy. The spirit can not for long maintain the heights. After the crest of every wave is the trough.

So it was with me when I awoke this morning. My first thought was that this ending of the world is becoming a depressing affair. I could wish it were over. The



DOOM

A Novel of Our Own Times

by LEWIS SOWDEN

waiting is much worse than the axe. The edge will be sharp and swift. And what do we lose by it? As life was, so it is, and so it will or would be. We lose nothing. We can take the rest as read. So let the Comet of Execution hurry.

I am aware that my personal affairs had much to do with this state of indifference to things. At a juncture like the present, what can one's personal affairs matter? But the personal equation is always there. Man's appreciation of the world is subjective. With only five days to go, we still think of ourselves, whether deliberately or not, in relation to things about us. If I were to learn today that something I had written had brought me fame, my joy would not be minimized by the reminder that I had only a few days in which to enjoy it. I should face the end a more satisfied, if not a happier, man.

As soon as I awoke and looked around me, remembrance came of the frustration of the previous evening, and hard on its heels realization of how foolishly I had behaved when Evans de Beer had asked me to come to the office. It was one thing, being willful at night; in the light of morning it looked like sheer stupidity. There'd be embarrassing explanations to make to Bailey today, especially if the news was really important.

There was a copy of the paper at my door. I jumped up and returned to bed with it. I skimmed the headlines on the front page: 5 B.T.C. . . . Five days to go. . . . Great procession of witnesses through city. . . . Three-column picture of the scene. . . . Statement by Archbishop. . . . Foreign Ministers— Ah, here it is! Not very prominent: "Foreign Ministers Discuss Comet." Atomic power also on Paris agenda as usual. There were two or three paragraphs below which elaborated the headline, and that was all. There wasn't much in that to be excited about. Still, the Old Bailey would insist on an explanation. I wonder how I'm to brazen it out.

Tambula came in with coffee. "I go home, 'Nkos."

"What?"

"I must go home—back to my home in Natal."

"What for?"

"I want to see my wife, my children, my home. Time is little, 'Nkos."

His home! So Tambula had lost all hope too! The belief that the black man might survive the burning had not sustained him for long. The black man too would vanish. There was a sun which he could not bear.

"Everyone is running away from here. Everyone is leaving me!"

"I'm sorry, Masteh, 'Nkos, but I must go home."

"What for? What have you got there in your home?"

That was a cruel thing to say. I knew he had little there—a patch of sunbaked soil in Zululand, a few meager cows, a reed hut or at most a shack of wood and iron. But that was home. That was his place on the earth; and now when the earth was falling away from him, he still yearned for it. His longings urged him.

"I have my wife and my children," he said.

"When are you going?"

"Today, this morning. Not much time."

I went to my wardrobe and gave him some clothes of mine. I put a banknote in his hand. "Buy something for your wife." Another. "And something for your children."

He put both his hands out to receive my gifts. "'Nkos! Thank you!"

"No more making coffee for me, eh, Tambula?"

"Sorry, 'Nkos."

"Never mind. *Hamba kahle*, Tambula—go in peace."

"Stay in peace, 'Nkos. Stay in peace."

And so Tambula went. His going depressed me more than anything. Perhaps because in my heart of hearts I envied him. I envied him his shrunken soil and his tumbledown hut. I envied him because of the peace he would find there. "Stay in peace," he had told me. But only he had the secret of peace. We in the city had lost it. We put up buildings; we fill them with machinery; and we print newspapers. But Tambula, not I, can get away from it all. Only he can have his wish and be sure of finding peace before the firmament crashes down.

This was no mood to encourage in me, however. It was best to get out and be doing—whatever there was to be done. I gulped down the cold coffee and swallowed the toast in between washing and dressing.

ON my way out, I stopped at the Cosways' door. I had not heard from them again. Of course, they must be gone. But I rang. To my astonishment, I heard footsteps, and Mrs. Cosway opened the door. She was the first to speak. "Good morning, Mr. Lacey."

"But Mrs. Cosway! I thought—"

"Yes, I know. But when we got to the airport, we were crowded off the plane again. So many priorities, they said."

"But why didn't you let me know?"

"We didn't think we ought to bother you any more. My husband said it was no use. That's how it is. They promise you seats, and when you get there, the seats have to go to the priorities. We have no priority."

For a moment I was angry. I was angry with the airways officials for being so callous. I was angry with the Cosways for not being more aggressive. I know what officials are like. They have to be bullied. "You should have insisted. You shouldn't have left the station."

"What was the good? They said there would be no seats."

I was angry with myself. "I should have come with you! I'm so sorry."

"You did your best for us, I'm sure. We're both very grateful to you."

I went away feeling helpless and despondent. It would always be like that. At time of stress there would always be the priorities. There would always be the V.I.P.'s pretending to sudden greatness, and ordinary people with no more than homely desires would be left behind. It would be so to the end of time.

Arriving at the office, I went straight in to see the news editor. Millington was not there. His absence surprised me. Millington was always there, or so we had got into the habit of thinking. I went in to see Bailey.

"Oh, there you are, Lacey. I suppose you know we were trying to get you last night?"

"Yes."

"Lucky for you, you were out. They tried your flat several times, I believe."

They did! Good old Evans de Beer! So he hadn't gotten me away! For a moment the day looked brighter. Bailey rattled on:

"Now listen to this. Something big may break today, and I want you to keep yourself free. . . . We were expecting it last night, but it didn't come. You saw the story about the Foreign Ministers' Conference? Well, a private wire from our London office is that they may be doing something about the comet."

"But what can they—"

"Don't ask me. Our job is to handle the news when it comes. If the Foreign Ministers make fools of themselves, all we can do is to report it. Wouldn't be the first time. So you'd better be on tap to handle the story when it breaks. See Conway Jones. Get his comment. Keep your eye on London. Be on tap."

"Very well."

BEING on tap in a newspaper office means lounging around—listening to Mrs. Ricketts, drinking her tea, calling in at the teletype-room now and then, reading the paper, advertisements and all. Advertisements have dropped off, more actually than we show. But we go on printing the canceled ones just for the sake of morale, or to make the pages look decent, nicely balanced. Bailey is determined to keep putting out a good paper, whatever happens. Wonder what he did with that notion about the Man in the Comet? . . . Here we are. Cartoon on the subject. Man in the Comet with a telescope to his eye, looking at us. Caption: "*Now I wonder, is that place habitable?*" Must be Bailey's idea. Not too good. Maddison was better at thinking up wheezes.

Here's the story about the last thing you want to do on Earth. . . . Bailey was right. Too sentimental. The only thing people seem to want to do is to go home. Back to childhood, of course. There's one fellow who wants to finish reading the Encyclopedia Britannica. Been at it five years already. Something different, anyhow. There's a spinster who says she's growing a new dahlia, absolutely new. All she wishes for is to see it open, in a week's time; then she doesn't care what happens to the world. Liar, of course. Affectation. Was Bailey really right? Won't they say what they really want? Or don't they know? Maybe they don't know. Only Tambula knows. He's going home to his wife and children. To beget more children? They say that the plant that grows in stony soil still produces seed before its early withering. At the springs of life, hope wells up unconquerably. There is always hope of something better—better—and never any acceptance of the inevitable.

Here's today's story about Judy Lane. All things considered, Clayton hasn't been handling the story badly. Of course it was a blunder not to have found out beforehand that the kid would not be able to use her eyes till eight days after the operation. Still, this is not bad. A bit sentimental, but that can't be avoided in a story like this. The whole town's gone sentimental over her. People have been sending the kid picture-books, colored plates of angels, prints of the old masters, Bible illustrations, toys, dolls, flowers, presents of all sorts. What a story we might have made of this! The girl's emotions! Her first reactions on seeing things! Her first words! All we can do now is go on repeating that she's looking forward with all her heart to the hour when the bandages are removed and she can look at this beautiful world of ours. She's heard it's so beautiful! Of course we don't give the time when that will be. Wouldn't do. We gloss it over. Clayton has had to keep skating round it, and so far, he's managed it neatly enough. Here he comes. Just back from the hospital. He makes that his first morning call.

"Hullo, Clayton. How's Judy Lane?"

"She keeps cheerful. A great kid, that, you know."
"Seen the surgeon about removing the bandages?"
"He won't budge. Won't touch them before next Tuesday, damn him!"
"What's Judy like?"
"A nice kid. She has blue eyes."
"How do you know?"

"I saw them before the operation. Nice eyes. A bit empty. I suppose they would be, seeing they'd never seen anything—but lovely eyes."

Clayton sat down to his typewriter. Typed a line or two, then looked up. "Heard about the Mayor? He's called a Council meeting for five A.M. Monday. Says the comet must find us all at our posts. Find him there alone, if you ask me, in his robes and chain of office! What does he think he's doing?"

"Being nice to the comet."

"Funny thing happened at the hospital this morning, very funny thing."

"What, to Judy Lane?" I was still browsing through the paper.

"Oh, no. Something else. A woman came into the hospital crying like anything, a pregnant woman."

"Anyone done her wrong?"

"No. That's just it. Kept crying she wanted her baby to be born."

I looked up. "Wanted it to be born—now?"

"Yes. She's seven months gone. But she kept crying: 'I want my baby to be born!' Like that. Whimpering. I was there and saw her. 'I want my baby to be born. I want my baby!'"

"Well?"

"They took her in. Couldn't pacify her, so they sent her over to the maternity section. They can stimulate birth at once, they say, with injections or something. Seven-months' babies are all right. They manage."

"You're writing the story, Clayton?"

"Story? You can't write a story like that."

"Why not?"

"I mean to say, there are some things! People will be shocked."

"Of course they will, and they'll eat it!"

"But you can't write about a woman having a premature birth like that."

"Why not? It's been done before. Wasn't *Macbeth* 'from his mother's womb untimely ripped'—I mean *Macduff*?"

"But that wasn't in a newspaper."

"What's the difference? We dropped all that gooseberry-bush twaddle long ago. You can't throw away a story like that, not these days!"

CLAYTON stated. "Do you think Bailey will pass it?"
"Pass it! He'll mark it front page! I tell you this is a gem of a story. We should have had it yesterday when we were writing those flabby interviews about the last thing people want to do on earth. Here's a woman who wants to have her baby. It would have made that story! The world's coming to an end in a few days, and all she wants is her baby! A story? Man, you could write a book on it! For years we've had people wailing about not wanting to have children in this dangerous world, and here's a woman who still wants nothing more than her baby—now—now! That's life, man, life! Faith and all that! Did you get her name?"

"No, but I can."

"Do it! And her age, and what her husband does, and is she pretty? You've got to say she's pretty in any case. You saw her? What's she like? Brunette? Say it! Good for brunettes! And they are going to get the baby out?"

"Tonight, they hope."

"That's your story. And for heaven's sake, don't be demure about it. Get her picture, husband's too. Let yourself go. Bailey will love you for this."

Persuading Clayton that he had a most unusual story and making sure that he would tackle it on the right lines, helped to shorten the morning. By the time I'd got him going properly, it was late enough to go round to the Golden Springbok for a pot and an early snack of lunch. . . . Here I find Wheeler listening to some lounge yarning. He sees me. "Want to ride round to the Observatory now? I'm free."

This gives me an idea. Why not? Conway Jones may have heard something independently. Never know. Anyhow, it'll be better than hanging round the office. So we gulp coffee and sandwiches. "Come along."

Wheeler calls in at the office to chalk his destination up on the board, and we leave.

Now it was seriously and honestly our intention to drive straight to the Observatory. Conway Jones would just be about finishing his breakfast, and that is usually a good time to see him. But by some whim of Wheeler's we did not take the usual way out of town. The traffic lights were against us at one corner, and rather than wait, he turned off in another direction. We got out of town some distance from the main road, and to reach it, we had to take a suburban way past some scattered houses and across a field.

There were trees. There was an open patch beyond, and some boys were playing cricket. The road led straight past the trees. Wheeler raised his foot from the accelerator. He looked at me, but said nothing. Neither did I. The car slowed down.

Now, cricket is a game for the village green, for the leisurely hours, for spectators with a love of the fields in their hearts. It is for people who know how to live, to work and to play and how to let the world glide by. Here were boys playing with all life and time on their hands. With them the world was still young, life was endless and the years were full of promise. How could we help lingering at the roadside to watch them, to enjoy with them their little circle of world and forget everything beyond?

A boy bowler ran and bowled, and the ball flew down the pitch. If Conway Jones were here, he would use that for a demonstration. But this is no place for Conway Jones; forget him and all he stands for. . . . The batsman hits; they run; they shout. Beside me Wheeler shouts too: "Well fielded! Oh, well fielded!" Again the bowler bowls, the ball bounds, the batsman hits, and the ball comes spinning in our direction. A youngster runs out to field it but misses. The ball comes straight on for us. . . . This is too much! Before I know what is happening, I am out of the car, under the trees, and my hand on the ball. Next moment it is back to the bowling end. I stand there feeling a little sheepish about it, when a voice shrills from the field:

"Hey! Wanna game?"

"What!"

Is it possible? I look round. Wheeler is also out of the car, laughing. "Why not?" he shouts. "Come on!"

So we go. The young captains toss for us. The winner chooses me, and Wheeler goes out to field.

Nearby there is a mound of red earth. For me it is soft sweet grass. From here I watch the game that now is also my game. That water pump is a steeple. Somewhere my father is waiting to applaud. The over is ended. . . . Another over is bowled. . . . Life is divided into overs. All time is a series of overs that go bounding delightfully over green fields into eternity. . . . And just when the inevitable voice begins to sing, "You'll never get him out," the ball flies high, comes swinging earthward, and who should be there but Wheeler with hands stretching out like wings!

"Oh, well caught, Wheeler! Well caught!"

Wheeler holds the ball up, and on his face is the flush of triumph.

"Well caught!" How can one withhold from Wheeler his due applause?

But now it is my turn to go in. There are no pads, no gloves. They push only a bat into my hand.

A prayer comes to my lips. "O Lord, let it not be a duck! O Lord, if this is my last wish on earth, let it not be a duck!"

I am at the wicket. I scan the field. There's Wheeler, watching me, a grin on his face. I shall avoid him. The ball comes down the pitch. I catch it squarely on my bat, and the ball sails across the field. I run and run again. Lord be praised! I have scored! Lord be praised, it is no duck!

I don't quite know how the game came to an end. One of the lads had to go home, and then another. We too had to go. I thanked the youngsters for the game. How could I thank them enough?

We got to the Observatory ten minutes later.

Conway Jones smiled when he saw me. "So here you are."

"Were you expecting me?"

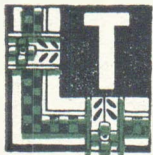
"No, but I think your office is. They've been ringing for the past hour."

"Anything new about the comet?"

"Not as far as I know."

"So long then. . . . See you later—I think."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



THE GREAT STORY WAS OUT, THE UNBELIEVABLE, the unimaginable!

Bailey had the cables in front of him, his eyes scanning them quickly, furiously, as though he would devour them. When he saw me, he rasped: "Where've you been?"

"Playing cricket."

He looked at me furiously.

"Are you too going to let me down, like the others? You going to crack up too? Millington, then you?"

I remembered that Millington hadn't been in his office in the morning. "What's happened to Millington?"

He seemed sorry he'd mentioned it. "Nothing. Got tied up with his Toy Fund."

That puzzled me. I wanted to ask more, but there was no time. Bailey pushed a sheaf of cables over to me. "Pitch into that."

I pulled my chair up and quickly ran through the first few pages. They filled me with marvel and excitement. The Foreign Ministers had been discussing the comet in Paris, and this time they had talked to some purpose. They had evolved a project—it was not theirs, of course, but that of their scientific advisers—a project of grand and audacious conception. It was nothing less than to attempt to divert the comet from its course so that instead of striking the earth it would pass by more or less harmlessly. A plan to drive the comet into the space to which it belonged.

This was no fancy or fantastic speculation. Not for nothing were some of the world's greatest physicists assembled with the Foreign Ministers—Ross of Cambridge, that brilliant brain who had evolved the Time Expansion Co-efficient; Hegeman of Yale, who, working with Mortenson, had produced the complementary theory of the expanding nucleus; and Bogomolov of Moscow, who had done far-reaching research on the properties of parabolic and reflexive space. Moreover, the project had been under discussion day and night for a week.

It was only when the scientists agreed on its feasibility, that the world was allowed to hear any whisper of the plan. It was feared that premature release might raise hopes that could not be fulfilled, hopes that in their fading would only leave more bitterness behind. Even now there were fears both in London and Washington that

the proposals of the Foreign Ministers had been disclosed too soon.

I must describe the plan briefly. The scientists argued that if man's action had deflected the comet from its course, action could be devised by man to do so again. If man's use of the atom had attracted the comet, it was for man to invent some means of using atomic power so as to repel the comet. The main difficulty was the shortness of time available, a matter of days, in which to assemble the necessary instruments. It seemed impossible that anything could be done so speedily. And then, as though heaven-sent, the means appeared at hand. American plans for sending two men in a rocket to the moon were almost complete. Could the same rocket be used for sending a huge uranium bomb against the comet instead?

The raising of this question among the Foreign Ministers of the great powers electrified the atmosphere of the conference. This was the day when we started getting those seemingly irrelevant reports of the Paris meeting. This was the day when a marvelous project began to take shape of directing into space an immense uranium bomb for the purpose, not of destroying the comet—this would be entirely beyond any power on earth—but of diverting it, however slightly, from its course. It was calculated that even a deflection of a fraction of a degree, provided it was effected at a sufficiently great distance, would be enough to send the comet skimming by at a safe distance from the earth's atmosphere.

The matter was no sooner raised by the American Secretary of State than the Russian Minister offered the full coöperation of his country and announced furthermore that Russian scientists were also working on a well-advanced scheme for sending a rocket to the moon. He trusted that the workers of the two countries could collaborate. The American Secretary cordially reciprocated, and at once such a spirit of understanding and generosity arose at the Conference as had not been known for years. With, as yet, only vague assumptions to go on, a hitherto undreamed-of hope of saving the world sprang up in the hearts of those stubborn men round the table. With no more than a week between them and annihilation, mankind through their few spokesmen in Paris began for the first time to see themselves as one race, one world, one life, one hope. . . .

The first question put to the scientists was: At what distance could the attempt of intercepting the comet or deflecting it from its course be made with the greatest hope of success?

AFTER some hours of calculation, the answer was: Rather more than half a million miles. It would not be safe, said the scientists, to wait for the comet to approach any closer. They described about six hundred thousand miles as the optimum distance. British, Russian and American physicists were fully agreed on the point.

They made their announcement with misgiving, for they realized that they were disclosing a great difficulty. It seemed that men's hopes were to be shattered almost as soon as born.

The American rocket was designed to travel altogether a distance of about half a million miles—that is, to the moon and back. It was hoped that after reaching the surface of the moon and making their observations, the two pilots would be able to take off again and return to earth. That at least had been the plan. The Russians agreed that their rocket was designed on much the same lines and was equipped with similar steering gear.

Here lay the difficulty: The rocket to be directed against the comet would have to travel without human pilots. It was not anticipated that there would be any lack of volunteers ready to travel into space with the uranium bomb and sacrifice themselves for the good of mankind; but it was pointed out that the rocket, driven

by the most powerful atomic engines available, would have to travel at an immensely greater speed than men could endure, and human pilots would therefore be useless. The rocket would have to be aimed and guided from the earth; and there was no means of guiding any missile toward a target at that distance with any degree of accuracy. This explanation was received with faces growing instantly gloomier round the conference table.

Then Ross of Cambridge made a dramatic disclosure. British scientists, he said, while doing research on counter-measures against pilotless bombs, had recently discovered a principle of direction by space-radar which they believed would be reasonably accurate at the required range. They were ready to place it at mankind's disposal, though it was still on the "Secret" list.

INSTANTLY the thermometer of humanity's hopes rose again at the Conference. The British Foreign Secretary was congratulated. The Russian Commissar was congratulated. The American Secretary exclaimed, "Now we're getting some place!" and the Commissar was heard to add "*Maladyetz!*—Atta boy!" But no time was wasted on international compliments. The scientists proceeded to the next question: the size of the atomic charge in the bomb. The answer was a simple one: the largest possible. And yet it was not so simple as all that. In fact, a workable answer to this question proved the most difficult one to find, and was the cause of the adjournment of the Conference.

Professor Hegeman explained that the largest bomb that could be assembled in America within the available time, even though it would absorb the greater part of America's processed uranium, would be insufficient. It could not be expected to have any appreciable effect on the course of the comet. The bomb to be sent against the comet would have to be about twice as large. So large a bomb or collection of bombs could be secured only if the Russians assembled their own material simultaneously, and then transported it by fast planes to America. He thought the transfer could be effected in good time.

