December

BLUE BOOK

Magazine

Now 15c

Painted by J. C. Chenoweth

AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE

By EDWIN BALMER and PHILIP WYLIE

A Red Wolf of Arabia story

The Spanish Prisoner, *by the author of* Beau Geste

Prize Stories of Real Experience

DECEMBER 1933 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 58 No. 2

Good Writing

"KNOWLEDGE," remarked Horace, "is the foundation and source of all good writing."

The old Roman said something—something that still holds true: the best stories, as a rule, are written by the men who know the most.

William Makin, for instance, who comes back to you this month with another of his fascinating Red Wolf of Arabia stories, has been and is a great traveler; and his first books were colorful travel-records like "Red Sea Nights" and "South of Suez." So when he tells a story of adventure in far Arabia or the blazing Sahara or the dust-swept Red Sea, he is able to picture his scenes vividly because he himself has seen them, and can make his picturesque characters real and living because they are real and living to him. And when you turn to his "Jerusalem Express" on another page of this issue, he takes you with him on a weird journey he himself has experienced, and enables you to witness a terrific drama among people such as he himself knows.

Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie, of course, have not journeyed to Bronson Beta. But they are both men of wide knowledge; they have consulted the foremost scientists of our day for their data; and they have been at great pains to check up the facts and figures they have used. Their cosmic collision is possible enough, astronomically speaking; granting them, then, the one remote possibility of their Space Ship, the rest of their story is based upon the best knowledge obtainable.

For another example, Percival Christopher Wren, whose stories like "Beau Geste," "Beau Sabreur" and "Valiant Dust" have won him world-wide fame, and whose Foreign Legion series in this magazine has evoked immediate enthusiasm: He has himself served in the Foreign Legion as well as in the British army. He has himself known Spanish Maine, and McSnorrt and Tant de Soif and all the rest of that valiant, pathetic, admirable and sorry company. He is able to make them real in your mind because they live vivid in his own.

So on through the magazine: the stories are good, we believe, primarily because they are based on knowledge. And the stories of real experience likewise, though they are mostly contributed by people with little or no technical training in the fine art of writing, are attractive because they deal with events through which the writer has himself lived.

—*The Editor*

The Soldier's Scrapbook

III—Dice of Destiny

By Captain R. E. Dupuy

IT is ten-thirty-five A.M., August 4, 1914. The British battle cruisers *Indomitable* and *Indefatigable,* commanded by Captain Kennedy in the former, are proceeding at a twenty-knot clip through the Mediterranean, bound for Gibraltar. France and Germany are at war. England is hesitating. Coming on, a bone in her teeth as she tears through the glassy sea, a big warship appears, her silhouette unmistakable—the battle cruiser *Goeben,* Imperial German Navy, Admiral Souchon commanding. Behind the *Goeben* is a smaller vessel, the light cruiser *Breslau.* The Germans are bound east, the British west. The British ships make a wide counter-march and follow the Germans. But the *Goeben* is making twenty-five knots, while the Britishers have difficulty in logging twenty-three. The *Indomitable,* needing overhauling, soon drops astern. *Indefatigable* hangs on, steadily losing ground, until at four P.M. she loses sight of the quarry.

Captain Kennedy had on August 2 received this Admiralty warning:

> To Commanders-in-chief, all stations. Today, August 2, at 2:20 the following note was handed to the French and German Ambassadors (Begins). The British Government would not allow the passage of German ships through the English Channel or the North Sea to attack the coasts or shipping of France (Ends). Be prepared to meet surprise attacks.

Kennedy further knew that the *Goeben* and *Breslau* had just finished bombarding the French port of Philippeville in Algeria and were now fleeing from the combined French Mediterranean fleet. He knew that France was preparing to ship troops across the Mediterranean and that this shipment would be endangered by the presence of the *Goeben* and *Breslau.*

What should Kennedy have done under these circumstances? He had, as we now know, in his hands that sunny

(Continued on page 4)

BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

DECEMBER, 1933 VOL. 58, NO. 2

A Remarkable Novel

Fascinating Short Stories

A Deeply Interesting Novelette

Prize Stories of Real Experience

Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events.