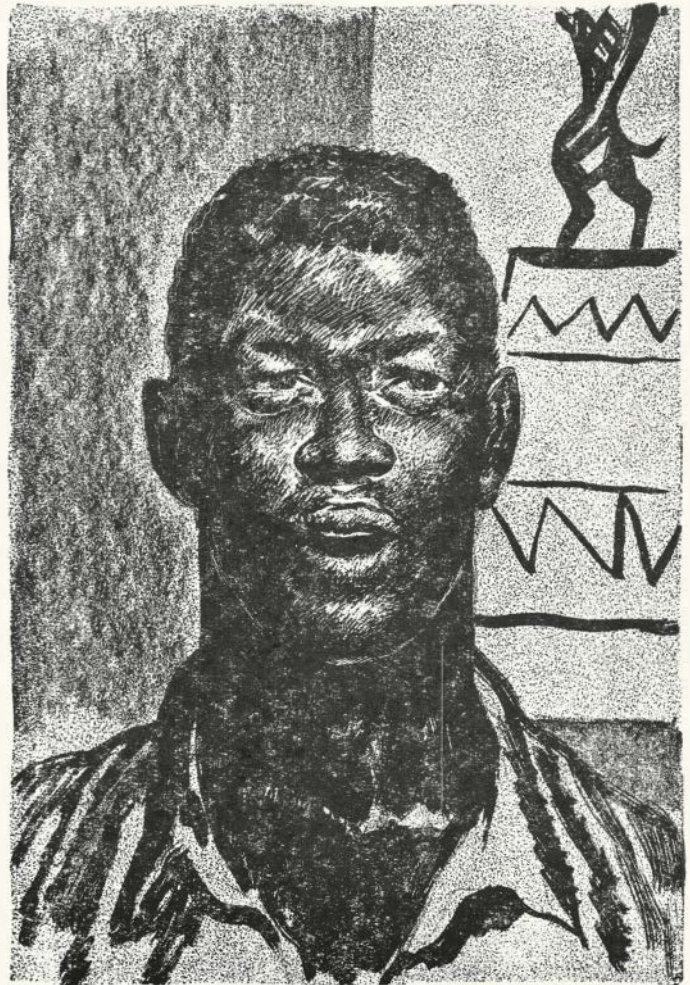
As the Commissar listened to this exposition, his face assumed a frigid immobility. There was silence when the Professor stopped talking, then some low whispering between the Commissar and his consultants, until the Russian faced the assembly again with a bland smile. He was glad to say that he could give his approval to the proposed plan, except for one detail, one small amendment to which he hoped the American Secretary would agree. The Soviet Union never permitted the export of any uranium or uranium product. There was no objection, however, to the launching of the rocket from Russian soil, in which event the American contribution to the atomic charge could be dispatched by plane across the Pacific to the launching platform in Siberia. He assured the conference that the Russian rocket was ready, that it was equipped with atomic engines as powerful as any in the world, and that it would probably have got to the moon first in any case.

It was the American's turn to contemplate his inkstand. He doubted whether that was possible, he said at length.

"Why not?"

The U. S. Secretary was quite sure that it could not and it would not be done.

Everyone at the table understood the *impasse*. In one moment the old suspicions were back among the foreign ministers, the old distrust that had for so long played havoc with international friendship. Though neither side would make any admissions, it was quite clear why the Russians insisted on their amendment, and equally clear why the Americans resisted it. Transfer of so large a quantity of atom bombs to Russia would nearly deprive America of its stocks. Transfer of a similar quantity from Russia would leave the Soviet Union without



"I want to see my wife, my home; time is little."

any at all. In either event one country would be at the mercy of the other, and no diplomat at that table had the courage to commit his country to any action which would expose it to such danger.

And so there was a complete deadlock. Neither side would yield.

Britain offered to make its new and secret instruments, together with an operating crew, available to either country without reserve. The Foreign Secretary appealed for sense, for right thinking, for moderation at this crucial stage in the history of the world. The Commissar promised every facility for the launching of the rocket from Siberia. The U. S. Secretary replied that launching apparatus was waiting to be used in New Mexico, and no sound reason had been given for any transfer of location across the Pacific. Neither side would give way; and neither side wished to take the blame for slamming the door to further negotiation.

The Conference adjourned but did not disperse. The Foreign Ministers and their consultants remained in Paris for further possible talks, and meanwhile maintained communication with their Governments.

It was at this point that London decided to break the silence and give the news to the world. Downing Street considered that world publicity might serve to bring the Foreign Ministers to their senses, that the light of public opinion should be directed upon them, and that the voice of common man should be given a chance to make itself heard at the council table of the mighty.

Downing Street issued a statement, and Fleet Street sent the story out to the ends of the earth.

Bailey passed the last sheet of teletype across the desk, and waited for me to finish reading it.



“YOU’VE GOT THE GIST OF IT?” BEGAN BAILEY.

“I think so.”

“Sounds like poppycock to me, but it’s not for us to say so. This’ll make a first-rate front page. I’ve already ordered a fifty per cent bigger edition for tomorrow. We’ll use the whole front page for it. We’ll kick out everything else. Streamer right across the top: SCIENTISTS PLAN TO DEFLECT THE COMET. No, not good enough. FOUR DAYS TO GO. SCIENTISTS WILL SEND ATOM BOMB AGAINST COMET. Something dramatic like that. It will be 4 B.T.C. tomorrow, won’t it?”

“Yes.”

I found I could answer him for the time being only in monosyllables. I was filled with wonder, delight and excitement at the news. I wanted to talk about it, to discuss it with someone, to share the exultation it produced. But you couldn’t discuss it with Bailey. Poppycock, he said! He was interested in it only as news. He said:

“Of course, we’ll have a leader on it. Perhaps in black type. Something about humanity’s last chance, last chance to let reason rule the nations instead of blind prejudice and mistrust. World relying upon five men to reach agreement. Not *they* being judged, but human nature as a whole. . . . But of course, none of this need worry you, Lacey. The leader’s not your concern. I’ll tell you what I want from you. First of all, you’ve got to see Conway Jones. Have a long interview with him. Let’s have it in the form of question and answer. Can it be done? How can it be done? Why wasn’t it done earlier? Between you and me I don’t think it stands a chance—”

“I think it does!” At last I’d got a word of my own in.

“Do you? No matter. See what Conway Jones has to say. And don’t let him tie you up in any scientific theorizing of his. Let’s have it straight. We ought to have a diagram, show exactly what they mean to do—if he knows. Shouldn’t wonder if we know more than he does. Never mind. We’ve got to play our part in mobilizing public opinion. This is where the press does its job. Downing Street looks to us. Yes, and—there’s already a statement in from the Archbishop of Canterbury. We’ll also get one from our own Archbishop. Also one from the Prime Minister adding the weight of this country to the world appeal. And one more thing: We’ll have a panel in the middle of the page. We’ll suggest special services in the churches. That’s right. Prayers for the foreign ministers, prayers that they may see the light of reason. At a time like this, the public likes to be told to pray. It makes them feel they’re doing their part. And who knows, perhaps prayer does help. Anyhow, it’s not for us to say it doesn’t. Readers wouldn’t like that. . . . You understand your part of the job, Lacey? Don’t forget the diagram. Make it a big one and see we get it early. . . . You’ll want to look at the cables still?”

“If I may.”

“Don’t keep them too long.”

I came out of Bailey’s office feeling that I’d been in a hurricane. The first thing to do was to collect my thoughts, and throw off that sense of rush and scramble in which Bailey seemed to revel. In circumstances like these the way to go about things was to take them deliberately, one by one. That meant first of all, having tea. Singer, our Arab-eyed Shangaan from the north (he gets that Arab streak in him from the east coast) was still on his tea round. He starts serving tea at ten in the morning, and does nothing else—tea at eleven, tea for lunch, tea at four. He must think of white men as so many tea urns. I saw him down the passage and shouted, “Tea, please, Singer!”

He was annoyed at having his round interrupted. “No more tea for you next week,” he cautioned me.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Comet will finish all tea.”

“You wait and see.”

His Arabic eyes narrowed, but he brought me a strongish cup and I sat down to make a shorthand summary of the cables. As I read them, a feeling of elation came over me anew. It was immensely stimulating to think that man could conceive so daring and magnificent a project. It was a bit terrifying too, as though man were launching himself against the elements, against the stars in their courses and planning their defeat.

Stated like that it seemed impossible that the plan could succeed, and yet in its details it was simple as well as immense, obvious and yet cunning. I became excited again and felt that I must be up and doing.

When I reached the Observatory, Conway Jones was in his study. He had the afternoon paper in front of him. “I was expecting you,” he said.

“Then you know what I’ve come for this time?”

He tapped the newspaper with a finger. “Your rivals have been alter me already.”

“Have they got much?”

“Not very.”

I scanned the page. Only the early statement from Downing Street. His fingers tapped the blotter while I read him my extracts from the later cables, giving details of the discussions in Paris. He stopped tapping when I stopped reading.

“What do you think of it?”

His eyes shone coldly. “Very interesting—v-e-e-r-y interesting.”

“Do you think it can be done?”

“Mmmmm.” He smiled warily. “My dear man, if they say so, who am I to say otherwise? Look who’s behind it! Hegeman of Yale, Ross of Cambridge, Bogomolov, De Curie of Paris!”

“I mean do you think it will succeed?”

“There’s a chance.”

I turned to the questions I had noted down.

“Do you think they can send up enough uranium to—push the comet off its tracks?”

The faint smile on his sallow face broadened ever so slightly. “If they say so—yes.”

I jotted down only: “Yes.”

“Do you know anything about this new direction device they’ve got at Cambridge?”

“I had heard they were working on something of the sort.”

“Can they really direct a rocket with precision at half a million miles?”

“Ah! Precision is a relative term.”

“With enough precision to hit the comet?”

My questions, I was aware, were excited and not framed in well-chosen words. His answers were cold and cautious. In his own way, here was a man like Bailey and yet a complete contrast to him.

“You forget,” he said, “they don’t want to hit the comet.”

“I mean to get near it.”

“Near it may be anywhere within a thousand miles of it. That means, to put it in ordinary language, they have a target a thousand miles wide at a range of six hundred thousand. Yes,” he added slowly, “they ought to make it.”

“They ought to make it,” I jotted down. “But . . . why do they need such a big charge of uranium?”

“It’s a big comet.”

“I mean—if the comet was deflected from its original course, or attracted, by the atomic tests in the Antarctic or the Pacific, why can’t it be deflected again by some similar explosions?”

He looked hard at me. “In the first place, we don’t really know that it was so deflected or attracted. That’s

only Mortenson's theory. And in the second place, if it was, we don't know how it happened. We don't understand it yet. We have to use the means we do understand."

I made sure to get all that down accurately. "Can they work out the exact time when the comet will be six hundred thousand miles away?"

"Of course."

"When will that be?"

"Just at about eight—no, seven and a half hours before the expected time of impact, the Big Hit. That is, at about ten on Sunday evening."

"And that's when the rocket has to hit the comet?"

"That's when the rocket has to explode near the comet. I should think that the idea is to give it a kind of glancing blow."

"And that can be done at a thousand miles?"

"It would be best done at a thousand miles from the comet. Best chance that way. Think of it! Perturbation of a comet, changing its orbit. That's what it means. Deliberate perturbation induced by man. I could illustrate this very simply on the billiard table."

"No, no! Please, here. I shall want a diagram."

He drew a line across his blotting-paper. "We must avoid sending the rocket in the direct path of the comet. The rocket would simply be absorbed. We run that risk in any case. But we minimize the risk if we send the rocket so as to approach the comet on the side, or above, or below. Of course, these terms I use now are quite unscientific. In space there is no above or below. . . . I think they would probably aim slightly below. Risk of absorption would be minimal. . . . mmm. . . . They have to explode the rocket before it gets within the comet's atmosphere, so to speak. Extraordinary thing to observe, it will be, extraordinary!"

"And that will be ten P.M. on Sunday?"

"Just about."

I glanced at my watch. "So they have only four days to do it in!"

"Not more than two days, at the outside."

"How?"

"We must allow time for the rocket to travel that six hundred thousand miles. We haven't achieved the speed of light yet, you know. We haven't even achieved the speed of the comet. We shall have to allow about—yes, at least forty hours for the rocket to traverse that six hundred thousand miles."

"And that means launching it—"

"Early Saturday morning, at the latest."

"That gives them only two days to do it in—and they can't agree yet!"

"It will take them at least a day to transfer or install the instruments in America, or Russia—when they do agree."

"Only one day, then!"

He tapped the table with his fingers. "Mmmm—just about."

"Surely they know this in Paris?"

"I trust so."

This new aspect of the situation at once appalled and roused me. Only one day left in which to save the world, and they were still bickering about it! Only one day! Here was my story for the front page! Even the cables would take second place. They would appear in the late editions of the *Evening* in any case. Here was the big story for the *Day*.

I glanced again at the paper on the table. The *Evening* hadn't a hint of it.

"You didn't tell the other paper anything of this?"

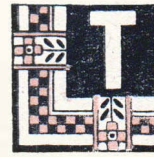
"They didn't ask me."

I let the compliment go by. In my mind's eye, I was already writing the headline. Bailey was probably trying out a streamer. He'd have to try again. I've got the

streamer for tomorrow. I've got the contents bill too! I can see tomorrow's bills on the street corners:

ONE DAY TO SAVE THE WORLD!

CHAPTER TWENTY



TO MY INTENSE ANNOYANCE, BAILEY WAS NOT nearly as enthusiastic over my angle to the story or my suggestion for a banner line and contents bill as I had expected him to be. Things often turn out that way in news-gathering. You find a story, get excited about it, and when you bring it into the office, you find they see it in quite a different light. One day to save the world? Bailey turned the phrase over on his tongue. He seemed inclined to pooh-pooh it. "A trifle alarmist, don't you think?"

"But—it's the plain truth!"

"Of course. So it is. But—we must take a more hopeful line. Have you heard about the Stock Exchange? Market suddenly picked up in the last hour of business. Why? What do you think? Because there's only one more day to save the world? Not at all. Because there's a chance! Got the diagram from Conway Jones?"

"Here it is."

"Good! We'll have it across four columns."

Then he looked at it closely. Conway Jones had indicated the path of the comet, the path of the earth and then the path of the proposed rocket. Bailey's jaw dropped. "Doesn't look very impressive to me. Looks as though we're going to attack the comet with a peashooter."

"He drew it as far as possible to scale."

"What's the good of that? Never mind. We'll make it only across two columns. It may look more convincing that way. And I'll get an artist's impression of the whole thing done as well. We'll make it look like something, dramatic, dynamic, big—as though we really have a chance. Get the idea? Good. . . . Go ahead."

So my suggestion for the front-page lead was thrown into the wastebasket, and I sat down to write my overall introduction about humanity's glorious opportunity to save itself at the eleventh hour. I sat down to write:

A great chance to save the world from the destructive comet presented itself yesterday to the Foreign Ministers of the five great powers assembled in Conference in Paris. A group of the world's leading physicists appeared before the Ministers with proposals for using atomic energy against the comet.

Their plan proved to be a daringly conceived project for discharging a rocket carrying the greatest atomic charge ever concentrated in one unit, with the object of diverting the comet from its course.

An announcement is expected from Paris hourly of the ministers' agreement on the final details of the proposals. . . .

And so I went on thumping the big drum of hope, putting out a story to please the customers and make them feel cheerful at breakfast. I must confess that writing such a story was in itself more pleasant than writing my own kind of story would have been. You can't write a column of good cheer for the public without becoming to some extent infected with it yourself. A chance that will not be lost, I kept telling myself. A chance that we shall all awake again to a glorious morning.

These thoughts made me impatient and restless. It was only ten o'clock. I telephoned Endymion. Philippa answered.

"Phil, is that you?"

"Darling! I've been longing for you to ring me."

"May I come over?"

"Do!"

Philippa opened the door to me and took me into the library. "Darling! It's so good to see you again. It's been an age!"

She straightened my tie; she smoothed my hair; she brushed a speck of dust from my shoulder.

"I waited for you last night, Phil."

"Darling—and I let you down!"

"Never mind. I'm here now. Have you seen the paper?"

"Of course. What does it all mean?"

"There's a chance, darling! Think of it! A chance! And if it comes off, what a lovely world this will be!"

"Oh, my dear!"

"To be alive and safe on earth, with the blue sky and the clouds, and the rivers and the fields. . . . It'll be grand to be alive. And we'll be so grateful to have dear old Mother Earth as our own again, to feel it belongs to us again and we to her, we won't want to quarrel any more. It will seem so wasteful. There'll be no more malice or mistrust, and— Oh, Phil, it will be beautiful to live again and know there's a future."

These words came to my lips in a torrent. I hadn't shaped the thoughts before, certainly not while writing at the office. "Yes, Phil. And we'll get married next week. We won't wait."

She was looking straight into my eyes and smoothing one side of my head. "Oh, you simple boy!" she said.

THEN for the first time I wondered what the new turn of events would mean to the household. "Phil, how's your mother?"

"Calm, John. But she's still praying."

"Praying?"

"In her room upstairs. Hasn't stopped yet. Of course we haven't let her see the afternoon paper. It would be too much of a shock to her, after all that praying."

"And your father?"

"Haven't you heard? The market's up, and Daddy's on top of the world. Fairly rolling in millions, I think. He's probably sleeping at the office tonight. But come along!" She took me by the hand. "Dora's waiting to give us tea. I said I wouldn't keep her long." We made for the sitting-room, but before we went in, she stopped. "You won't show any surprise, will you?"

The warning proved to be very necessary. Without it, I should certainly have been openly astonished. Dora was at the tea-table, ready to preside, her usual quiet and severe self. "Nice to see you, John." On the settee nearby were two pretty girls, pretty in an obvious way, with rouged cheeks and blondined hair. They were introduced to me simply as Jane and Millicent, and though I had never seen them before, I knew at once who they were. These were the two women Kennaway Laver had brought home with him, and here they were installed, as it seemed, in the bosom of the household. They were knitting and looked very domestic.

When I was introduced, I murmured something and they smiled a "How-do-you-do?" Philippa gave me no time to betray my embarrassment, but whisked me away to the tea-table and began talking animatedly about nothing in particular. Then I heard Dora speaking. "Sugar and milk, John? Two lumps of sugar?"

"Thanks."

"I thought you wouldn't want to see us after last night."

"You thought I wouldn't dare to show my face again, you mean, after—making a scene on the telephone?"

"Put it that way, if you like."

"Was I—very villainous?"

Dora said nothing, but took some sandwiches to the girls on the settee. Gleaming-eyed, Philippa answered for her. "Oh, very dark and villainous, John!"

Dora returned to the table. "I was only doing my duty."

"Like a dragon on guard," said Philippa with a laugh.

"But a gentle dragon," said I.

"And I was right," said Dora. "Right and wrong can never change places. It's just as well to remember that. Is it true what the radio said this evening? We may escape the comet after all?"

"There's a good chance."

We were speaking in normal voices now.

"Then what I did was for the best. . . . Not that we deserve to be saved."

"Don't be so hard on everyone, Dora," I pleaded.

"It's true! What have we done with the earth? Turned it into a battlefield."

"You can't blame everyone for that."

"I don't. I blame us, the white people. It's we who overran the earth, pillaged it and set one side against the other."

"That's only a half-truth."

"Not a bit."

I don't know how this strange discussion would have continued; for just then a nervous whimper came from the two girls on the settee. I turned round to see them looking at us, much distressed.

Philippa spoke brightly. "Do you hear, girls? The world may not come to an end next Monday after all. Isn't that nice now?"

For answer they both broke down and began to cry. "What shall I ever do?" sobbed one.

"How shall I ever tell my father?" said the other.

This time no effort on my part could hide my astonishment. Philippa, seeing me bewildered, laughed and led me from the room.

"What on earth's been going on here?" I asked.

"It's Dora. I told you she's been a dragon. She's made them repent. She's made them see what's right and wrong. Daddy's simply furious. But don't let's bother about them, darling. Come! Take me somewhere. I want to be taken out!"

"What about Dora?"

"She won't mind. She thinks I'm safe now. Come, darling. Your car's still here, you know."

"I know."

"Then come!"

Soon we were speeding toward town together. Soon we were comfortably settled under soft lights in a plush corner of the Little Savoy. The head waiter was there to greet us, and made us think that there was nothing on earth that would not be brought at our bidding. The band played. Soon we were sipping wine. They brought us a dish of heavenly savors made with mushrooms. The music was languorous. There was dancing. A man at a microphone began crooning seductively: "*Comet, Comet, go away. Come again another day. Little children want to play. Comet, Comet, go away.*"

I took Philippa in my arms. We were dancing before we got to the floor, and soon we were lost in the lilt of the music, "*Comet, Comet, go away—*"

The Fourth Day

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



IT WAS A DAY OF WAITING.

After the elation of the night before, reaction came in the morning, and the thought that awoke me was not that which had lulled me to sleep eight hours before, but the menacing "*One day left—Only one day left.*" And still five men in Paris were facing each other pretending not to see, pretending not to know the word that might still save the world.

Yet the day started with promise. I was preparing to leave for the office when my bell rang, and I opened the

door to Mrs. Cosway. The little woman, who had grown distinctly older in the past few days, looked flushed with a new pleasure.

She spoke quickly. "Good morning, Mr. Lacey. I hope I haven't disturbed you, but I felt I must tell you. We've heard from him."

"Heard? From whom?"

"From Henry. We've had a cable. And he's coming. Isn't it lucky we didn't get that plane after all? We'd have passed each other; that would have been dreadful!"

FOR that moment the burden was lifted from my mind. "Oh, Mrs. Cosway! How glad I am!" It seemed that there was a purpose in things after all. Not everything went by chance or man's priorities.

She held the telegram up for me to see.

"It was handed in on Sunday, but was delayed. Only reached us last night. See what he says? Leaving by plane Wednesday. That means he'll be here today."

"That's right. He must be on the way. How nice for you!" And then a doubt crossed my mind. Would he have got onto the plane? But Mr. Cosway, it seemed, had thought of everything this time.

"Even then my husband wanted to make quite sure"—she was still standing in the doorway—"so he put a call through to London, a personal call. Something we've never thought of doing before. Six hours we had to wait for the call, till two o'clock in the morning. And then they said he wasn't there. That was the answer: he wasn't there. So of course he must be on the way."

"You'll have him in the afternoon."

"Of course he hasn't qualified yet. One more year to go. But isn't it grand to have him with us!"

I felt with Mrs. Cosway how grand it was! She was happy. I had never seen her so plainly happy before. I left for the office feeling that the day was already brighter than its beginning.

There another surprise was in store for me. Evans de Beer was in charge in the news editor's office.

"Where's Millington?"

"Busy with his Toy Fund," he growled in answer.

"But at a time like this!"

Evans de Beer avoided the point. Speaking from Millington's chair, he merely went on to say: "Mr. Bailey asked me to take charge here. Got to keep the office going." Then he became confidential, and his voice went a note deeper. "And I hope you're going to stand by me, Lacey."

"Of course. But what's happened to Millington? Where is he?"

"You know where they keep the toys? That's where he is."

Of course I knew, and curiosity sent me in pursuit. When Evans de Beer realized where I was going, he growled after me, "Don't let him keep you!"—a remark which only deepened the mystery.

On the fifth floor of the building there is a half-empty filing-room where we keep old volumes of the newspaper, old Government reports and old reference books. Here on some large tables Millington assembled his toys every year in preparation for the Christmas distribution. I went up the two floors two steps at a time; and there, sure enough, in the filing-room was Millington among his toys. He was standing at a table working with a brush and a pot of paint.

He seemed glad to see me. "Come to give us a hand, Lacey?"

"Well, not exactly."

He completed a flourish with his brush and then invited me to admire his work. "Look at that. Looks quite different, I assure you. Very neat job, I think."

He held a tin duck up for me to examine. "What do you think of that? I had to repaint the eyes, you know. And then the spring gave me no end of trouble. What's



"The world may not come to an end, after all."

the good of a duck if it can't waddle?" He wound the spring and made the duck waddle across the table.

I watched him in amazement. Then I had to speak. "Millington, what do you think of the news?"

"The news? Oh, that's all right. I've put Evans de Beer in charge. Good fellow. Someone's got to do these toys; otherwise we'll never have them ready in time." With a neat twist of his tweezers, he disassembled a toy airplane.

"I mean the news about the comet."

"That's all right. Looks better to me. All the more need to get these toys ready in time. That story Evans de Beer wrote brought me a heap of them, but they all needed wheels, or heads, or springs, or knocking dents out of them, all of them.

"And you can't stay to give me a hand? Pity. That little yacht there needs a mainsail. Know anything about yachts?"

For a moment I was tempted to answer that I did, and perhaps the thought that it would be fun did light up in me, but I quickly quenched it. "Millington, you know we expect a big story to break today?"

"Of course I know. But don't worry. It'll straighten itself out. The office runs itself, you know. I found that out a long time ago. . . . What do you think? I do believe I shall get this airplane to work—yes, I do. Now, when I was a boy I never had many toys, but I was always good at—"

There was something in that piece of information I could not stomach. I guessed what he was going to tell me. He wasn't meant to be a journalist at all. Every journalist tells you that sooner or later. So I left him to his toy world and went downstairs.

"Did you see Millington?" inquired Evans de Beer. "Yes."

"Well—Bailey says you're to hang round. He thinks there'll be early news from London today. Wants you here."

"Very well."

Neither of us said anything more about Millington. Neither of us wanted to say anything. Afterward it set me wondering why. Could it be that in the hearts of us both we knew that Millington was right? We were the dupes and the simpletons, not he. We were the mugs, to spend our lives or what remained of them printing newspapers that were no sooner out on the streets than they were wastepaper. Was Millington right after all?

CLAYTON came in. "The baby's born, boys! The baby's born!"

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"The baby!"

Then I remembered. As I had predicted, they had put Clayton's story from the maternity hospital on the front page and given it a splash heading: *MOTHER-TO-BE WANTS HER PREMATURE BABY*—"Give him life before it is too late," she pleads.

"And it's a boy!" shouted Clayton. "Just what she wanted!"

He was so excited about the event, one might have thought it was his baby. "Is it all right?" we asked. "Did you say goo-goo to it? What's it like, Clayton?"

"Chubby!"

"Fathead! We call all babies chubby in the paper."

"What does the mother say now?"

"She's as happy as anything. Says she doesn't care what comes now, as long as she's got her baby."

"Mother love, eh? What a woman!"

"What a story! What's the betting they front-page this in Fleet Street? Never mind. We'll probably never know."

Clayton had been at the hospital since the early hours and was full of information. "The kid weighs four pounds, and they're keeping it in an incubator."

"What does the father say?"

"Didn't you read the story this morning? The father died three months ago. Newly married couple."

"And she still wants her baby!"

"She says it's the image of its father, and she's naming it after him."

"What? Not after you?"

"Don't you think we ought to start a fund for her?"

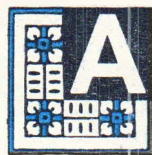
"No, no! We have enough funds going."

"Don't overdo it, Clayton. A baby's only a baby."

"But this is a comet-week baby!"

"There are millions like him, poor devils."

But he went on talking, and soon he had the whole office talking about "Clayton's baby," and Clayton himself not a whit put out.



ALL AFTERNOON, MESSAGES, APPEALS, RESOLUTIONS, declarations, exhortations came over the teletype from all parts of the country and all parts of the world. It seemed that pleas, warnings, injunctions, threats were fluttering down upon Paris from the ends of the earth, and now and then a wind blew some of them into our office.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union implored the foreign ministers to see the light of human kindness and to read Luke 21:20. The reference seemed obscure to us. Error in transmission somewhere, no doubt.

The Lily Bond of the Women's Federation resolved that what the world needed was purity of heart, and offered its own emblem of the lily as a world symbol of purity.

The British Association of Women's Institutes, in special conference in the Albert Hall, re-affirmed its slogan, "Brighter Village Life," and decided to print a million copies of its anthem "Jerusalem" in five languages. Half a ton of copies are to be sent to Paris by air.

The Daughters of the American Revolution called upon everyone to stand firm in the crisis.

The Rotary Club at its weekly luncheon unanimously passed a resolution hoping that the spirit of International Rotary would prevail.

In New York the Security Council of the United Nations talked for six hours.

The Archbishop sent us a special form of prayer for the week with a note that a copy was also being cabled to Paris. Continuous services were ordered in all churches.

The Chief Rabbi announced that mention of the foreign ministers was to be inserted in Saturday's Prayer for the Government and the Royal Family.

From Palestine the Voice of Jerusalem Radio called all the nations of the world to prayer.

From London the news was that crowds were massed on the steps of St. Paul's, and that Whitehall and Parliament Street were barely passable on account of the thousands of people waiting at Downing Street.

In the House of Commons, members urged that Russia should give way—that America must give way—that someone must trust someone.

In Washington, D.C., a Congressman in a generous spirit of give-and-take suggested as a workable compromise that the atomic rocket should be discharged from neutral territory, say Switzerland.

Promptly came an answer from the Swiss radio pointing out that Swiss neutrality precluded any association whatever with atomic weapons.

"Will Swiss neutrality still hold next Monday?" demanded a hot-blooded Gascon in the French Chamber of Deputies.

A reporter came in to say that the Salvation Army was singing hymns in front of the City Hall.

These messages piled up Babel-wise on my desk beside my cups of tea. The grinning Singer, surprisingly caught up in the spirit of things, was now plying me with his stale brews as though he were giving me next week's tea in advance.

After a day of waiting and a gaggle of cables, came the message that swept all others to the floor. Reuters sent us a line warning us of an important announcement in an hour, and we knew that could mean only one thing.

It came within the hour, and the first flash was: "*Agreement in Paris.*"

There was only one thing to do with it. Crowds were lining the streets outside the office, and in accordance with a practice we follow on other occasions, such as test matches and world heavyweight championships, we put

up the news on a placard outside our front door: "Agreement Reached in Paris."

Cheering at once broke out in the street. People rushed across the road and elbowed each other to get a closer view of the placard. They shouted the news over their shoulders: "Agreement in Paris!" The cheering rose in volume as it passed down the street, and people began singing and dancing.

In the office we crowded round the teletype machine waiting for details of the Paris announcement—reporters, proofreaders, workmen from the composing-room, Mrs. Ricketts, and sometimes even Bailey sticking his long neck in at the door. One machine was reserved for messages from London, and presently it began its rattling and ticking:

Compromise plan for discharging atom bombs at comet proposed in Paris and approved by all Foreign Ministers. Plan provides for discharge of two atom-loaded rockets, one from New Mexico and another from Siberia. With aid of new high-precision instruments from Cambridge, rockets will be directed so as to meet at calculated distance from comet, resulting in greatest explosion ever caused by man.

New plan considered to be an advance on earlier proposals and greatly improves chances of success. Time provisionally fixed for discharge of rockets is dawn Saturday.

Agreement over plan is accompanied by one-hundred-year peace pact between West and East to be signed next week. Foreign Ministers drank a toast as messages were sent to London asking for immediate dispatch of Cambridge instruments and crews to Russia and America. Believed that double explosion of the rockets against the comet will be most dramatic and grandest sky spectacle ever witnessed by man.

As we craned our necks to follow the carriage of the teletype machine spelling out the news, awe and silence fell upon our group, awe which increased as the astounding sentences formed themselves. The first word that escaped anyone—I think it came from one of the printers—was "Hopeless!" It found a murmuring echo round about: "Hopeless! . . . Impossible!"

These were the thoughts that rose in our minds against our dearest wishes. We all wanted the plan to succeed, and yet these new proposals seemed to us even more audacious, more impudently fantastic than the first that the conference as a whole had been unable to accept. In each one of us there had been lurking somewhere the skeptic who was inclined to say with Bailey, "Poppycock!" and wonder if the scientists really expected anyone to be taken in by their speculations. The chances of success, coldly examined, seemed so slender, and now instead of being doubled, as the latest messages suggested, they seemed to have been halved.

THE machine went on ticking in its insensible way when, feeling someone behind me, I looked round to find Bailey leaning over with a grimace upon his face.

"You'll see Conway Jones about this, won't you?"

I nodded. He nodded too.

I could imagine him saying to himself. "Of course, it's the news, good authority. . . . We print it as received, but—"

I waited to get the full story before going to the Observatory, and as the details of the plan came over, in sections that were marked Anti-Comet 3, Anti-Comet 4 and so on, the picture of the enterprise began to take on a more likely color. As one followed the explanations, incomplete though they were, one began to think that the project was not so outrageously unlikely of success after all.

One could sense the drama and tension that must have attended the discussions in Paris. First came Professor Ross' account of the further examination of the original

proposals. It appeared that both he and Professor Hege- man now had misgivings. They both saw difficulties which had not been apparent before. They doubted firstly the feasibility of transporting across half the world so great a quantity of uranium as was thought to be required. For the purpose of immediate use, the uranium would have to be of the stock already processed to the point at which only trigger touch was needed to start the chain action of atomic fission.

They foresaw dangers as well as difficulties, dangers that might wreck the project even before it had been properly begun and perhaps cause widespread ruin at the same time. The actual quantity of fissionable uranium involved was not disclosed, but was unofficially estimated to amount to hundreds of tons. The thought of mishap befalling even a portion of this atomic explosive was enough to send a shudder down the spine of any layman invited to contemplate it. It might be preferable to take one's chance with the comet.

Assuming, however, that the transport of the uranium westward or eastward across the Pacific could be safely effected, Professor Ross foresaw a further and perhaps a greater danger. The total quantity of uranium brought together would exceed the safety point. The greater the quantity the greater the heat involved and the greater the likelihood of spontaneous fission. The professors inclined to the belief that the Russian and American stocks would together just about exceed the limit of effective control.

ON hearing these pronouncements, the U. S. Secretary of State at once rose to state that in the circumstances now disclosed his government would not insist on the transfer of any uranium from Russia to America.

Whereupon the Commissar declared that his government would most certainly negate any proposals for transferring any uranium from the U.S.A., and he withdrew any previously uttered remarks which might be interpreted as supporting such proposals.

Professor Ross explained that as both in America and Russia plans were far advanced for the discharge of a rocket to the moon, his scientific colleagues suggested that both governments should make use of these preparations, load their rockets with the greatest possible uranium charge and send them both against the comet. Cambridge University could supply two sets of its newly perfected guiding instruments. As yet it had only one crew fully trained in the application of space-radar principles, but he proposed to divide the crew between the two countries, each of which would no doubt be willing and able to provide intelligent assistants. He believed that His Majesty's Government would agree to the immediate dispatch of the instruments and the available operators by fast plane to the launching sites in Siberia and New Mexico.

Assuming that the two governments concerned would agree to the plan, the efforts of the scientists would be applied to directing the rockets to a point south of the comet where they would explode on coming into proximity and, it was hoped, deflect the comet.

Examining the plan calmly, one had to admit the brilliance of the conception. Clearly the driving force behind it was the astute imagination of Professor Ross. Yet brilliance is always suspect. Reading the report as it reached us, one sensed the atmosphere of doubt in which his explanation of the project was received.

First to speak was the French minister, who cautiously inquired if the professors had any alternative to offer.

Ross answered that there was no other project which he and his colleagues could recommend, and he appealed for the Ministers' speedy approval.

"And the chances of success?"

"As great as we can make them," replied Ross. "But the chances of success grow less as time grows less."

In the presence of this implied warning, the Foreign Ministers had no option but to agree. One gathered that they did so without enthusiasm. There was no other course open to them. At the same time there was matter for gratification in the fact that the new plan raised no political differences and disclosed no conflict in outlook—or so it seemed until the very last moment.

In quite an innocent tone the Soviet Commissar inquired if the rockets would be discharged simultaneously.

"Not quite," answered Professor Ross. "The distance between the launching points makes a slight interval necessary."

"Whose rocket will be expelled first?"

"The American rocket. The Russian will follow about half a minute later."

The brief silence that followed was broken by the U. S. Secretary rising to say that he hoped the Russian government would give adequate guarantees that its rocket would actually be discharged after the necessary interval.

"You have our fullest assurances on that point," the Commissar answered with a smile.

"I am afraid that my Government is not likely to regard that as sufficient."

A hard look came upon the Commissar's somewhat Eastern countenance as he said, "I appear to have made a serious omission. I should have made it clear that my Government will require definite proof that the American rocket has already been expelled before we can discharge our own. I hope that the United States Government will be able to arrange for that proof to be available in time." He said the words "in time" with unmistakable emphasis.

"The United States Government gives its solemn pledge—"

"We ask for proof."

This was a critical moment, when it seemed that the fate of the project and indeed of the whole world would be settled by a word. Again British intervention saved the situation. The British Foreign Secretary proposed that the Ambassador of each country be present at the launching of the rocket in the other country, and that he be accompanied by his scientific adviser. Moreover, he suggested that in America the trigger actually setting the rocket on its journey should be worked by the Russian Ambassador, and in Russia by the American Ambassador. This arrangement, he thought, would provide adequate safeguards.

At these words the men round the table breathed more easily. This was in fact the scheme finally approved by all parties, and it was there and then announced that Hegeman would fly to Siberia for the launching of the Russian rocket, and Bogomolov would fly to New Mexico. Tension was at once relaxed. The Ministers shook hands over the table. They drank a toast to the success of the project in French wine, and over another glass christened it Operation Ross in honor of the man principally responsible for its conception.

In this happy mood of give-and-take the one-hundred-year peace pact was at once proposed and accepted in principle. Further discussion had necessarily to be postponed until, as they put it, the position clarified—which meant of course until Operation Ross succeeded—or—

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



AFTER ABOUT TWO-SCORE SHEETS OF TELETYPE transmitted in explanation of Operation Ross, there was little that one could question. One had either to accept the feasibility of the project or dismiss it, unless of course like the almost inhuman Bailey one treated the whole thing merely as a fact to be recorded, and waited for the rest. The average man lacked the

training to be able to comprehend the finer points of the plan. If he was an optimist, he accepted it and rejoiced; if he was a pessimist, he let his mind dwell on the fantastic improbabilities which Operation Ross involved.

"They're goin' to make a mistake in their sums. You see if they don't!" That, of course, was Tewkes the barman, back at his job and sober again. Wheeler and I had dropped in at the Golden Springbok on our way to the Observatory.

"Who do you think you are?" challenged Wheeler. "Another professor?"

"Tell you on Monday. You wait and see."

OTHER folk were as skeptical as Tewkes. What did they know of space radar? Or of nuclear fission? For that matter, what did they know of comets, or orbits, or the speed of light, though we'd been filling columns with popular science for days? Even if they read the stuff or listened to dialogues on the same lines over the radio, they felt about it much the same way as my liftman Biggs, for instance, who in the last day or two has been getting more and more long-faced. His comment when he first heard of the Paris proposals was: "Six hundred thousand miles? Who's going to measure it?"

"They've got their instruments, Biggs. They've got marvelous formulas."

"So they say!"

It was no use arguing with him. Biggs is by nature a pessimist. I am an optimist, temperamentally unable to look at the worst side of things while there are glimmerings of a better. Nevertheless, any man was entitled to ask: "Could it succeed?" As a reporter, I had to try to find an answer to that question, if there was one. This, therefore, was the principal inquiry I carried to Conway Jones.

As usual, he was detached and noncommittal. "Strange they didn't see those difficulties in the first plan," he began. "Would have saved a lot of time. Very strange."

I was no longer interested in the first plan. All the news was in Operation Ross.

"Can it succeed?"

He looked at me with those cold eyes and that faint smile which showed me he was once again being cautious. "They seem to think so in Paris."

"Let me put it this way. Do you think they can aim with any accuracy at a range of six hundred thousand miles?"

"You asked me that yesterday. The answer is the same."

"The target is not the same. Yesterday the target was only the comet. Now they mean to send a rocket from New Mexico to hit one coming from Siberia."

"Mmm. . . . Ah—that's where you're wrong. The rockets won't have to hit each other. At the temperature obtaining in the vicinity of the comet they will only have to approach each other in order to explode."

"Approach to within—"

"A thousand miles would do it."

"And you think they can make sure of that?"

"Do you think you could make sure of hitting a thirty-six-inch target at six hundred yards—one yard in six hundred?"

"Tolerably."

"That's what Operation Ross—stupid name, they gave it, I must say—that's what they're going to try to do. One yard at six hundred is very much like a thousand miles at six hundred thousand. Do you think they can do it? Your answer is as good as mine."

One more question: "Do you really think they can blow the comet off its path?"

"It's not that! The explosion of the two rockets will create a gravitational center of brief but terrific intensity which, being near the comet, will slightly alter its orbit. That's all. The planet Jupiter does it quite often to

comets. Now we're going to do it ourselves. It's going to be very interesting!"

He was lost in contemplation of this man-made marvel. He drew lines on his blotting-pad again, showed me where the rockets would create their gravitational point, promised to let me have another diagram. I could see that this diagram was going to be no more convincing than the other. Bailey would say that instead of looking like one pea-shooter, it looked like two. He would again order a double-column block and get our cartoonist to do "an artist's impression of the rockets, dramatic, dynamic, across three columns at least."

But I was grateful to the astronomer, all the same. He had given me the popular approach to the story, one which would bring it within the grasp of the average man. I saw my headline again: LIKE HITTING A 36-INCH TARGET AT 600 YARDS. That was something simple, something to comprehend in a flash; and this time I felt sure that Bailey would not pooh-pooh my angle to the story, and he would not fling my headline to the floor.

This proved to be right. Back at the office, I explained the view that Conway Jones took of Operation Ross. Bailey was impressed, looked as though he thought there might be something in Operation Ross after all. "Good. I like it. Conway Jones breaks into common sense occasionally. It's human, understandable. . . . We'll use it."