THE McCALL COMPANY,
William B. Warner, *President and Treasurer*
John C. Sterling, *Vice-President*
Francis Hutter, *Secretary*

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Stories of

Real Experience

A PRIZE OFFER

THE truth that is stranger than fiction; the hour so crowded with excitement that it shines bright before all others in memory—these are tremendously interesting to everyone. For this reason The Blue Book Magazine prints each month in our Real Experience Department (beginning on Page 148 of this issue) a group of true stories contributed by our readers. And for this department we are glad to receive true stories of real experience, told in about 2,000 words; and for each of the five best of these we will pay fifty dollars.

In theme the stories may deal with adventure, mystery, sport, humor,—especially humor!—war or business. Sex is barred. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. 'Preferably but not necessarily they should be typewritten, and should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope for use in case the story is unavailable.

A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for while we handle manuscripts with great care, we cannot accept responsibility for their return. As this is a monthly contest, from one to two months may elapse before you receive a report on your story.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, Circulation, Etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912

of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE published monthly at Dayton, Ohio, for October 1st, 1933.
State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Louis F. Boller, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Assistant Treasurer of The McCall Company, publisher of The Blue Book Magazine, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:
Publisher: The McCall Company, 230 Park Avenue, New York City. Editor: Donald Kennicott, 230 Park Avenue, New York City. Managing Editor: None. Business Managers: None.

2. That the owners are: The New Publishing Company, Wilmington, Delaware, McCall Corporation, Wilmington, Delaware. (Owner of The New Publishing Co. stock.) The following are the names and addresses of stockholders holding 1 per cent or more of the capital stock of McCall Corporation:

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3. That the known bond holders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

Louis F. Boller, Assistant Treasurer.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 15th day of September 1933. Joseph F. Fox, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 136, New York County Reg. No. 4F298. My commission expires March 30, 1934.

Next Month!

"Wildcat"

A complete novel of the West today

By **ROLLIN BROWN**

(Continued from page 1)

morning of August 4, 1914, the power to prevent an active Turko-German alliance. Following this line of conjecture, had he sunk the *Goeben* there would have been no Gallipoli holocaust, no Mesopotamian campaign, no Palestine campaign. Overawed by Allied superiority Turkey would have opened the Dardanelles to troopships and supply vessels. Russia would have been supplied from the Black Sea. And the Central Powers would have gone down to decisive defeat two years earlier. There would have been no A. E. F.!

At seven P.M. Kennedy got this radio:

> To All Ships, August 4, 2:50 P.M. The British ultimatum to Germany will expire at midnight, Greenwich Mean Time, August 4. No act of war should be committed before that hour, at which time the telegram to commence hostilities against Germany will be dispatched from the Admiralty. Special addition to Mediterranean, *Indomitable* and *Indefatigable.*

Goeben and *Breslau* had disappeared. With war declared at midnight August 4, it became imperative for both French and British naval authorities to know their whereabouts.

The dice of destiny rattle once more. On board a merchantman lying in the harbor of Messina on August 5 was a British midshipman, coming home on sick leave. This youngster took a keen look at something in the harbor and filed the following message to Malta:

> Two ships all-same likee *Lion* and *Weymouth* taking black diamonds here.

Admiral Milne's intelligence officer, studying this innocent dispatch, read between the lines that a battle cruiser like the *Lion* and a light cruiser like the *Weymouth* were coaling at Messina. The *Goeben* was the only battle cruiser not British in the Mediterranean. Ergo, the lost was found.

At six P.M., August 6, their twenty-four hours of neutral privilege expiring, the *Goeben* and *Breslau* cleared for action, steamed from Messina—and turned south! North, east and west, lurked Allied ships; here, the only sentinel was the little cruiser *Gloucester.* But the *Gloucester* had an Irishman for commander—Captain W. A. Howard Kelly, who when he sighted the Germans at seven P.M. felt that his big day had arrived.

Breslau altered course to pinch *Gloucester* against the land. Kelly slowed down; *Breslau* crossed his bows at four thousand yards. But they were in Italian territorial waters, so no shots were fired. *Breslau* disappeared, scouting for *Goeben* to the southeastward, and *Gloucester* carried on in pursuit of the bigger vessel.

At five-thirty the next morning *Gloucester* was still doggedly trailing the Germans. Admiral Milne, apprehensive lest the little ship be destroyed, radioed Kelly to give up the chase. Kelly was deaf—like all Irishmen looking for a fight. Noon found *Goeben*, with *Breslau*, rejoined, making at a twenty-knot clip for the Greek archipelago. And right behind was *Gloucester*—a terrier chasing an elephant.