Nevertheless, he wanted something more. "This is one time when the scientific side of the story takes second place to the political side. Mark that! The statesmen come out really big in this affair. That's the angle we're going to splash. This Operation Ross is wonderful, of course. Something might even come of it. But more than anything else, Operation Ross represents a triumph of statesmanship—that's it! The really big thing is this Hundred Year Peace Pact. Just think of it! Something never dreamed of before—heralds a new era in international relations. That'll be our banner line: STATESMEN PROMISE THE WORLD HUNDRED YEARS OF PEACE."

"If the comet misses us."

"Of course, of course."

THE telephone rang. He picked up the receiver. "Yes . . . yes." He looked at me. "Call from our London office. I've been waiting for them." He handed me the extra earpiece. "I want you to hear this too. May be something for your introduction. . . . Yes. Bailey here. That you, Horten? How are you, old man? Keeping fit? Keeping your head? That's good. Now listen, old chap. I want something more about the Paris to-do."

"More! But we've already sent you a couple of columns in addition to Reuter's stuff. How much more?"

"I know, I know. All good stuff, too. But the afternoon paper is cleaning up on Operation Ross, and we want something new. We're going to splash this Hundred Year Peace Pact. That seems the big thing to us."

"Fleet Street is soft-pedaling that till next week."

"Maybe, maybe. But we take a different view of things in this part of the world. See things from a distance, see more. We want some good interviews on the Peace Pact—with the Foreign Secretary, or the American Ambassador. . . . You know what I mean."

"Yes, I know."

"Very well. A column will do us nicely, but don't keep it too late. . . . Thanks, Horten. Glad to see there's no despondency at your end."

Bailey rang off and turned to me again.

"Good man, Horten! He'll get the stuff. You write your introduction across three columns. You know—New Era. . . . And now about that special edition we were planning."

The special!

"What time do the rockets go off?"

"About two A.M. Greenwich. That's four A.M. our time."

"That'll be in time for our extra edition. And what time do they hit the comet?"

"About ten Sunday night, our time."

"And next morning the Big Hit Special. How's that going?"

I hadn't given it a thought. "Fine," I said.

He nodded, satisfied. I waited for no further instructions or inquiries from him.

Horten's copy began coming in about ten o'clock, and was very much on the lines suggested by Bailey. I could easily picture what he had done. He'd rang up a friend or two in the Foreign Office and in the diplomatic corps, asked them whether they thought this and this about the Peace Pact; as it was quite harmless stuff, he easily persuaded them that they did; and then wrote an interview with a "Foreign Office spokesman." But it was vigorously written and made a good story. When I left it on the chief sub-editor's desk, I noticed the night's cartoon drawing waiting to be checked.

The drawing showed Earth as a batsman at the wicket raising his bat, which was labeled "Operation Ross," while the comet, looking rather scared, was bounding up the pitch. Earth was saying: "I'm going to hit him for a six!"

Good, I thought. . . . But it seemed less good when I was out in the street and gazing up at the sky. The comet now looked like another moon, only brownish and surrounded by a yellowish light. Yes, you can clearly make out a face there, the Man in the Comet, a face quite composed and not a bit as our cartoonist has drawn him. "All the same," I smiled to myself, "we're going to hit you for a six—I hope."

All the way up to my flat I felt that smile on my face. Then I passed the Cosways' door and remembered. Henry Cosway had not arrived. It was quite clear that he hadn't. The stillness of the flat told me all.

But never mind, Mrs. Cosway. Perhaps your Henry won't have to come, after all. We're going to hit the comet for a six! And then the world's going to be lovely. We're going to live in quiet and peace after that, a hundred years of it. We'll be so grateful to find ourselves still on the earth, we won't want to disturb as much as a blade of grass again. And your Henry will be able to finish his studies. He'll qualify and come home as a doctor. And Clayton's baby will grow up. And Judy Lane will see the beauty of the world. And Tovey will grow vegetables. And you, Mr. and Mrs. Cosway, will have your wish. . . .

Then I look out through my window. There's the Man in the Comet. But from my window I see more. I see that there's a faint orange light on one side of the buildings, a yellowish light that puts fear into my heart.

We're going to hit the comet for a six! Are we? O God, are we?

The Third Day

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



DAY OF STRANGE UNEASINESS AND TENSION; A day that seemed no more than a gap; a day we could have done without. Even though our days on earth may be few, people wanted this one to pass, to push it behind them. . . . And yet a most necessary day, the one available day for flying the Cambridge instruments to New Mexico and Siberia and installing them at the launching sites. A most precious day—all too short for the work in hand. But at a time like this one does not reason; one feels. And like others, I felt I wanted the day to pass speedily, to race by, to go in one gulp, so that the all-important dawn of Saturday, tomorrow, might bring its pregnant hour.

Once we knew that Operation Ross was the only way we had to save ourselves, we wanted action, and we wanted its moment to arrive. The day seemed unendurably long. We knew that to those men in Cambridge, to the men flying, and to the others waiting in New Mexico and Siberia, it would be short, far too short. But to us it seemed long, because it was also a day of inactivity and anxiety—of fear lest the plans might miscarry, lest one of the airplanes might meet with an accident, lest somewhere a fatal hitch might occur in the arrangements causing an irreparable loss of time. So it was a day of watching, scanning the cables fearfully, . . . A day of uneasiness.

After making my breakfast and dressing, the first thing that occurred to me was to call on the Cosways. To my surprise, there was no answer at their door. I rang the bell and knocked hard, but there was no sound in response. It was quite clear that there was no one in.

AT the office, where I first caught the feeling of the day's nervousness, where everyone seemed waiting, people keeping tight hold of themselves and talking little for fear of giving themselves away, letting something snap. Even the doorkeeper seemed to efface himself behind his glass, and the liftman scarce looked at one. . . . At the office I found that Spencer had turned up again. He had just walked in and reported for duty to the news editor as he had done a thousand times before, and the tactful Evans de Beer had asked no questions.

It occurred to me at once that Olwen must be back too. To pick up the telephone just then would have seemed too obvious. I had no desire to pick a quarrel with Spencer. So I pretended I was reading the paper, and reflected that Clayton had written quite a good story about Judy Lane this morning—a bit sloppy, but moving for all that. It appears that the girl's known all along about the comet. Millington would have blamed Clayton for that, had he known. But no one told her. Must have heard it from the other kids. She's not depressed. Says she's sure God will save the world. God wouldn't be so hard on a little girl. . . . Too sentimental. And look at the headline! "JUDY LANE SAYS SHE'S SURE GOD WILL SAVE THE WORLD." Some people will say that's a sure sign. Out of the mouths of babes and— And here's his story about that other baby. Written with an almost fatherly pride. Clayton has been busy.

News started coming in early. More explanations of Operation Ross: speed of the rockets; speed of the comet. The rockets will not travel in a straight line but in a sort of arc. Of course. Every soldier knows about trajectory. Similar. Route of the planes across the Atlantic and Siberia. American ambassador on his way to the launching platform. Russian ambassador on his way to New Mexico given great send-off in Washington. Great crowds to see him off at airport, and wish him God-speed. New chains of friendship being forged across the world.

Discussion raised somewhere as to whether explosion of the rockets may affect the moon. Pity if the moon were to be knocked out of the sky. Nights wouldn't be the same. Answer is that moon is only quarter-million miles away and the force of the uranium rockets being more than twice as far not likely to disturb her. Which of course is very comforting. More about mechanism of the rockets. Old stuff, of course. All this about atomic engines came out months ago when plans for the American rocket to the moon were first announced. This will make good reading next week—if there is a next week.

The underside of the comet will be kept under observation by telescope, and what there is to be seen will be seen by the astronomers. There will be photographs, of course—which reminds me that I ought to get a good photograph from Conway Jones. But all these cabled details are rather tiresome at the moment. All that we

shall want to know tomorrow morning is that the rockets have been launched. The rest will be stale. Time of launching will be 4:15 A.M. We'll hold back the extra edition until we get the flash. Meanwhile perhaps I really ought to get busy with that Big Hit Special. If the world does not end on Monday morning, and I haven't got a few columns in type ready for use, I shall be properly in the soup. Better see if I can dig up more stuff in the library. Which reminds me, if Olwen is really back, Mrs. Ricketts will have her assistant again. So off I go to the library. . . .

I was right. One glance was enough to tell me that Olwen must be back at her post. But I lost interest at once in the buxom Olwen. Mrs. Ricketts was far more interesting at the moment. She sat there in her matronly way, piles of clippings around her, looking positively pleased with things; flushed and pleased. Her mouse-haired assistant was somewhere in the background, but hardly in the picture.

When Mrs. Ricketts saw me, she beamed. "Now, Mr. Lacey! See?"

Obediently I looked at the heaps on her table. They were carefully arranged behind little labels: "*End of the World, Local. End of the World, Overseas. End of the World, Churches and. End of the World, Comet and. End of the World, Operation Ross and. End of the World, Archbishop on. . . . Foreign Secretary on. . . . Prime Minister on.*" . . . And so on. "See?" she repeated. I knew that she was not really referring to her clippings, but I pretended she was.

"Lots of work you've got there," I said.

"Of course. What do you think of it?"

"Keep you going a long time."

"I should say it will, and a good thing, too!"

We understood each other quite well. "See?" she was really saying to me: "Is the world going to end or not? Things are looking up, aren't they? Operation Ross indeed! They think it's their rockets and their astronomers and their statesmen who are going to save the world. But the world can't end as long as Mrs. Ricketts has got a job on her hands, and Mrs. Ricketts will see that she has, though little credit she'll ever get for it."

BACK in the reporters' room, Spencer hailed me. "Something I wanted to tell you, Lacey: I was at the airport this morning. Saw a couple of friends of yours there. Looking down in the mouth, rather. I forget their names. They live in the same building as you, I think you said. They were here the other day."

I'd been listening to him with only half an ear, but now I was startled. "You mean Mr. and Mrs. Cosway?"

"That's right. Cosway? Couldn't think of it. Where do they imagine they're flying off to?"

"They were—they must be waiting for their son. That's it! He's due to arrive today."

"Is he? They're going to wait a long time then—unless their son's a bloody field-marshal or a Cabinet minister. There'd be a story in that. Say, is he a Cabinet minister?"

He shouted the words after me, because I was already off down the corridor. Although the Cosways and I had been neighbors all that time, I had got to know them and their troubles only during the past few days. But now I felt myself deeply interested in them, in their helplessness, and I could not bear the thought of their waiting blindly and vainly. I routed Wheeler out of a corner of the composing-room, where he was playing shove ha'penny with some of the apprentices.

"Going to the Observatory so early?" he asked.

"No. The airport."

It took us half an hour to get there, and it wasn't easy to get in. There was a guard at the gates who was closely questioning anyone professing to have business there. My press card carried me through, however, and I got to

the waiting-room without difficulty. Here there were scores of people lounging about on the benches in all sorts of attitudes, men and women, some resting on their baggage, some without baggage, some half-awake and some fast asleep. Presently I espied Mr. and Mrs. Cosway in a far corner sitting bolt upright as though expecting to be called any moment. I made my way to them over drowsy legs and stray portmanteaus. "Mr. Cosway! What on earth are you two doing here?"

HE looked at me hopelessly. She answered: "We're waiting for Henry. They're expecting a plane in any minute now."

"But how long have you been here?"

"When he didn't come yesterday, we just waited for the next plane. There are so many coming in—"

"And you've been here ever since?"

"Well, you know, once we were here, it didn't seem worth while going away, in case his plane came in."

"And are you sure now he's on the next plane?"

"They don't tell us, Mr. Lacey. They don't answer questions. Really, they're most unreasonable."

I took Mrs. Cosway by the arm. "Come with me. Both of you." I shepherded them out of the waiting-room and into the inner offices. On the way Mr. Cosway found opportunity to whisper to me: "If you could only persuade her to go home, Mr. Lacey, I'd be so grateful." Using my press card again, I got one of the attendants to show me to the local traffic manager.

He was hostile at first. "Really, Mr. Lacey, you ought to see Mr. Pocock. What do we keep a public relations officer for?"

"Yes, I know. Awfully sorry. But Pocock's at the head office and I happen to be here." I gave him no chance to raise any more objections. "This is Mr. and Mrs. Cosway. Now, they have a son, Henry Cosway, brilliant young doctor. He's just now on his way out from London. He was supposed to have arrived yesterday. Could you tell us if he's on the next plane?"

He rang a bell, and said something to a girl who appeared at the door. While waiting, he turned to me. "Mr. Henry Cosway, did you say?"

"Yes."

"And what is the Day's interest in this passenger, may I ask?"

I felt at that moment like Spencer wanting to knock somebody's block off, but I restrained myself and quickly invented a lie. "We're running a little story about them, about the son, that is—brilliant young fellow."

The girl reappeared with a list in her hand. He scanned it. "No. No name of Cosway here."

"Are you sure? C-o-s—"

"Quite sure. What's his mission here?"

This time I could not lie quickly enough. "He's coming to see his father and mother—only son, you know."

He looked at me with open impatience. "Really, Mr. Lacey!"

"Yes, I know! Lots of people want to see their fathers and mothers now. You want to see your father and mother. I want to see my father and mother. And if we had any guts, we'd go and do it!"

He answered me coldly. "I'm afraid Mr. Cosway's name is not on our next list. I'm sorry I can't do anything more for you."

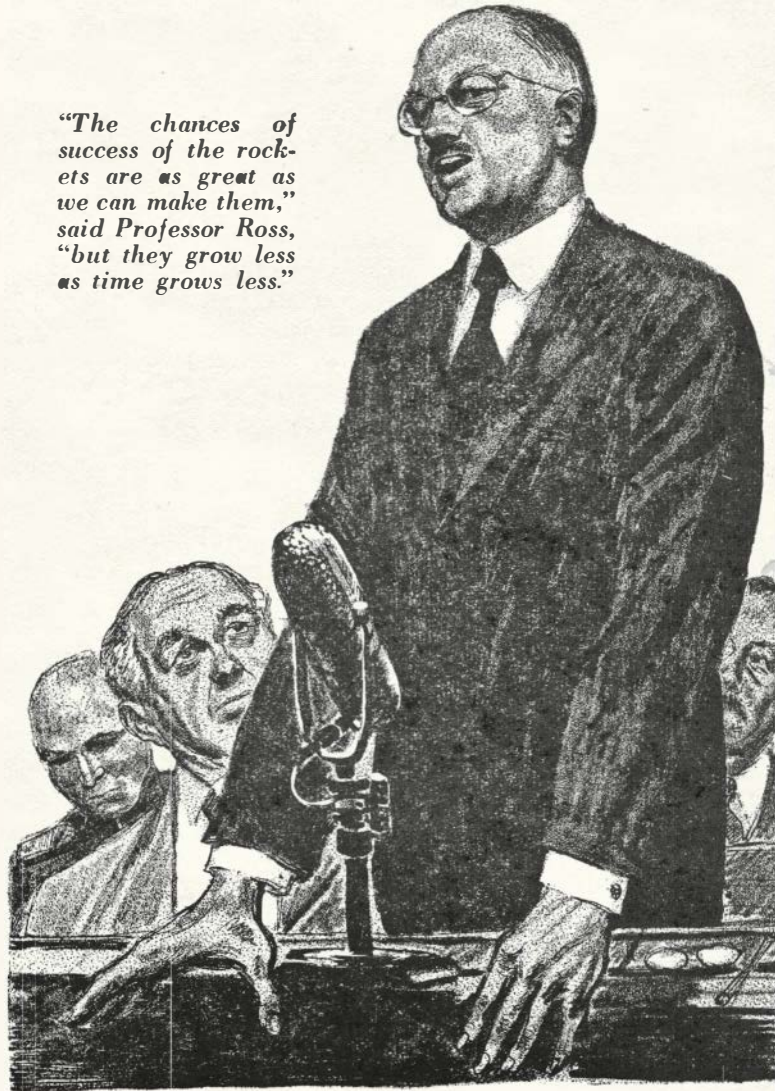
"But you can!" I had made a mistake in losing my temper. I needed this man's sympathy. I leaned over the table toward him. "These people have been waiting here for twenty hours. They got a cable saying the boy was coming yesterday. Do you want to keep them waiting here?"

"Certainly not."

"As soon as he gets onto a plane, you'll have his name on the list, won't you?"

"Yes."

"The chances of success of the rockets are as great as we can make them," said Professor Ross, "but they grow less as time grows less."



"Would you get someone to ring Mrs. Cosway when his name comes through? That's all. Then they can go home. They needn't wait here. That's all we ask."

He saw what I was after. His tone changed. "I think that can be arranged. Yes. The number? And the name is C-o-s—"

We thanked him profusely. Then Mrs. Cosway let me lead her out to Wheeler's waiting car.

Half an hour later I was seeing them into their flat. Mr. Cosway gripped my hand and looked his gratitude.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



IT WAS ALSO A DAY OF PROCESSIONS—PROCESSIONS that seemed to appear from nowhere and gather a following as they came through the center of the town. First a ragged column of black folk led by native parsons in dirty white surplices.

That belief which had sprung up among the natives, of their immunity to the fires of the comet, had not been dispelled. It seemed firm enough among these dark placid faces, placid in the fantastic hope that the fires would pass them by and consume only the white people.

They carried banners aloft. THE DAY OF WRATH IS COME. JUDGMENT DAY IS AT HAND. A NEW WORLD COMES FOR THE AFRICAN. . . . And THROUGH THE FIRES TO FREEDOM. The black stragglers at the rear danced jubilantly as they followed their banners.

They would never have dared to parade such slogans in the street at ordinary times. They would have feared

the batons of the police. And perhaps there would have been rifles too to fear. But today they had courage. Hope sang wildly in their hearts. And in any case, the police had too much work on their hands keeping watch on power stations, Government buildings, telephone exchanges and other key-points to bother about a trifling street-demonstration that would tire itself out anyhow.

After the blacks came the strangest procession—a group of Seventh Day Adventists, men and women in sober garb and solemn faces, carrying banners displaying the most positive exhortations and the most elaborate admonitions: STOP THE ROCKETS! STOP THE SCIENTISTS! STOP THE ANTI-CHRISTS! . . . IT IS BLASPHEMY TO SEND BOMBS AGAINST THE ANGEL OF THE LORD. IT IS ETERNAL DAMNATION TO STRIVE AGAINST THE JUDGMENT. . . . BEHOLD THE LORD COMETH AND WE SEND BOMBS AGAINST HIM. STOP THE ROCKETS! . . . STOP THE SCIENTISTS!

It all looked rather fearsome, and might have been more so but for the fact that somewhere in the rear a brass band of the Salvation Army was beating out a march tune that at that distance sounded jocund rather than solemn. Thus the thunder of the Seventh Day Adventists was blurred by the trombones of the Salvation Army. Undismayed, the long-faced Adventists marched on, hoping to shake off the Salvationists in good time.

BAILEY saw them from his window. "Let's have a photograph of that lot. And tell them to make sure we get that banner with the strange device, the one about sending bombs against the Angel of the Lord. If the wording doesn't come out clear in the photograph, we can always paint it in."

His mind was occupied, however, with more important things than the Adventists. "London wants a story about Kennaway Laver. His shares have shot up everywhere. Wouldn't be surprised if he were a millionaire a hundred times over by now. Most sensational romance in modern commerce. That's what they're saying in London. Man who gambled on the end of the world and won, for the moment anyway. What does he say about it? What are his plans? We've got to get him to talk, and you'd better go along and do it."

As I was going out, he stopped me. "That's all I'll expect from you today. Get us a good story from Kennaway Laver and then clear off. I don't want to see you again till four o'clock in the morning. Four A.M., that's the hour. So put your alarm on. I'll get the office to ring you at three-thirty in any case."

There was no point in telephoning Kennaway Laver even if I could get through to him, so I went straight to Laver House. They knew me there by now, and though they said the Big Man was seeing nobody, they showed me in at once. Passing by an open door I caught sight of the two girls—what were they called? Jane and Millicent—who had been up at the house, now installed again in front of their typewriters. I wondered what this might portend. But more wonderment awaited me within. Kennaway Laver was not in the room when I entered. His secretary was there, and when she looked up, I found to my amazement she was Dora Laver.

"Hullo, John," she said quietly.

"Well, I never! What are you doing here?"

"Someone's got to be Father's secretary, and you seem quite to have spoiled Philippa for the job."

"Ah, I see. Is that it?" I remembered some remark Philippa had let drop about the dragon, and here was the dragon at Kennaway Laver's side. Though truth to tell, she hardly looked the part. Away from her usual surroundings, Dora had a striking appearance, uncommon, distinguished, an exotic flower among those rouged and painted blooms in the offices around her. A dragon? If so, a singularly interesting one.

To make conversation, I asked the first question that rose to my lips. "How's Milton?"

"Why don't you read him and find out for yourself?"

"I have."

"And—"

"I think Satan was an admirable fellow."

I felt her disapproval; but just then Kennaway Laver came in. He was wearing a light-gray double-breasted suit; his silvering hair was neatly brushed down; a ring glistened on his hand; and he looked the perfect magnate. "So it's you, John. You newspaper men can't leave well alone. What are you after now?"

"London's after you, not I. They want to know all about you. The new Midas, they call you." I thought it best to flatter, but he took it differently.

"They want to know what sort of specimen I am, do they? Want to know if I'm sound, if I can be trusted?"

"I didn't mean that."

"But they did. I know the crew. Nosing around. That's their way. They don't go by ordinary sense, oh no! They go by sense of smell. Want to know if Laver's companies have got a good odor?"

"It's not that. You're news now. You're a big man."

"And they want to know how long I'll stay big. I know how their minds work."

He was sitting at his broad desk now with both hands grasping the edge, talking at me and enjoying it. "And they want to know how many millions I've made since last week, I expect."

"I dare say they do."

"I'd tell 'em, John, if I knew, honestly I would. +But I don't. It may be two hundred million; it may be three hundred. But that'll be enough to make their mouths water. Or shall I say four hundred?"

"And they want to know, or rather everyone wants to know, how you did it. London's buzzing with rumors. Why, in the London papers you come next to the comet!"

"The comet and I, is it? But go ahead, John. Tell 'em. Or don't you think they'll believe you? Perhaps you're right. They won't believe it was plain common sense, just ordinary arithmetic. That's too simple to be true. Tell 'em I had inside knowledge."

I didn't quite know how to take him. But he seemed serious enough. And there was a cold streak of truth in what he said. No one would believe the true story. "What are your plans?"

"Plans? Of course they'll expect plans. Tell 'em you understand I'm going into Parliament. Not to be surprised if I turn up in the Cabinet. Why not? I've got the Government in the palm of my hand. They'll expect to hear that, and I like to keep them guessing. Tell 'em more. I'm going to bring the Bank of England here—St. Paul's!—Jerusalem!—Hollywood! I can have them all now."

Dora's voice broke in upon his boasting. "You said Satan was an admirable fellow, John!"

LAVER waved a hand toward her. "Ask Dora. She has plans for me. Worked them all out. Plans for native hospitals, plans for schools. I'm going to endow half the rescue homes in the country. Tell him, Dora."

She was looking at me with pain in her eyes. "What's the good of talking now? Why don't we wait until next week? It seems almost—almost indecent now."

He chuckled. "There you are! Hadn't you forgotten something?"

"Dora!" I exclaimed. "Not you! You're not afraid!"

Her reply was unexpected, her words startlingly commonplace: "Take me out to tea, John. Please do!"

"Certainly, Dora."

"That's right," laughed Kennaway Laver. "She'll tell you the whole story. Knows more than I do."

Quickly Dora tidied up her desk and drew on a pair of thin net gloves. Soon we were leaving Laver House, Kennaway Laver's laughter still ringing in my ears.

We went to the Carlton Lounge, where we found a quiet corner away from the orchestra. There were few people at the tables, and the musicians, in one of their subdued moods, were playing nostalgically "Roses of Picardy." I liked the air of the place this afternoon. With such fateful things happening in the world, it was comforting to find that there was still such a thing as quiet, that in the midst of it all one could get away, that even in a great city one could, if one wished, forget. But there was to be no forgetting. Dora had not brought me here to forget.

I ordered tea from a solemn-faced waiter who looked as if he had been there for years and would continue gliding about in the same place for at least as long again. While we waited for it to be brought, Dora fidgeted with her gloves, drawing them off and drawing them on again. This, I reflected, was no longer the self-composed Dora, ready to pass judgment on almost anything with a word, the Dora sure of herself and facing the future unflinchingly whatever it might bring. When the waiter placed the tea things before us, she smiled at me nervously.

WHEN he had gone, she spoke abruptly.

"John, what's going to happen?"

"We must hope, Dora—"

"Yes, I know. But is there any reason to hope?"

I hardly knew what to say. These words seemed strange, coming from her. "But Dora, I didn't know you cared."

"Oh, don't say it! Have I seemed so hard, so callous?"

"No, no. I didn't mean that really." It was a cruel thing to have said. "I mean, you were willing to take it as God's judgment, and to face it like a martyr. That's right, I've always thought of you as the stuff that martyrs are made of."

"I'm not as brave as all that."

"I mean you were resigned to it. Mankind was getting no better than it deserved. You used to say so."

"I know. But I've grown older; I feel I've grown up."

Yes, I could believe it. Dora Laver had grown up. In a few days she had left behind her that glorious state of growing when the world is beautifully simple, everything is black or everything is white, there is a yes or no to every question, and life is ill-ordered only because it hasn't been well-ordered. She had lost her knowledge of what was right and what was wrong, and in its place there had come doubt and confusion. Now I could understand her distress. Growing up is at all times attended with pain, but is usually gradual and the aches of reality come slowly. But to have it happen quickly, to have the revelation of life's mediocrity made suddenly, to find all at once that it is not all good and not all bad, but that good and bad are mingled inscrutably, and that the shifting blend that is called life is no less dear on that account—to have all this happen is like the shock of the surgeon's knife. Given time, there will be recovery. Meanwhile the pain is racking.

There was all this to be read in Dora's face, and in her quick words.

"I've grown up, and I don't want the world to end. I want to live, and I want everyone to live. A week ago I know I thought I was indifferent to it all. I didn't care. It didn't seem to matter. The world was getting what it deserved. Mankind was rotten anyhow, and if the comet was coming, well it would clean up everything. Fire is a purifier. But now I know I was wrong. I don't want it to happen. Now I'm afraid. Now—"

Now she had gone to the other extreme. Passionate natures such as hers are like that. Now she wanted to save everyone. Now she wanted to see mankind saved so that it might be reformed. No, Dora. You're not as grown up as you think you are. After all, there is no forcing-house, and even though life's hours may be numbered, it will not be hurried. The flower that has to

bloom in a month's time will not open now because that month may not be. The bud stays closed, and holds its secret forever.

"Now I can't believe that God intends it, that God would be unwilling to save the world for the sake of the good in it. And there is good somewhere, I'm sure there is." She put one gloved hand on the table. Through the open net I could see it trembling. "Is there any hope for us, John?"

"We must think so."

"Do you say that just to calm me? Am I making an exhibition of myself?"

"No. Even if there's no hope that we can see, we must keep hoping. Surely you realize that. You were always so serene."

"I thought so too. But I was wrong. You are much braver than I am. You're cynical. All newspaper men are cynical. And yet you say we must hope."

She remembered the tea and began to pour it out. I realized that my hand had been resting on hers.

A question rose to my lips. "Why did you come to the office? Surely you didn't want to?"

"Philippa wouldn't, so I had to. My mother insisted. It was the only way to calm her. In any case I didn't want to stay at home. I couldn't bear it."

"Couldn't bear what?"

"Everything. My mother breaks out praying again every now and then. Because she wants revenge on one man, she's willing to bring the world down in ruins around her. That can't be right. I'm sure it can't be right. My father is full of the power he's got into his hands, thinks of nothing else. That too is wrong. It's wicked. And—" She stopped.

I prompted. "And Philippa?"

"She's not good enough for you, John. You be careful of her."

"How can I be careful of the one I love?"

"Be careful. She'll—"

The next word remained only half-formed. But I laughed at the suggestion that Philippa might not be good enough for me.

Dora changed her line of thought. "There's no one to talk to in the house. I had to get away. I was so glad you came."

"Go on, then. Talk."

She smiled. "I seem to have said everything."

Then we had our tea. She was in better spirits by now. Talking seemed to have helped her. And I urged her to think not of Monday but of Sunday evening. That made her more hopeful. We talked little of her father. There was little that she needed to tell me. I offered to take her home, but she preferred to return to her father's office, and it flattered me to think that it was a much more cheerful Dora I accompanied back to Laver House than I had found there.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



I WAS EASY TO WRITE A GOOD STORY ABOUT Kennaway Laver for sending to London. We knew all about his career. Mrs. Ricketts was delighted to give me his envelope and would have been still more pleased to give me some choice stories about his private life had I encouraged her. As to his great financial coup and his plans for the future—I made a sober account of all that and wrote, of course, on the assumption that there was to be a future. It was after all on this assumption by everyone that the market had gone soaring again. It didn't really matter what I wrote. Kennaway Laver would contradict nothing. He never did. It was easy, therefore, to write a good story about him, and as we ourselves were also going to use it, I put on a head-

line, KENNAWAY LAVER SAYS FORESIGHT, CALCULATION AND HARD WORK DID IT. INSIDE STORY OF GREAT FINANCIAL STROKE, and broke up the story with cross-heads, TO PARLIAMENT? and HOSPITALS AND RESCUE HOMES.

It was late in the afternoon before I was free of the office. On my way out I met Millington, strolling in dreamily. "Hullo, Mr. Millington. Busy?"

"Rather," he answered. I'd heard he was among his toys at all sorts of hours. "You ought to come and have a look some time. I've got a pair of fine model railways up there—I'd like to show 'em to you."

"Next week."

He laughed a short laugh. Then he stepped into the lift. "Cheerio."

What on earth was one to make of him? But I gave him no more thought. There's a point where the human mind becomes too complicated. Hurrying off to the garage, I got the car out and drove to Endymion. I had a long evening before me and was sure Philippa would want to go out dancing somewhere. A free evening always gives me a feeling of gaiety and abandon. That comes of continuous night work. Also, I wanted to see Dora again, see if her mood was keeping, and perhaps talk to her a bit more. Strange that all these days Philippa and I had said little to each other about the comet, or the rockets, or what might come of them. Matters that were so fatal and vital, yet we had little wish to discuss them. Dora had already said much more to me than Philippa ever had. Moreover, I felt that if our conversation over tea had comforted her, it had brought me also a kind of relief. Dora was right. We newspaper men get too cynical. It is wholesome at times to throw cynicism into the street and talk one's heart out. Having done it once, I felt the need to do it again.

It was dusk when I got to the house. One of the servants let me in, and I wandered into the sitting-room. It was empty. There was nothing for me to do but wait. After a few vacant minutes Kennaway Laver came in. "Oh, it's you, John!" That was always his greeting, as though he found something faintly amusing in my being who I was.

"Yes. I got away early after writing your—"

But he was not interested and cut me short. "You've got yourself nicely into the soup, young man!"

"I? What have I done?"

"I shouldn't have let you take Dora out to tea. I should have known my daughter better."

"But is anything the matter? Dora seemed all right."

"Of course she is! I wasn't thinking of her. It's Philippa. One of those girls at the office, I swear it was Millicent, must have telephoned her and told her about you and Dora. These sluts always stick together, you know."

"Mr. Laver—"

"That's all right, my boy. I know what I'm saying. You'll learn all about women in time—if you're given the time. That girl must have told her a mighty fancy story about you and Dora. Sent Philippa into a perfect rage of jealousy."

"Philippa jealous!"

"Yes. Look at this!" He showed me a book he'd been holding. "Just picked it up on the staircase." It was a copy of Milton ripped clean in two down the spine. "Philippa did that. Shows you the temper she's in."

"But this is absurd! I can explain everything."

"Shouldn't try if I were you, at least not now."

"There's really nothing to explain."

"That's just it. Dora's up there crying her eyes out. Philippa is still going at her, and of course my wife is on Philippa's side."

"But—what am I to do?"

"Nothing, if you take my advice. Leave it alone. It'll blow over. I'm going off to the club for dinner. Help yourself to a drink."

"No, thanks."

"Spoiled your evening, I know. But don't stay here moping about it. Women are not worth it, I assure you." He laughed. "No, they're not. All the same. Get too possessive. Can I give you a lift into town? . . . Oh, I see, you've got your car here. Sure you won't have a drink? . . . Please yourself."

After he had gone, I did take a drink. There seemed nothing better to do. It was the kind of situation in which a man feels that the only thing left is to get drunk. But I restrained myself and put the decanter aside without refilling.

I was already at the front door when a voice from the staircase stopped me.

"Do you still come here, John Lacey? What do you hope to find here?"

It was Mrs. Laver, standing halfway up the first flight of steps. She was wearing an evening gown, and with her hair done on the crown of her head, she looked as stately as I ever remembered seeing her.

"Mrs. Laver!"

"You're all the same. Only out for what you can get. I know. But there's nothing here for you. And after Monday there'll be nothing for anyone. . . . Mark that—for *anyone!* Good night."

I was glad to get away from the house, and started up the car with the least possible noise. If a two-seater sports model can be said to slink away, mine did out of the grounds of Endymion.

Arriving in town, I called in at the office to see if there was anything new in the cables from London. "Nothing special," drawled Henderson, the chief sub-editor, as he had drawled almost every night in his life for years. "Nothing much at all."

Someone pushed an inland telegram into my hand. "Read that."

It was from the coast: "DEATH OCCURRED OF WELLINGTON TOVEY— Who on earth is Wellington? It must be poor old Tovey! We never knew his first name, only his initial. No one ever knew!—OF WELLINGTON TOVEY, RETIRED JOURNALIST STOP HE WAS FOUND HANGING IN A BARN AT HIS FARM LIVAGEN END MESSAGE.

Poor old Tovey! The fool! The fool! Why did we let him go? Why couldn't he wait?

But perhaps he wasn't such a fool, after all. He couldn't bear to see his new life destroyed, so he destroyed it himself. Poor old Tovey!

Tovey's hanged himself, and there's the comet shining low in the northwestern sky. What price pumpkins! The comet is now like a ruddy pumpkin in the heavens, and the night too has a ruddy brown hue over it, a ruddiness that makes streets, buildings, houses and faces, especially faces, look pale, deathly pale. And in the glowing head of the comet, the Man in the Comet looks passively into the wastes of celestial emptiness.

The Second Day

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN



THE FIRST NEWS CAME PRECISELY AT FOURTHIRTY A.M., a three-word flash from London, date-lined Santa Fe, New Mexico. We waited anxiously for the next.

It was not the first time that I had been up at that hour waiting for news for an extra edition. In my early days of reporting, to stay up during the night was one of the thrills of the job. There was something romantic about losing one's sleep so as to be able to give the town the latest news at break-fast time; it was part of the excitement of the job, and carried the sense of power on which the newspaper man feeds. But I lost my relish for that kind of excitement

long ago. I learned to value sleep; for after all, sleep is better than power. There is a kind of infinity in sleep.

Last night I sat up reading—yes, I had better record it—reading Milton. And I had better confess too that I fell asleep over the Second Book. A telephone call from the office woke me with a harsh ringing. The bell of Doom would sound like that. Perhaps it was. If we really had any chance of survival, we should know it within the next hour or two. Fateful expectations, like the memory of some recent horror, killed sleep almost as soon as my eyes were open. I found it easy to get up, and was out in the pre-dawn darkness, a darkness still edged with red. The comet is with us most of the night now. In the street, the freshness of the hour was stimulating even though there was a hue in the sky that gave no light, and a light that promised no dawn.

I went in at the building of the *Day* by the printers' door and entered through the composing-room. This was the hour of lull, the lull that comes between two editions, though over it all was the hum of the presses down below turning out the earlier one. A few men were at the linotype machines setting new copy. Others were getting the forms ready for the extra. Copies of the first and second editions with Kennaway Laver's face on the front page were lying about on the tables. The quiet of the place was like the quiet of the street. It was the hour when people naturally make little noise.

As I threaded my way past the tables of type, one of the foremen, a genial, wiry old fellow, always ready with his box of snuff, plucked my sleeve and asked in a confidential tone: "How's it, Mr. Lacey? What are the chances, heh?"

"What do you think?"

He took a big pinch out of his box and held up his forefinger and thumb. "I don't think that much of them!" He pushed the snuff up his nose and drew it in with satisfaction. "Not *that* much!"

Upstairs, Evans de Beer and Henderson were marking copies of the early edition—killing columns that were to make room for later news, setting others that were to be retained, changing headlines, cutting out dispensable paragraphs. The paper was not out on the streets yet, and here it was already being treated as stale by the men who made it.

Most of the copy for the extra was already in type—further descriptions of the launching sites, arrival of the ambassadors, snap interviews with them that seemed just a little emptier than such interviews usually are—paragraphs on the radio communication between the two launching sites, on the synchronizing arrangements, on the last-minute observation of the comet, in particular on the spatial deformity in its vicinity and the allowance that had to be made for it—on the feverish hours of toil before the final "All ready" could be given. I knew that word *feverish* would turn up somewhere, but what other word could a hurrying journalist use?

London also sent us notes on the careers of the Cambridge scientists accompanying their instruments. Among them I found the name of J. L. Smithson, whom I seemed to remember as an R.A.F. expert on guided missiles. Our files showed that I was right, that he had faded out of the news for some years, and had now turned up as one of the key-men of Operation Ross. Upstairs our engravers were putting the finishing touches to the blocks of photographs of the American launching sites or the less secret parts of them (none at all from Russia, but one set would do), and I reflected that we had all the material for a superb front page in the extra.

The machine in the teletype room had begun ticking again, and with no one there to tear off the sections, had produced a long scroll that now hung to the floor. Some Cardinal or other had been blessing the scientists; a herd of elephants had jumped over a cliff in Burma.

In Siberia it was day and in New Mexico it was early evening, and on both sides of the world the scribes were wearing out their pencils. . . .

At about four A.M. the teletype machine stopped.

It started again at four-fifteen with one line warning us to stand by. Henderson and Evans came into the room. The three of us stood round watching the ticker. Few indeed are the occasions when you stand waiting for the news to come in—the first results at election time, the peace announcement at the end of war, the Derby—yes, I have known more than three stand waiting for the Derby result.

A rattle at the door-handle and young Jupp pushed his face into the room. "Have they let fly at 'im yet? Fellers downstairs want to know."

"Get out!" Henderson slammed the door. Jupp had no business being at work at this hour, in any case.

At four-thirty the first flash came from Santa Fe: American rocket launched.

Henderson stepped to the telephone, rang through to the pressroom and ordered the presses to stop.

It seemed an interminable time before the ticker moved again, but actually the clock on the wall showed that no more than two minutes went by.

The next flash was date-lined from Vladivostok and was also in three words: Russian rocket launched.

Immediately afterward came the confirming message: Operation Ross launched. Both atom rockets were successfully released against the comet from New Mexico and Siberia at two-fifteen A.M. Greenwich Time.

The hum of the presses had died down. A strange stillness came into our ears. Henderson tore the last message off the ticker, marked it *Fudge*, corrected the time to conform with our South African standard, four-fifteen A.M., and sent it down the chute for the Stop Press column. Then he returned to the sub-editors' room.

My task was still at the ticker, which for the next half hour or more worked in short spurts, spitting out as it were brief sentences. There would be no continuous story for the next hour or more. It was my job to take the disjointed messages and make a coherent story of them. The first rocket was released by the Russian Ambassador at four-fifteen A.M. Half a minute later, said Vladivostok, the American Ambassador pressed the switch for the second rocket to leap from Earth. . . . Full harmony at the launching sites between British, American and Russian scientists. Russian crews insisted on being shown how the Cambridge guiding instruments worked. . . . Scientists full of admiration for skill of Cambridge men. . . . American rocket left the earth with a great roar, was immediately lost in a streak of smoke and was out of sight. . . . Similar report from Vladivostok. . . . All agree Operation Ross launched with every promise of success. . . .

As I was tearing these messages off the machine I could hear the presses start up again, miles of paper racing along carrying out into the streets the news of man's last desperate throw. Soon someone brought up a copy carrying the Stop Press announcement in bold black type. Beneath it was a line in red: Extra edition of the *Day* at six A.M. I heard that Bailey had telephoned asking Henderson to make sure that some such line was inserted. I thought I could hear him repeating one of his dictums as he did so. "It's the little things one has to keep remembering, you know."

Using scissors, paste and pencil, I compiled the main story from the cables and sent each folio off to Henderson as it was done. The later messages had more continuity and could just be tacked on to the narrative.

At five-fifteen Henderson signaled that he would take no more. Another sub-editor had turned up by now and had marked sections of type in the galley proofs for use on the front page of the Extra. The banner line had



"It's all here. But your readers won't understand."

been set: TWO ATOM ROCKETS SPEEDING AGAINST COMET. And below that: OPERATION ROSS STARTS WITH PERFECT TIMING. The last lines I had sent in were now on the machines. Soon the form would be locked up and taken for casting to the stereo-room. The extra would be out on time. But my share in it was over and my task for the moment ended. I could let the ticker rattle away. I could leave the subs to their pencilings. A native was bringing up a tray of cocoa for the early-morning staff. Taking a cup, I sat back for the first time and asked myself what had really happened.

The battle was on. That's how the situation framed itself in my mind. The battle had begun.

I felt exactly as on so many occasions during the World War when we got the first news of a new battle and the first dispatches after zero hour. For days we had known that a new attack was impending, and for days our correspondents had been preparing us in private messages not intended for publication. They were followed by silence and then the first cables after the attack. The battle was on, and we waited nervously for the issue. It would last for days, we were warned, for a week, perhaps two weeks. But we knew well enough that we should know in about forty-eight hours how the battle was really going, and that even while we were printing encouraging stories, we might be preparing the public for a setback or trying to minimize its effects.

So it was now. The battle had been joined, a battle in which there could be no retreat to any prepared positions and the result of which every man would know for himself. Moreover, there would be no days of waiting and no time to give various interpretations of the outcome. We should know everything in a matter of forty hours or so, by tomorrow evening that is, and there would be, therefore, no long-drawn suspense. That, at least, was a comforting thought.

I gulped down the thick cocoa and went out, leaving the ticker rattling away to an empty room.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE MORNING WAS HOT AND STEAMING, THE sunshine of a dazzling brilliance. It was like a hundred Saturday mornings I have known when, free of the routine of the office for one day in the week, I could plan the long hours ahead of me as my own, the long, lordly hours.

It was a sweatful morning. To escape its heat I lingered in a cool bath. Here was also one of the pleasures that could not be taken from life—to lie in the lapping water and feel it caressing the skin, as the first protoplasm lay on the edge of its tropical sea and felt itself being lulled into life—one of the pleasures at the beginning and the end.

For weeks past Philippa and I have been spending our Saturdays together. I would let the morning go by lazily. She would get away from the office at noon, and I'd be waiting for her with my car to take her away for lunch and an afternoon's tennis, or rowing, or motoring through the countryside. My thoughts turned naturally in the same direction this morning, and there seemed no reason why we should not spend the day as we had spent many a delightful Saturday before. On the contrary, there seemed to be every reason why we should enjoy life while it lasted, and drink its wine while the goblet was whole. That is what makes this calamity so different from others. If people keep their heads, life and its sweets can continue almost till the very last moment. Thank heaven one can't see the comet by day. It is Saturday. One can pretend to forget the comet, and Philippa will be expecting me.

Yesterday? That too we shall forget. I am sure Philippa will not want to remember it. This is no time for quarrels. I should have insisted on seeing her last night and having it out with her. But Mrs. Laver had such a depressing effect on me. I wondered what she would say today. I can't bear to wait in uncertainty. The telephone was at my hand; I rang up Endymion.

Philippa came to the phone, and the sound of her voice at once freed me from anxiety. It was the same warm and impulsive Philippa. How could I think she would be cruel?

"Philippa! I'll be over as usual."

"Of course, darling."

"Half-past twelve?"

"I'll be waiting."

"Lunch at the Half Moon and then—"

"Lovely, darling!"

"And then we'll see."

Prompted by her tone, I was moved at once to end the doubts of last night. "Sorry I couldn't come round yesterday evening, Phil. Held up at the office as usual."

"I was more than sorry, darling. I was bored to tears."

That was enough. It didn't mean that she didn't know I was there. It didn't mean that her father was exaggerating. But it meant that whatever it was she wanted to forget it, and so did I.

There was still an hour or more to noon. Time to get the car oiled and greased and have it polished up for the

week-end. But as things turned out there was time for none of this.

The telephone rang. "That you, Lacey?"

Bailey on the line! Does that man never get tired?

"Listen, Lacey. Sorry to worry you today, but there's something I'd like you to see to. . . . Yes, today. Can't leave it for tomorrow. Bound to have our hands full. I want you to do a Judy Lane story for Monday. We've rather let that affair get out of hand."

"But surely Clayton's on that job."

"I know he is. But I don't like the way he's been handling it. We've been getting too girlish about the kid. I want a good human story, not just mush. You know what I mean. There's a good fellow. You did first-rate work this morning, first-rate. You go round to the hospital and see the girl. Talk to her. Let's hear what she says. I'll take as much as a column about her. Something to take people's minds off things. Cut into the confounded comet if you like. See what I mean? . . . Thanks, Lacey."

There was no arguing with the man, and there was no avoiding the job. He'd be sure to ask to see it tomorrow. Luckily an hour gave me all the time I needed, time to get the car out, time to drive to the hospital, see Judy Lane for a few moments, think of a few things to make her say, and get it all over in time to be at Endymion without keeping Philippa waiting. Wouldn't do to have to tell her that a story had delayed me again.

The car was ready for me, and I was at the hospital in under fifteen minutes. Shown to Judy Lane's ward—everyone knew where Judy Lane's ward was—I had a preliminary chat with the Sister in charge. The Sister always expects it; likes to have some acknowledgment of her authority.

"Well, Sister, having Judy's bandages removed soon?"

"Tuesday."

"Not before?"

"No."

"Doesn't the doctor think that there's just a—"

"No." She gave me no chance to finish the sentence. She was ready with her answer. But then she relented slightly. "Judy's quite happy, you know."

And so you would say she was. Leaning against snow-white pillows, her head swathed in bandages, she was sitting up in bed talking to the other children in the ward. About her were all the toys and presents she had received, some still wrapped, some unwrapped, some overflowing onto neighboring beds, where they had already undergone wear and tear. But Judy didn't mind.

She talked freely in a rather high-pitched voice. Sister told her who I was. "Where's the other man from the newspaper who comes to see me every day?" she inquired.

"Taking the day off, I expect."

"That's horrid of him."

"But he asked me to come instead. Sends his love."

"Nice of him."

"Looking forward to Tuesday, Judy?"

"Of course!"

IN the instant of asking the question, I regretted it, realizing I was on dangerous ground. But her care-free answer reassured me. I also caught Sister's approving glance. The thing was to ignore Monday entirely.

"What are you most looking forward to seeing, Judy?"

"Lots of things! Everything!"

"For instance?"

She thought a moment. "There's the sky—and the trees—and the fields—my mummy, oh, yes, my mummy's face, and my own face too." She laughed. "I want to see my face!"

"I'm sure you will."

"I hope it's pretty."

"Everyone says so."

"What's pretty? I mean, what's it like?"

Sister intervened. "You'll know all about it on Tuesday, Judy. You must be patient, child."

"I want to know now," said Judy, but as though excusing herself added: "I want to know what to look forward to. What's pretty?" She turned in my direction. "You tell me. What do the clouds look like?"

I didn't know what to say. I felt embarrassed, felt I should like to be anywhere but at this bedside. She repeated the question, and no one seemed inclined to answer. They'd heard it before. But I could not evade it. In the child's voice and in the exposed part of her face there was an appeal that could not be neglected. Could it be that Judy was thinking of Monday?

"What do the clouds look like?" she asked once more.

How to give a comparison in non-visual images? My eyes fell on the pillows. "Do you feel the pillows behind you?"

She spread her hands on them. "Yes."

"Well, the clouds look—that's it—the way your pillows feel, white, cool, soft—"

A child shouted from a neighboring bed. "That's right, Judy! They are like pillows!"

She laughed. "They must be funny!"

"I dare say they are."

She gave me no time to reflect. Her voice became eager. "And what are the green fields like?"

"Green fields?" Perhaps I could really do better this time. I thought of my own feelings on seeing a field of green grass. "Green fields are—like—like a drink of cold water when you're thirsty. That's right."

She repeated the words after me slowly. "—when you're thirsty." The image held her. "Green fields must be lovely."

"They are, Judy."

"And shall I see them?"

"Of course."

Sister put a hand on me, wanting me to go. But Judy still stopped me. "What are flowers like?"

"Flowers? Flowers are like beautiful thoughts."

"They must be wonderful!"

Now Sister insisted on my going, murmuring something about exciting the child too much, rousing her imagination. . . . She was right. I made a few more commonplace remarks, asked her a few ordinary questions, and then I left.

On the way out I turned to the Sister. "You're sure it can't be before Tuesday?"

"Quite sure," she answered without looking at me.

Soon I was on my way again and recovering that sense of week-end abandon with which the day had started. The engine purred smoothly and the car flew along the road. I pulled the roof open and got the breeze blowing refreshingly over my head.

Philippa was waiting for me, wearing a light frock, a broad-brimmed hat and a silk scarf fluttering from her neck. She was beautiful, gay and charming, and she was coming down the steps before I could pull up. Next moment I was opening the door for her, she was at my side, and the world was as full as it was bright for me.

"Off we go?" I inquired.

"Off we go!" she laughed.

I hadn't even switched off the engine, and in a moment the car was swinging out of the drive. Glancing back, I caught a glimpse of Dora standing forlorn at the door. She was looking at us. I saw her long enough to feel sorry for her, long enough to feel that I should have stopped to say something to her. But Philippa was laughing; I was changing gear, and we were off.

The Half Moon is a pleasant little roadhouse several miles out of town. We had been there on occasion before, had played tennis on the courts in the grounds, gone swimming in the pool. At the edge of the country with a view of sunny fields and rural ways, it seemed

today quite the most attractive of the out-of-town resorts. The food has always been good there, and today it was at its best. The Indian waiters moved silently about us desirous only to serve. I was glad they were Indian and could speak little English. There was no need to talk to them about that one infernal subject that was in everyone's mind, no need to explain ourselves or to ask them how they were taking it.

They gave us good helpings of sole, ducklings, strawberries with thick cream, then coffee.

Impersonally attentive to us, ready to please at every turn, they probably thought of us as two wanton white folk from the city bent on pleasure no matter what happened. And I put them down as ignorant fellows without sensibility or understanding. We were both wrong of course. I remember once on board ship seeing Lascars at their afternoon prayers on the foredeck, prostrating themselves on their mats to the East. No, they could not be insensible. But I was glad there was no need to discuss things with them.

WE sat on the veranda, lingering over our coffee and gazing out toward the sun-hazed skyline. It was difficult to believe that those fields and those distant hills, which had been there since the beginning, might cease to be. Their aspect of eternity beckoned to us. We got into the car and drove on.

The winding road, the plantations, the fields of maize and millet, the orchards of peaches and apricots just ripening, the acres of watermelons, here and there a white farmhouse among blue-gums, all spoke to us of the sense of permanence which is in all nature. We came to a river running through a deep valley—to lonely pools beside poplar groves, to placid stretches of sand where the water went trickling through. Picnic parties had already arrived for the week-end as usual. The smoke of their wood fires gave a sweet tang to the air. A portable gramophone ground out a sentimental tune somewhere among the trees. Doves called to each other in the distance. We strolled along the riverside. I could have lingered beside the water all day. But Philippa was restless. She took no pleasure in these sandy walks. We walked back to the car, drove on, and taking a roundabout route because I could not bear to leave these fields and this valley, we crossed the river again where the willows grow. We stopped to look at them. Who can pass a grove of willows without looking? Then we returned to the Half Moon for tea.

There was a sound of music when we got near, dreamy, lilting music. Philippa brightened up at once. People were dancing. They had started the evening early. Philippa was in high spirits again, and I was glad we had left the river. Soon I was ordering drinks. Soon the wine was sparkling before us, and soon we were on the floor dancing to music of that frolicsome rhythm you usually get in a place like this only late in the evening. But the musicians had been given orders to "Hot it up, boys." They had been served with drinks and the drummer was "giving it a bang." We easily let ourselves be caught up in the spirit of it all. Philippa danced lightly, easily. Her hands were warm in mine. We enjoyed the music, the wine, the people about us, the smoky air of the place. The music went on. It grew dark outside. The comet must be up by now. But the interior of the Half Moon was well-curtained from the baleful glare and was lit only by the soft light of subdued lamps. Philippa danced impetuously, recklessly. People threw glances at her, laughed and danced away a little more rakish than before.

When the music stopped for the next brief interval, I led Philippa back to our table against the wall and ordered supper. Stupid of me to let her drink without taking food. We had both had more wine than I knew. When the band struck up again—glasses with dregs

standing on the piano—I kept her by me. I noticed that her dress was twisted and was lower down the breast than it should be.

The owner of the place came up, a man with well-greased hair and oily manner, washing his hands in the air. "Mr. Lacey, please! Let me order you some Poulet a l'Empereur!—delicious—magnificent. The chef is longing to make Poulet a l'Empereur for some one. He says he will not die happy otherwise. Poulet a l'Empereur for the lady, cooked in white wine with exquisite sauce."

I don't think I heard him rightly, but I said: "Yes, yes. We'll have it at once."

He was gone in an instant, but I doubt if I saw anything of his Poulet a l'Empereur, and I am sure I never tasted it. The music grew louder: the saxophones blared; the drummers beat hard. I cannot recall the rest with any clarity.

Philippa was on my knees with her arms round me and kissing me. "John! John! Don't you love me?"

"Of course, Phil!" I tried to subdue her voice by keeping my own down. "What makes you ask?"

"But don't you want me?"

"Of course I do. More than anything!"

I felt people's eyes on us. I saw waiters grinning. I looked into Philippa's face, and something there shocked me. It was flushed. Her eyes were dark. Her underlip was thick and sagging, reminding me of those sensual photographs of film actresses so blatantly designed to allure. Her face, it seemed to me, had become distorted. It was ugly and it repelled me.

"Take me, John! Take me!" she was saying.

"Keep quiet!"

She thrust herself from me. Suddenly she steadied herself, but her face was white with anger, and her eyes burned at me. "You beast! You beast! Do you think you're the only one?" She slapped me hard across the face. "Beast!"

Then she ran from the place. I followed her at once, but she was faster than I. She was already out of the door and down the steps before I could guess what she was about.

"Phil! Phil!"

There was a long line of cars parked on the grass. I saw she was making for mine, and I slackened my pace.

She slammed the door hard and switched on the lights. Before I could grasp what was happening, she had started up the engine and had the exhaust roaring.

"Philippa!"

She was already driving off, urging the car over grassy hillocks and into the road.

"Philippa! Philippa!" I knew that even if she wanted to she could not hear me. I cursed my careless habit of leaving the keys in the dashboard. "Philippa!"

All I could do was to stand and watch the red tail-light grow fainter in the dust as the car sped up the road, and then disappear in the yellow light from the sky.

I returned to the Half Moon feeling angry with myself and with Philippa. I paid my bill and waited about the place until I could get a lift into town.

The Last . . . ?

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE



AS WAS TO BE EXPECTED THE SUNDAY PAPERS this morning were full of the comet and the rockets, having new treatments of the story splashed across the front pages, and pages of radio photographs inside. There's little extra they can add to the story and they have no real subsequent news at all. They can say only that the rockets are on their way, speeding along into space under infallible guidance. That is the point

they are stressing. The Cambridge guiding instruments are using a new principle, and American scientists are lost in wonder at their ingenuity. The rockets cannot fail, they declare. Under the control of these instruments they cannot miss their rendezvous.

The Sunday papers are therefore full of hope. They urge folk to keep calm, to spend the week-end in the open, to plan their holidays as usual, it's going to be a gorgeous summer. Twenty-four hours to go before the comet comes—One B.T.C.—but the rockets strike at ten tonight, they say in effect, time for a late supper, and we'll be with you again next week—yes, with a New World supplement.

THAT'S the note they're sounding: The new world of friendship and goodwill is at hand, and it will be up to mankind to make the most of it. They're blowing the trumpets of international understanding and blowing them hard. All the prime ministers are giving interviews. All the bishops are preaching. It makes one think that there really is a new spirit moving in human affairs and a new outlook.

The general argument is sound. This great crisis has shown that the nations of the world can co-operate when their common future is at stake. Normally they quarrel and bicker, magnify the issues at dispute and harp upon their differences. But all the time there is a basis for understanding and co-operation. In the hearts of men there is the will to work together, to trust one another and see each other's point of view. If that were not so there would of course be no hope for the human race, no hope at all. But an emergency like the present shows that the will to peace and amity is still the greatest factor in human affairs. When danger threatens, knowledge, skill and resources are speedily pooled for the common good. Science is universal. Good sense and good hearts prevail to make all the people of the earth one.

That is the argument of all the leading articles and all the interviews. The moral they draw is that if East and West can work together in danger, they can work together in safety: that never again must it be said that the twain will never meet. There is no twain. East and West are one, and for the future they must work as one. All very obvious and very true, of course. I remember things like that being said before, and things like that being forgotten. Never mind. This is no time for cynicism. In these past few days mankind has been given a fright such as it has never had before, a fright which it will not easily forget. Perhaps this time things will be different. Perhaps if we do get one more chance—in ten hours' time or so—we shall know how to use it.

At the office there was little to do but wait. Our big story was to come at night. There was nothing to do now but talk over the arrangements for the evening. Coming up in the lift I had been startled to see Maddison, the editor, Maddison of all persons, walking slowly down the steps. I saw him through the glass. I wondered what he was about now and why he should have turned up just at this moment. But no one else seemed to have seen him. When I got upstairs I mentioned it to Evans de Beer. He said I must be mistaken. He had seen nothing of Maddison. I began to think I had taken somebody else for the editor. Curious, I thought.

Evans de Beer told me that Bailey was waiting to see me. Bailey was boiling over with plans for the evening, special assignments for everyone, me in particular. I was to be the king-pin of the evening's organization. At present Bailey had the works manager with him, doling out instructions for the night foreman and the printer. He would send for me when he was ready.

While waiting, I paged through the Sunday papers again. Pictures, headlines, stories all on the same subject. . . . My eye caught a paragraph about a new theory of the structure of the comet. Some Russian

scientist was now putting forward the theory that the comet's electrical field is not continuous. Possibility of gaps of some sort. Electrical field like an envelope enclosing a nucleus of atomic disintegration. Pointless stuff to be sending now, I thought. And yet there was something ominous in it, something familiar in its tone and timing. Could it be that they were already preparing us for possible failure, and buoying us up with false hopes as they used to do during the war? The electrical field is miles deep, miles and miles, says this Russian theorist. What will it matter to us what is at the center? To me this item smacks of wartime propaganda tactics, preparing us gently, just in case. . . . I felt a sinking at the heart. Then Evans de Beer's telephone rang, and I went to see Bailey.

He was sitting bolt upright at his desk, in high spirits and eager for action. His hair was untidy as usual, and his mustache was brushed down. As I sat down opposite him he shot a question at me.

"Do you know who's been here? Maddison."

"So I was right! I thought I saw him."

"Came in and went out, just like that. Quiet as a—you'd never think he was editor. Made me feel queer."

I'm sure he did. I knew at once that Bailey had been alarmed to think that Maddison had returned to rob him of the satisfaction of presiding at the climax of the great story.

"Came in, and three minutes later he was gone." There was unconcealed relief in the way he ejaculated "Gone!"

"What did he say?"

"Nothing! That's what was so extraordinary. Happened not fifteen minutes ago. He came in and sat down there, where you're sitting. Just like that. He nodded to me. Then he turned the pages of the paper. Yes, turned them over slowly. You know, it made me think he hadn't seen them before, hadn't been following the news at all. He just looked at the headlines. I don't believe he read them. Just looked. You can tell when a man's reading and when he's just looking. Turned the pages and then—yes, he did say something. That's right. He said, 'Let it come.' That's all. In a hopeless sort of way. 'Let it come.' Then he got up and walked out. . . . That's all."

"What do you make of it?"

"Plain enough. Remember the book of philosophic aphorisms he was writing? Maddison's masterpiece?"

"Yes."

"Well, it just isn't, that's all. What did I tell you? A man dreams of the day when he can get away and write his great work at ease. I've met scores like that. But it's no use, no good. If you wait for the day it never comes. And if it does, it's also no good. When you get down to it you find you can't do it. It's not in you. Masterpieces are not written at one's ease. They take hold of you, not you of them. That's what happened to Maddison. Went off to do his magnum opus and found there wasn't one. I know. I could tell by the look in his face. Not enough philosophy to fill a chapter. And so that's the end of it for him."

BAILEY went on babbling like that, talking in great satisfaction. Let it come! Chuckling over it. . . . But I was thinking of Maddison. Millington was better off, much better off. And so perhaps was Olwen. Her philosophy was simpler. Poor Maddison. But it was best to put him out of one's mind. Bailey had done so already.

"And now about tonight," he was saying. "You're going to be up at the Observatory. That's your place. I shall want a good descriptive story from you, Lacey."

"But the cables say there won't be much to see."

"I can't believe it. There'll be a good deal to see through the telescope, won't there?"

"I dare say."

"And there'll be the scene at the Observatory. You know—preparation—instruments ready—tension—time draws near—same kind of scene in every Observatory in the world. That alone will make a first-class story. And in any case, they're bound to see something of the explosion, the bust-up or whatever it is, aren't they?"

"Oh, yes."

"Very well then. As soon as you know that the rockets have hit—er—whatever it is they're going to hit, you telephone us and we bang it into the first edition. We can even post it up downstairs. There's bound to be a crowd. Get the idea?"

"Of course."

"When you've telephoned us, you can get down to writing the real story. Effect on the comet and all that. Get an interview with Conway Jones. We'll have columns of that stuff from overseas, but it's always good to have the local man talking as well. And don't forget that Conway Jones was the first man to report the comet. Let's get a bit of the credit for ourselves. And make sure of a photograph. We'll have our own, of course—view of rocket-comet clash as man-in-street saw it. But a photograph taken with the telescope will absolutely make our front page. So there you are, Lacey. Did you do that story about Judy Lane? Yes? Thanks . . . Take my advice and be there early. Something may happen before the expected time. Usually does. Anything else? No? Good. . . . Keep an eye on the cables. See you tonight then."

I was not at all sorry to know that I need not see Bailey for the rest of the day. His high-powered talk got on my nerves. It was not the first time that I had been on a big story, and I knew that the important thing on such occasions was to keep cool. The story would practically write itself. One had simply to wait for it.

Singer's eleven o'clock cup of tea appeared at my hand now, as though it had been conjured there. Singer's routine hadn't altered in the slightest during the past fortnight. When his hour came he glided up to my desk and glided away, depositing a cup of tea seemingly in the act of turning.

"Hey, Singer!" I called out to him.

He stopped at the door. "Yes, masteh?"

And then I realized I hadn't anything to say, or rather I didn't know how to say it. Did he imagine he was going to serve tea like this morning and afternoon forever? Did he think his tea-serving routine would never stop? What did he think? All I could say was, "You be here tomorrow, Singer?"

FOR once his Arabic face broke into a grin. "I dunno, masteh."

"You bring me tea tomorrow?"

Now he laughed. "I try to, masteh."

I could well believe it. Singer was like a figure between two mirrors, his image with tea on a tray reproduced endlessly in two directions. Putting my hand in my pocket, I drew out half a crown. "There you are. Christmas is coming."

He put out his tray to receive the coin. "Thank you!"

"And you be sure to bring me tea tomorrow."

"Of course, masteh. If you be here, I bring you tea."

He laughed. We both had to laugh at that.

That paragraph about the comet's structure caught my eye again. Of what use was it to know what the inside of the comet was like, and why were they telling us? Could it be that in spite of all the optimistic accounts of Operation Ross, something had gone wrong somewhere? Could it be that there was some expectation or fear of failure, and this theory of the obscure Russian was being held in reserve so that it could be developed if need arose to lessen popular disappointment? Could it be? But it was vain to speculate. Time

was rushing upon us. Tomorrow's comet would be here in about seventeen hours. In less than that, much less, we should know all that we could ever hope to know about it, certainly all that we could wish.

Irritated by her surroundings: Olwen had returned to her bad habits at the switchboard again, leaving it unattended while she gossiped, keeping us waiting for calls, even Spencer, who seemed to lack any spirit of protest—Jupp, in early on Sunday, had developed something that was a cross between a whistle and a raspberry and nothing could stop him from testing it in all corners of the building. People were ringing up from outside asking if there was further news, and Olwen kept putting them through with maddening regularity—Bailey was keeping the staff running up and down the corridor for no purpose apparent to anyone but himself. Irritated by all this I decided to return to my flat, where at least I should find quiet of a kind and where I could get down to writing these last chapters and so make sure of finishing the story tonight. There's no knowing what the comet may bring in the morning or how soon it may bring it.

BUT I did not go straight to my flat. Wheeler was hanging round, and it occurred to me to use him. He drove me to the hospital.

It was not my intention to see Judy Lane again. I spoke to the Sister in charge in her little ante-room outside the ward, and kept my voice low.

"You here again?" she said. "Haven't you got enough copy?"

"Sister, don't you think you could remove the bandages today, just for a bit? Might be worth while."

"Impossible before Tuesday, and you know it."

"It may be worth risking!"

"Doctor's orders."

"Tuesday may be too late. Tomorrow may be too late. Give the kid a chance today!"

She looked hard at me. "Listen to me, young man, and don't be foolish. Even when we start removing the bandages we'll have to do it gradually. Think we haven't thought of it? It'll take two or three days to get her eyes used to the light. If it'll be too late tomorrow, it's too late today.

"Why the hell didn't we start this earlier?"

"Would have been a better story for you, wouldn't it?"

"I wasn't thinking of that."

Unwittingly I raised my voice, and the blind girl in the ward heard and recognized it. "The man from the newspaper is there!" she called. "That nice man who knows things. Please make him come here. Do come here! There are so many things I want to ask you."

I went into the ward. "Here I am, Judy."

"I want to know what the stars look like. Please, tell me. What are the stars like?"

"The stars, Judy?"

"I'm sure you know."

"The stars are—like points of pain, Judy."

"Like points of pain! I don't think I shall like the stars."

"Oh, yes, you will, Judy. You'll like the stars. Good-by, Judy." I was staying for no more questions. "You'll like the stars. Good-by, Judy."

There was nothing more to say to Sister. Wheeler drove me back to town. On the way I saw people coming from the cathedral, people in Sunday clothes and solemn faces with Bibles under their arms—faces set in a firm serenity. I wished I had been one of them, that I could have made myself one of them. There are times when the only solace that life can offer is the solace of religion, times when the only anchor is in faith. I envied them their serenity.

They were not the only people in the street. Folk were standing about in groups, some with hands in

pockets, some with papers open, talking, wondering, talking and glancing up at the sky. There was an ice-cream cart at the corner, doing a good trade too. Why not? Why not keep cool while you can?

It is another sweltering day, a real December scorcher with the temperature somewhere over ninety. Inevitably people are blaming the comet for this—adding its heat to the heat of the sun. The Weather Office says that the comet has nothing to do with it, still about two million miles away, too far to make itself felt. But of course no one believes them. And perhaps there is a stifling intensity in the heat that we don't usually get. The sunshine is brilliant and blinding, the sky is like glass, and the glare of the comet now stretches above the horizon. The comet is still mercifully hidden from us by day, but that is its glare sure enough. Yesterday it was still faint. Today not all the sunshine in the world can wash out its blaze.

So people stand there on the street corner, and on other street corners too, I am sure, just talking, discussing it—/T. People in general are much calmer than they were a week ago, more resigned, more philosophical about it all. They like to talk about it and keep talking. Meetings in the park all day. Meetings in front of the City Hall. Big meetings of the Spiritualists and the Theosophical Society. Meetings of the Life After Death Circle. It was formed only a week ago and now has a membership of tens of thousands. They meet in the open. People can't believe that all the teeming millions of the earth can suddenly be swept away. There must be some sort of survival!

The authorities approve of these meetings. One way of keeping order they say. Critical time will be tonight. The whole police force will be on duty together with units of the Defence Force. But they know as well as we do that this will be no guarantee of order. The police are but human. Everything depends on the news.

Wheeler dropped me at my flat. On the way up I realized that many of the tenants had returned, having discovered apparently that one was as near to the comet here as a thousand miles away. There were even bottles of milk standing outside doors waiting for the occupiers to put their hands out and claim them. At other doors empty milk bottles were waiting to be collected by the milkman on his next round. Waiting—that is the word that describes it all—waiting, disbelieving, believing, hoping, waiting. . . .

In the corridor I ran into Mr. Cosway and asked after his wife. I didn't need to ask after his son. I knew quite well that he hadn't arrived. Mrs. Cosway, he said, was much better, much calmer. They had had another telegram from Henry. He showed it to me. "Still trying to come. Wait for me, it says. So thoughtful of him. Such a considerate boy. And so she's just waiting."

RADIOS keep blaring—one across the way, another from the floor below, crackling and blaring. There's interference, heavy atmospheric, so people keep them on loud to hear better. Most of the time it's music, light music that comes through a jarring curtain of noise. The studio puts records on while waiting for the next news bulletin. Not easy to work with this noise going on, and in this heat I must have the windows open. And I must work. These last chapters must be done in time.

There's a voice on the radio. The music has stopped. The voice blares louder. What is that he is saying? I switch on my own set.

"The rockets are expected to come within the appointed range of the comet just after ten p.m. The exact time of the detonation, as now calculated, should be three minutes past the hour. The results will be announced on this program, conditions permitting, as soon as received. Once more: The rockets are expected to reach their ignition point and detonate at three min-

utes past ten tonight. The results may not be known here at once, but will be announced directly they are received. Listeners are requested not to telephone the studio. Program will be interrupted to give the latest news. Our advice to listeners is: Wait for it."

CHAPTER THIRTY



THE FIRES OF SUNSET PALED BEFORE THOSE that already held the side of the heavens. Long before the sun went down the blaze we had seen on the horizon during the day grew fiercer and broader, and when the sun had set, there was the comet burning in the lower half of the sky and filling it. It was now like ten moons and spreading its haze farther over the heavens. It is a haze that gives a strange light, a haze that only partly washes out the darkness and makes shadows seem deeper. It sends a lurid effulgence over the earth, throws the outlines of buildings into darker relief, edges the trees with dull fire.

The evening remains sultry. It is now impossible to believe that no heat reaches us from the comet. Nights in this part of the world are cool and refreshing, but from the heat of the sky there is no respite now. I can see part of the comet from my window. Later I shall see more, should I want to. For the first time I find it frightening. If destruction is to come, there can be no doubt, this is the destroyer. The buildings beyond my window stand out as though I am looking at them from the wrong end. The Face in the comet acquires a new meaning when seen in part. Seen as a whole, it is impassive and indifferent. As I see it now, it is cruel and malignant. Heaven knows what I shall read into the face if I keep staring at it. So I close the window. This way, with a lamp overhead, a lamp on my table and another in the corner damping out the unearthly hue that still creeps in from without, I can even pretend that all is well with the world. And if for moments I do, it is because it is easier to write while pretending. . . .

Wheeler was waiting for me when I got to the office at eight o'clock. Out in the street there were still those groups of people, more of them, looking up at that monstrous spectacle in the skies, still talking, still wondering. Still taking it calmly, I said to myself. I felt sure then that if any cinemas were open on Sunday night, the queues would be filing in as usual. It was like that when the big battles of the World War were on. When they were at their most critical stage, people were still laughing in the cinemas, and it was considered good for them to do so. Other people, great crowds of them, are in the churches, and even outside the churches, unable to get in.

Wheeler greeted me with a grin on his face. In times of excitement or stress, Wheeler's eyes become mere pin-points, and a smile presses on his puffy face.

"What do you think of it now?" I asked him as I got into the car. Not that I thought he would have anything useful to tell me, but because one had got into the habit.

He looked upward. "Anyone who tells me we ain't for it, and says we can make any impression on *that*—"

"Never mind. . . . Anything new at the office?" I hadn't looked in after midday.

"No. Morton, the political man, came in. Not much doing for him, I should think. That literary fellow, what's-is-name, Millman, turned up with a couple of columns of book reviews for tomorrow's issue."

By now we were away up the street and putting on speed. The street lights looked pale, the lights of other cars lacked their dazzle, their beams stopping halfway. One side of the street seemed dark and leaning over; the other had a dull glow as though the brush of some great scene painter had been over it. Wheeler lowered his

head over the wheel and looked out through the side-screens. "Do you want to know what he looks like?" he said. "He looks as though he don't mean it. He don't mean it!"

"Keep your eye on the road. This light's tricky."

"I'll say it is! Look at those shadows. Just the night for telling ghost stories."

The gatekeeper at the Observatory had a good look at us before letting us in. Conway Jones and his assistants were in the telescope-room. The area of observation was both too large and too near, he explained to me, for proper observation with the great refractor in the dome. Only the smaller telescope would be in use. Its long tube pointing heavenward seemed large enough for me. Conway Jones was no more the slightly flippant, casual-looking astronomer I had mostly known till now.

"You're early," he said to me.

"I was taking no chances."

"You'll have an hour and a half to wait. If I were you I'd take your man and go and play billiards."

"I prefer to look on here."

"Very well, but keep out of the way."

Conway Jones had two assistants with him in the telescope-room. The senior was a man with a small mustache and a bluish face. The other, though junior, looked older. The three men moved about their instruments in silence. The only sound was a faint hum from the motor which kept the axis of the telescope moving to counteract the rotation of the Earth and hold the observation point in the field of view. If the men exchanged any remarks it was in subdued monosyllables. I gathered that the two assistants were a little afraid of Conway Jones, his thin lips and his cold eyes.

He was right in suggesting that I should find little to interest me before about ten o'clock. Conway Jones actually disliked visitors. People who were eager to look through his telescope and say "Ah!" were an abomination unto him. I remembered that he'd let me observe the comet only once or twice in the course of all my visits here, and that each time I had been disappointed. There was little to interest the untrained eye—a patch of variegated light, or some shimmering wisps hundreds or thousands of miles long, and that was all. The photographs were far more striking, showing as they did the comet's haze or corona, with its edges of fire and tongues of flame which in a newspaper reproduction could appear very sensational indeed.

TONIGHT there was little more to see than that. The comet was really much more impressive to the naked eye. Conway Jones had his telescope trained on the southern edge of the comet's disc, on the approximate area of collision of the two rockets, he explained to me. The visual effect of the explosion would largely be lost in the haze of the comet, and to the naked eye would appear no more than a spark lasting several seconds and dying out slowly. The telescope would show it as a great outburst of flame, he hoped. For the time being all there was to see—and for a grudging minute or so, a minute in which I felt intensely how he disliked laymen meddling in scientific work, he let me sit at the eye-piece and see it—was a thin strip of the comet's tumultuous surface inverted on the lower side of the image, and immense, flying strands of multi-colored, mostly greenish flame, streaking across. I gazed eagerly at the horrid sight, and just as I was beginning to imagine all sorts of interesting figurations in the atmosphere, I was pulled up to reality by Conway Jones' matter-of-fact voice. "Don't tell me you can see the rockets on the way, because you can't." What a contempt he has for the unscientific man!

For some time, therefore, I sat watching the astronomers quietly making their preparations, methodically, unhurriedly, as though this was a routine job they were engaged on no different from a hundred others they had

done before. I began to feel that it was unreal. This quiet and order were not natural to the moment. Reality was outside, among the nervous, waiting, unsure multitudes, not here where the movement of things was recorded on one instrument, compensated by another, and everything was made to seem calculated and certain.

I lacked the patience of these cool-blooded astronomers and soon realized there was something to be said for billiards at this moment. Conway Jones nodded to me as I went out, a nod which said plainly enough that he would send for me as soon as it was time. Wheeler was already in the billiard-room, making patterns on the table with the snooker balls. He was glad to see I had come to join him, and for the next hour or so I played an erratic game with him, watching his score mount against me. He was cool, I thought, cool as an ox. He had the same detachment as those astronomers, and I envied it in him just as I had marveled at it in them.

AT quarter to ten I could wait no longer. Conway Jones had not sent for me, but I could not run the risk of his forgetting. That would not be impossible for him. When I returned to the telescope-room, he smiled at me, and his smile took on the color of the sky. I began to see that color everywhere. The roof was wide open and turned as it was to the comet, the whole gap of sky was filled with its shape and effulgence.

Conway Jones himself was seated at the telescope. His senior assistant handed me a spyglass, showed me that section of the comet's edge at which I should look, and explained that I would see it right side up, not as they saw it, inverted. This was the only concession that Conway Jones would make to the layman in his presence. He was at this moment a high priest presiding at his ritual, waiting for the sacred manifestation. No words escaped him now. When he wanted anything from his assistants, he merely signed to them. They sat at their instruments and understood every move of his. Words would have seemed profanation. I sat on a steel chair and felt awed into silence.

A clock on the wall marked off the minutes and seconds. Now and then Conway Jones glanced up at its face. For the next few minutes the clock seemed the principal actor here, and again I was struck by the unreality of the situation. Reality was away in the town, in the office, in front of the teletype machine, in the houses in front of radios, in the streets, in the churches, where excitement, expectation, devotion would just now be mounting higher and higher. Here on a hillside, up against the sky, amid the slightly grotesque shapes of these instruments—here was no reality. A wheel revolved, a pointer flickered, a dial trembled, but the three men sat at their posts immobile.

The second-hand went on. It touched ten o'clock. I was the only one who moved uneasily in his chair. The others also moved now and then, but theirs were calculated movements that seemed no different from stillness.

The minute passed. I had my spyglass to my eye, and my eye fixed on the shimmering haze of the comet. A spark, did he say? A spark that would last several seconds? I thought I could see sparks already. I had been seeing them for some time. How was one to know? Never fear, I told myself, when the right thing happens you'll know sure enough. Another minute passed. Conway Jones' eyes flicked just once in my direction, as if telling me, one more minute and then—zero. I was grateful to him for his acknowledgment of my existence.

The seconds flew fast. My eyes began to ache. For one moment I moved the spyglass to see that the three astronomers were motionless at their instruments, and then I clapped it to my eye again. Shapes and signs seemed to dance and flicker before me. I kept staring vaguely into space. My eyes felt strained and weary. I could no longer tell what was real and unreal in my per-

plexed sight. At last I lowered the glass, looked up at the clock, and to my horror found that not one minute had passed, but three, four, five minutes, and I did not know what had happened, or if anything had happened. The three men were still fixed at their instruments. I dare not utter a word or a sound. From staring at the lights of the sky I turned now to stare at Conway Jones, all desire in me longing for him to say or do something.

Another five minutes must have gone by. At last he moved. Quite suddenly he left the telescope and took a couple of steps in my direction. At the same time his two assistants relaxed at their instruments.

"What's happened?" I demanded.

His simple answer was accompanied by that inevitable smile. "Hmm, afraid I don't know."

"But—what did you see?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? What does it mean? What's happened up there? You must have seen something. It must have happened nearly ten minutes ago."

Again that faint, exasperating smile. "That's right. But we saw nothing, nothing at all."

"But, Mr. Jones, what does it mean? Have the rockets missed? Have they misfired? Are they still on their way? Something must have happened!"

"I can't say. All I can tell you is that we've seen nothing. Later I may be able to say more, when our plates are developed. But they're still under exposure, and will be for another half-hour at least."

He was like a surgeon washing his hands after an operation. He was telling the anguished relatives that his work was done, but there was still no knowing if the patient would live.

"What am I to tell them at the office? What am I going to print?"

"I'm afraid you must decide that for yourself. I can tell you only the results of our observations, which so far are—nil." He looked at me steadily with his cold eyes and added, "You'll be hearing something from overseas, don't you think? Let me know when you do, won't you?"

That's right. At the office we should probably know by now. They'd get a flash cable at once. I said no more, left the telescope-room, shouted for Wheeler on my way out, and was soon in the car.

"Well, what's the Professor discovered?" inquired Wheeler as he took his seat.

"Damn the Professor!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE



STEP ON IT!" I TOLD WHEELER AS WE LEFT THE Observatory grounds. But there was no need to. He understood well enough the urgency of the moment.

As we drove to town we had the comet directly in front of us. In that last hour or two it had grown larger. Ten moons, did I say? Nearer twenty by now, and with a glare that crept into all the corners of the sky. I pulled the blind down to shut the sight from my eyes, but looking at Wheeler I saw that his face was under a yellowish pallor. Mine must look the same. There was no shutting out anything now.

To get to the front of the office we had to hoot our way through crowds. To my amazement they were laughing and cheering. As I got out they tried to stop me with shouts of, "Tell us! . . . Tell us all about it! . . . Yah! They're keeping it to make you buy the paper!"

I bounded up the staircase and got into Evans de Beer's office breathless. Bailey was there too. As I entered, Evans de Beer put down the telephone. I guessed that he had been trying to telephone me at the Observatory.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Bailey. "Man! Why didn't you ring us? We're holding the first edition for you."



*"No, not Man in the Comet.
That is God."*

I realized then that I had completely forgotten Bailey's instruction, but the reason was obvious. I answered with the first breath and the first words that came to my lips. "There was nothing to tell you. . . . I mean nothing definite."

"Nothing! What do you mean, nothing?"

"We saw nothing at the Observatory."

"What sort of an astronomer is Conway Jones? We saw everything here!"

"You did!" Now I understood the gayety of the people in the streets. "What did you see?"

"Well, I mean, I myself didn't see it. But Evans de Beer saw it. Didn't you, Evans?"

"Of course, I saw," rumbled the basso.

"What did you see?"

"I mean I saw—well, I saw the spark."

"That's right, and not only he!" Bailey called down the corridor. "Mrs. Ricketts! Mrs. Ricketts! She also saw it. Mrs. Ricketts!"

Mrs. Ricketts came sailing out of the library.

Bailey confronted her with forefinger pointing. "Mrs. Ricketts! You saw the rockets go off? You said so."

"Of course I saw, plain as anything. I saw two sparks!"

"There you are, Lacey. She saw two sparks! What do you say to that?"

I sat down. I was the calm one in this company. "Conway Jones saw nothing."

Mrs. Ricketts put her chin out. "You should have told Conway Jones to come here. We'd have shown him!" And with that she flounced out of the room.

Bailey closed the door on her. "I've got a bill ready for the streets. Look! ROCKETS BLAST COMET."

"You can't use it," I said. "It's not official."

"But what did Conway Jones say about it?"

"Nothing. He saw nothing and so he couldn't make a statement." Here was I on the side of the scientist and almost enjoying the layman's discomfiture. "You'll have to wait till you hear from London."

"Wait! As though we didn't know anything!"

"That's just it. We don't know. . . . Has anything come over the radio?"

Evans de Beer rang through to the radio-room, where we had a man listening to London. Presently he answered. "Can't pick up anything."

The three of us sat looking at each other, Bailey fiercely resentful of the situation. "I never thought it would be like this, just to be left in mid-air."

Then the door was pushed open, and Jupp appeared with a slip from the teletype machine in his hand. Bailey glanced at it, then held it out to me. It was a two-word flash from London: *Rockets fail.*

"Hey!" shouted Bailey down the corridor. "Stop that boy! He'll be yelling it all over the place." But it was too late. Jupp had the news alive on his lips and nothing could stop him.

"Never mind!" exclaimed Bailey. "We'll use it! At once! *Atom Rockets Fail!* That's our banner line! We'll have the edition out on the streets in half an hour."

In a moment, Bailey was a transformed man. He was no longer at a loss. He had his story, and that's all that mattered. He knew what to do with it and where he was. He rang the composing-room. He shouted for Henderson. He rang the press-room. He turned to me. "You give us a story from the Observatory. Vain watch through telescope. That's the line to take. Make it vivid! You know how!" He was off.

I REALIZED I was not the complete reporter after all. Beside Bailey's single-minded concentration, I was a fumbler and a weakling. All that mattered to him was to have a story to print, but I could not tear my mind from the story itself. This hour of watching and waiting at the Observatory, which, had it ended otherwise, I could have filled with so much tension and atmosphere, was now empty and trivial, a mere fringe dragging at the edge of the great calamity. I put it into five flat sentences and had nothing more to say. Bailey, I knew, would want the drama of it, but I could find none to give. When the drama is all around you, there is no drama. I kept running to the teletype to see if the main story from London was coming, and soon the machine began ticking it out:

Astronomer Royal states that observations from Greenwich, confirmed by reports from California and Vladivostock, establish that the two atom rockets discharged yesterday from New Mexico and Siberia against the comet, failed of their objective. There is nothing to show that the junction and explosion of the rockets, expected at three minutes past ten, did in fact take place. No effect whatever has been observed on the course or direction of the comet. It is accepted as certain that the rockets missed their target point. Latest calculated time for the entry of the comet into the Earth's atmosphere is given as 5:15 A.M.

That was definite enough. The rockets had failed. Not all the power that man had assembled could avail him. The comet would enter the Earth's atmosphere—How coldly these official messages put it, as though the Earth's atmosphere was something quite remote from us! The comet would swallow us up in about six hours.

We tore off the first section from the machine, sent it to the sub-editors. Soon the machine was ticking again:

It is now revealed that failure of the rockets was the result of an error in the discharge at the Siberian end. Rus-

sian scientists working in co-operation with Cambridge men misinterpreted one of the symbols used in the mathematical calculations. It appears that the value placed on this symbol by Russian scientists differs by a thousandth of a degree from that usually given it by Western scientists. The discrepancy was discovered soon after the rocket's release, and unremitting efforts were made for hours afterward to correct the rocket's course. But it was found impossible to compensate for the initial error, which is considered large enough to divert the rocket from its target point by as much as ten thousand miles.

So something had gone wrong! And they knew it! As I read the message I felt that I could weep. So much for international understanding! So much for the basis of co-operation and friendship. What price peace pacts now? What price cabbages?

There was another paragraph:

Now revealed that first plan had greater chance of success, but had to be abandoned when the Powers were unable to agree to the necessary arrangements.

So much for goodwill! We were congratulating ourselves that after all these years of dispute and wrangling we could work together in humanity's testing time, we could take each other by the hand. Our way of thinking was the same and we could see with each other's eyes. We had turned our backs on one another and made enemies of ourselves in the cynical belief that if real danger threatened we could always patch things up. But we can't! We can't in a moment of peril correct all the mistakes of the past. Our ways of thinking have not been the same, and we cannot make them the same in the final moment left to us for our rescue.

The rockets have failed not because of a mistake made yesterday, but because of mistakes made long ago and repeated, because of error persisted in through years of wantonness. That is why the comet comes tomorrow. That is why the world will end in the morning.

The machine is ticking again. What else can there be to say now? The tragedy is as good as ended:

It has been established that the comet's nucleus is partly gaseous, and that the electrical field is a radiating field split up by deep interstices. In these circumstances, and taking into account the fact that the temperature of the nucleus is not as high as was at first thought, scientists think it possible that some parts of the Earth may escape destruction.

Some parts of the Earth may escape. . . . What a message of hope to give to humanity! Some parts may escape, while the rest is turned to ash! Some of us may survive in a molten, smoldering and consumed world! Some of us may survive to struggle on in chaos.

Bailey's rasping voice broke into my reflections: "We ought to get Conway Jones to talk on this. After all, he can't just sit there and say there's nothing to be seen. Who does he think he is, Nelson? You get him to talk. He ought to give us a good interview. Will you try?" "Yes."

I took up the telephone, but I might have known I would not get through. It was useless trying.

Wheeler was still downstairs. The crowds had scattered. He was half-drunk, but with the stubbornness of the drunkard refused to let me drive his car, *his* car. The night air sobered him up a little. We got to the Observatory without mishap.

There were lights in the windows, but the place seemed deserted. There was no one to challenge us at the gates, and the main entrance was unlocked. I went to Conway Jones' study. The lights were on, but no one was there. I called, but there was no answer.

I went down the corridor to the little telescope-room. The door yielded as I turned the handle. At first I

thought this place too was empty. But no. The roof was open. The room was filled with a ruddy-brown glare, and Conway Jones was seated at his telescope. He moved neither eye nor muscle at my entrance. His assistants had gone, and he was quite alone. He sat peering into the instrument, his right hand grasping a pencil and jotting down notes now and then almost mechanically. I recalled one of the things he had said a fortnight ago— "We shall continue our observations until the last moment, until the last possible moment, a unique opportunity." He was so engrossed in his work, I doubted if he was aware of me, and I wondered what he would do if I spoke. But that's what I had come for. "Mr. Jones, you've heard the news?"

He looked up, not a bit startled. "Yes. Managed to get it on the radio. Did you print it?"

"Yes."

"Good man! Didn't think you'd dare." Then he turned his face again to the eye-piece.

"Mr. Jones, we want you to say something."

He waved a hand at me impatiently.

I stood there uncertain what to do. With the comet's color all about us, it was easy to think that we had been absorbed by the comet already, that Conway Jones was no longer real and I myself was unreal. But I had to make another effort to get him to talk.

"Mr. Jones, we want you to explain what went wrong." He made no sign of having heard, but I went on as though he had. "What do you think is going to happen now?"

He turned quickly again. "Now? Don't you know? It's all here. But what's the good of explaining?" He tapped the pad, on which I could now see he had jotted columns of figures, readings taken at intervals. "It's all here. But you won't understand: your readers won't understand. So what's the good? It didn't happen as they said it did! That's all! Use that if you can. It's all here, so don't waste any more of my time. Go home! Good night."

With that he turned his back on me and went on working as though unconscious of my presence. Nothing would move him to listen any more. The last I saw of him he was jotting down figures again.

Wheeler drove me back to town, but not to the office. "Drop me at my flat," I asked him.

As I got out, he leaned over toward the door. "Will you be wanting me again, Mr. Lacey?"

"No. Where are you going?"

"I'm going straight home to get into bed with my wife, and that's where I'm staying."

"Enjoy yourself. . . . So long, Wheeler."

"So long."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO



THE WORLD WAS NOW STEEPED IN THE COMET'S glare. There were none of those monstrous shadows that had made the evening hideous. The comet was spread over the zenith burning steadily and fiercely like a million lamps, and its light came all about us. I stayed in the street only long enough to take one glance upward, one look at the contours in the fire, the Man in the Comet gazing steadily at the Earth now lying prostrate in his path. I felt then that all these days I had been striving against him, battling with might and main. But now the fight was over. The comet had won.

The lift was working. I took it up to the tenth floor. On the way I began to wonder why I was going home to my empty flat, why should I be seeking loneliness in these last hours. Oh, yes, still a few more pages to write!

The lift stopped and I stepped out. The first thing that caught my eye was a light over the door of the Cos-

ways. That was not the light of the comet coming through from outside, I thought. Too white for that. The Cosways were waiting up. I wondered if after all their Henry had— The thought arrested itself half-way. It was quite impossible. There had been no planes for twenty-four hours. They were waiting up because— what else was there to do? I was going past their door when some need within me, some call for the companionship of creatures like myself stopped me. In an hour like this one could not pass a fellow human and withhold a greeting. I knocked softly at their door. Mr. Cosway opened it at once.

"Oh! Mr. Lacey."

AT ONCE I WAS SORRY for what I had done. Mr. Cosway, kind and friendly as he wanted to be, could not hide the disappointment in his voice.

"Yes, it's only me. . . . Just looked in."

"Come in, Mr. Lacey, do!" He called down the passage, "It's Mr. Lacey, my dear, Mr. Lacey."

"How is she?" I asked, as we went down the passage.

"Bearing up nicely, Mr. Lacey—wonderfully, in fact."

She was standing at a table that was laid for three. The radio was on, crackling and playing softly. I did not mention the news. It was plain that they knew.

Her lips trembled as she spoke. "Nice of you to call in, Mr. Lacey."

"I thought I'd just drop in, passing by, to see how you were."

"We haven't seen a soul for hours," said Mr. Cosway.

"You look tired," said Mrs. Cosway. "You'll have something with us, something warm?"

"Thanks awfully." I remembered I had eaten nothing since the afternoon.

Her face brightened. "We'll have it at once."

She went into the kitchen.

"Nice cocoa she's got for us," Mr. Cosway whispered to me. "The very thing."

She was back from the kitchen carrying a white jug, which she placed on a table mat. But as she uncovered it, a look of despair came over her face. "It's cold," she said. "The gas went out, and it's gone cold."

Saying that, she covered her face in her hands and burst into tears. Mr. Cosway put his arms around her. "My dear! My dear!" She would not be comforted.

I could not understand why on earth she should want to give anyone hot cocoa at this moment. But there it was. The cocoa had gone cold, and that to her meant the end of everything. She had not broken down before. She had not cried before. But to find that the jug of cocoa had gone cold spelled to her the end of all hope.

For some moments I stood awkwardly by while she sobbed in his arms. This was all wrong, I told myself. It was wrong to go out in a flood of self-pity. Mr. Cosway looked at me helplessly.

"I'd better go," I said.

He nodded and waved a hand. I closed the door softly behind me.

A few moments later I was at my own flat. To my amazement it was filled with the brown glare. I could not remember having opened the curtains, but sure enough they were drawn wide apart. I had scarcely noticed this when I realized that someone was sitting at my table. She looked up as I came in.

"Oh, John!" she said softly. "At last!"

"Dora!" I exclaimed. Yes, it was Dora Laver.

She came up to me and stood still for a moment. The light from the window burnished her hair. She stood there lonely and beautiful.

"John, may I be with you?"

The next moment I was holding her close and I was kissing her passionately and longingly.

"I couldn't stay alone," she said. "I couldn't be on my own any more. I needed someone. I must be with you."

"I'm so glad."

"I'm so glad I came."

It did not occur to either of us to ask any questions. I did not ask about Philippa, and she did not ask either. With all my soul I was grateful to Dora for having done this. It seemed inevitable to me now. Remembering how she had stood forlorn at the door of Endymion yesterday, I now saw that this was as it should be.

We did not say the usual things. We did not talk of love. Little was spoken, but everything was said. There was only one longing between us, one desire, and we knew that we should come to it.

For some time we sat in front of the window, facing the burning sky, each strengthened by the presence of the other. I no longer feared the light of the comet, and it no longer seemed terrible to me. We did not inquire what was to come. We were in our right place, and that was enough. Dora held my hand. "That I should have waited so long before coming!"

"But at last you came."

I marveled at her beauty, serene, warm, inspiring. I marveled that I had not known it before. I pressed her close to me again, and she held her face up to mine. We forgot everything else. We forgot time except that it was timeless. Eternity was in an hour. The world was in a room . . . and life had to go on.

LIFE has to go on. That is my discovery, even now, even at this fast-ebbing time. In two or three hours the world will end for us. We shall probably not be here to see the Earth's final overwhelming. But life must go on. That is the conviction within life itself.

And that is what brought Dora to me. It was not simply to be with me for an hour or two, to snatch a few moments of pleasure before the final rubbing-out. There was more in it than that. There was all womanhood, and all life's impulse. There are some who, if they read this, will give their own interpretation, and they will say that I show only that ultimately all that there is left in life, the only residue, is love, naked, physical love. They will say that Dora's coming to me, however romantically I try to present it, was no more than Wheeler's going home to his wife, no more than Tambula's going home to his woman, no more than the rolling of couples in the parks. I say it is more, and in all of these things there is more. Love is not all gross and not all sacred. It is not all body and it is not all spirit. It is all these mingling, all these in one. It is the beginning and the residue.

I know that the world will end in less than three hours, and that this race of men will end also. I know it even more surely than I knew it when I came home at midnight. I have known it for the past hour.

Dora was leaning against the side of the wide-open window, looking out. All was quiet around us. Within us too the tempest was over. For the time being all was calm and at rest.

I went to her side and we stood there together in the hot light, looking at the great sphere of the comet, which now with its suffounding flame seemed to fill the whole sky and to be consuming it. And the Man in the Comet still looked down upon us, still unseeing, unknowing.

The words of an old song came into my head, silly words, distorted. "If the Man in the Comet were a—"

"No," said Dora, "not Man in the Comet. That is God in the Comet."

Her words frightened me. I wondered how she could utter them so plainly and simply. She repeated them. "It is God in the Comet."

I looked up again in awe, wondering what I was going to see. I saw the same as before, but I knew she was right. It was God in the Comet, and we were looking straight into the face of God. For days we had been looking at God, and it was we who had been unseeing and unknowing.

"Yes," I whispered, unable to do more than whisper. "God in the Comet."

Then I was sure that the end was coming, and that this race of men was to die. I remembered Mortenson, who had seen God in the atom. Men cannot see the face of God and live. God presents Himself to us only in the moment of death, and this was our moment. The Face in the Comet all the time was the sign we could not read. But there it is. God is in the Comet, and the race of men must die.

Yet in man there is the will to live and the certain knowledge that life must go on. Somewhere it must survive. Somewhere a spark must remain. Man may die, but life must not die. In his last moment Man cries out that life must not be allowed to perish from the earth, because if it should vanish utterly, the effort of beginning again might be too great, and God Himself might find it too great a labor. And so somewhere, somehow life must and will go on. It cannot be otherwise.

That is why Tambula went home to his wife and Wheeler to his. That is how Nature works. That is why Dora came to me. Every woman thinks she may carry a Messiah, and may have the Babe of Salvation within her. And so she comes—that the seed of life may not be killed, but that somewhere it may be preserved, carried over and through the great destruction, not barren but fructified, so that there may be growth again. So that the secret of life may not be lost.

Dora stands at the window looking out at the Comet. She is waiting for me. "Don't be long," she says.

No, I shan't be long. There is not much more to say.

I think of the people I have known wrestling with themselves and destiny during these last few days. Mrs. Ricketts still cutting and clipping—still at it? I wonder. Millington still among his toys, still finding all the universe in them? And mending it? Mrs. Laver still praying for the destruction of man? Conway Jones still at his telescope, jotting down the final figures? I feel sure he is, just as I feel sure that next door the Cosways are still waiting for their son, still hoping . . . and Judy Lane is still hoping to see the beauty of the world.

DORA at the window begins praying to God, to God in the fiery Comet:

"O God, do not destroy mankind utterly. Do not take full payment for our sins. Leave somewhere a remnant from which another race may grow, from which another age of men may rise still to testify on Earth that good is greater than evil. Do not, because of our wrong-doing, destroy life entirely. I ask not for me or mine, O Lord, but for the children of men anywhere.

"If we of the white race are unworthy, do not spare us, O Lord. If we have proved cruel, arrogant, rapacious, wasteful, unmerciful, tyrannical, hard-hearted, then destroy us and uproot us, O God. Give the Earth over to another. Give the Earth to the yellow man.

"If the yellow man has proved idle, apathetic, fanatic, purblind, superstitious, malignant, demolish him too, O Lord. If he is unworthy, give the world over to another. Give the world to the brown man.

"If the brown man has proved incapable, unfeeling, unseeing, weak, confused, sensual, foolish, deny him too the dominion, O Lord. Cast his seed also into the fire of destruction. Give the earth over to another.

"Give the Earth to one among us who has yet had no chance, who has yet to prove worthy or unworthy, whose kindness may be greater than ours, whose wisdom may be deeper, whose patience may be more because his suffering has been more.

"Give the Earth over to one who will cherish life as well as breed it. Somewhere on Earth there is such a one. Keep him, O Lord. Save his blood, so that some time life may revive again from chaos, and faith may flourish again under the heavens."

Who's Who in this Issue



Richard Hanley

MY birthplace was Richmond Hill, Long Island; the year 1920. My schooldays were spent at the choir school of St. John the Divine, Peddie preparatory school, then one year at Trinity College. I barely passed my examinations.

Enlisted in the Navy January, 1940.

However, I did not become a crew member of the destroyer *Conyngham*, whose story I've written, until October of nineteen hundred and forty-one, about three months before the war's beginning. Before then I was attached to another destroyer of the same class. I remained aboard the *Conyngham* from the war's beginning until January of nineteen hundred and forty-six.

Before finding out that I had TB, I married, and the course of marriage was interrupted by a six-month stay in the naval hospital at Sampson, N. Y. Upon being adjudged safe to join the family, which now had the addition of a son, my discharge was received on December 15th, 1946, to spend another nine months loafing at home and enjoying every moment. At present I am employed at the Northern Westchester Hospital, Mt. Kisco, New York, learning hospital management.

Having written the story I am not too good a judge of it, but the one idea I had in mind was to keep heroics out of it, for I am sure that no one aboard the U.S.S. *Conyngham* ever thought of the ship as doing anything but her duty. As the story was written completely from memory, a few statements such as damage to accompanying ships may be slightly in error. The dates of action, however, are correct.

Coleman Meyer

STARTED life in California (yes, some of us were actually *born* here!), circa 1903. Odd jobs; construction worker on big steel—never quite got to be the superintendent; dirt-track racer for a few years—never got to be the champion; radio announcer for more years—never made NBC; dirt-track promoter for a while, and never got rich. But I did have a lot of fun.

Big steel was in the early part of the Flaming Twenties, when we were just learning to do amazing things to steel with the hissing flames of torches. The dirt-track portion was in the latter section of that decade, when anybody who didn't own two hundred shares of Trans-America was simply trying to retire the hard way.

The radio stint was through NRA, WPA and FDR. Anybody who would spend a dollar for radio time was regarded as a patron saint of the higher arts. I remember when I'd work a remote-control sports show, I'd have to break it off in the middle to get back to the studio with our *only* microphone! And that one, I learned later, wasn't paid for!

Then, through the Thirties, a selling job. After that, time out for a war.

Met a lot of people. Found out that he who stays out of bed long enough gets acquainted with all of the world's wacky characters.

Hobbies: racing boats and flying. Have boat with eight noisy cylinders and remarkable affinity for water—inside. Have Army surplus airplane with nine noisier cylinders and inordinate lust for high-priced gasoline.

Write for wherewithal to keep water out of boat, gasoline in airplane and wolf away from door. Water is rising; gasoline is lowering; wolf is sleeping under stove.



Lewis Sowden

ABOUT fourteen years ago a South African newspaper was the first to report the passage of a minor celestial body (subsequently named Hermes, Messenger of Gods) across the path of the Earth, missing the Earth itself by a mere five hours. Recollection of this fact, coupled with contemplation of some present facts, inspired Lewis Sowden to write the novel "Star of Doom"—a story which carries on from the July to this August issue because we thought it too good to abridge.

Lewis Sowden is a South African author, born in Manchester, England, and living for the time being in Chelsea, London. He was educated in South Africa, and took his Master of Arts degree at the University of the Witwatersrand (the university of the goldfields).


For eighteen years he worked on South African newspapers, eventually becoming assistant editor of a morning daily before resigning in order to go traveling.

He is the author of plays on the early history of Johannesburg, including "The Gold Earth;" poems, including "Reverie on a Gold Mine" and "The Life and Death of Mr. Smith," an account of a street accident in verse; a book on South Africa, "The Union of South Africa," published in New York by Doubleday in 1943; and several novels, among which are "The Man Who Was Emperor," "The King of High Street," and "Lady of Coventry," a story based on the legend of Lady Godiva, which is to be published in London this year by Robert Hale, Ltd.


BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE FOR ADVENTUROUS READING

AUGUST, 1949



WASHINGTON



THE GOLDEN SNARE
by *WILBUR S. PEACOCK*

SEAT OF THE MIGHTY
by *ARCH WHITEHOUSE*

TRUCK SHOW BULL
by *ROBERT BARBOUR JOHNSON*

STAR OF DOOM
by *LEWIS SOWDEN*

DARK INTERLUDE
by *RUTHERFORD MONTGOMERY*