The *Breslau* began to slow down, and the two ships clashed. Admiral Souchon turned *Goeben*, to crush this annoying opponent. Kelly, knowing that one salvo from *Goeben* would tear his ship apart, felt the time had come to obey orders. He hauled off, with one gun out of action and several men killed. *Breslau*, a shot through her hull, was glad to break away. Souchon gathered up his lighter consort and the Germans continued their flight.

But the *Gloucester*, keeping discreetly out of range, kept following the Germans, broadcasting their whereabouts, until at 4:40 P.M. with Cape Matapan abreast and his bunkers almost empty, Kelly received peremptory instruction from Admiral Milne to halt. *Goeben* and *Breslau* arrived without further molestation in the Dardanelles. The rest is history.

Illustrated by
John F. Clymer

Just before they reached the restaurant-car the young Arab in the hooded burnous passed them. It seemed to the man who was accompanying the Jewess that a brown hand stretched out for a moment from the burnous and caught hers.

The Jerusalem Express

A tensely dramatic adventure of the Anglo-American Intelligence officer known to the natives as the Red Wolf of Arabia.

By WILLIAM J. MAKIN

A BELL clanged loudly in the darkness of the desert.

"Take your seats, gentlemen, please. For Jerusalem. Yes, sair. Your seats, gentlemen, if you please,"

The uniformed man with the mixed blood of four nationalities in him—part English, Arab, Ethiopian and low-caste Indian—pleaded desperately in six languages with the passengers who seemed loath to board the train for Jerusalem. He was a ticket-collector. He moaned in despair as he realized from one preliminary glimpse of his cosmopolitan crew that he would spend most of the night haggling with Arabs and Syrians and Egyptians, all of whom would do their best to cheat him of the legitimate fare.

"Imshi, you misbegotten child of doubtful parents!"

He fell back upon Arabic, the most eloquent of all his six languages, and bestowed an unofficial kick upon one lingering passenger.

The Arab youth, in white burnous, let a brown hand steal toward the curved knife at his belt. Then thinking better of it, he pulled the hood of the burnous over his head and slid away into the darkness.

It wanted twenty minutes to midnight.

A sizzling arc lamp showed a gray sea which was really the desert beyond. A hissing, oil-smeared monster in the darkness was the locomotive. This strip of sand-strewn planking was the station El Kantara East from which the train bound for Jerusalem started at a quarter to twelve every night. The Suez Canal, a broad black ribbon in the gray sand, gurgled softly a few yards away.

"For Jerusalem? By all the jinn of Arabia, I have told you so a thousand times!"

Once again the ticket-collector lost his temper in a spate of Arabic. In the flickering gleam of oil lamps, groups of shrouded figures trailed past him to the train. With dirty white robes swathing their brown bodies they resembled at this time of night a procession of ghouls.

A match flared in the darkness. A man was lighting a cigarette. For a second there was revealed a thin, keen face which regarded the scene about him with quiet enjoyment. Then a flip of his fingers and the match was trailing into the darkness.

"Oh, and I was just going to ask you for a light!"

The feminine voice startled him. He swung round. Dimly he discerned a slim white figure standing near to him. A cigarette, unlighted, was between her lips.

"So sorry! Allow me."

He struck another match. As the flame flared at the touch of her cigarette he saw a face of cool, white beauty such as always catches the breath, east of Suez. The whiteness of her skin was almost unearthly. But the dark somber eyes, the full red lips and the nose told her nationality at once: a Jewess.

A beautiful woman. As the match was tossed aside and a breath of smoke masked her face, the man was left with the impression that some modern Sheba was traveling to dazzle a Solomon in the ancient city. For in the brief glimpse he had of her he sensed that she was garbed and scented in the most expensive Rue de la Paix manner.

"YOU are going to Jerusalem?" he asked indolently, and she nodded.

"Yes. When do we start?"

"In three minutes."

"Then I must find my compartment. I booked a sleeping-berth."

"It ees all right, quite O. K., lady," suddenly burst in the harassed voice of the ticket-collector. "I 'ave seen your baggage placed aboard myself. And the compartment, it ees all to yourself."

She laughed, a low attractive laugh with a passionate virility in it. She gave a few piasters to the ticket-collector which he accepted with magnificent dignity. Then he turned away to harry a little group of Syrians who seemed helplessly lost.

"As your baggage and compartment are settled, may I suggest a drink in the restaurant-car?" said the man with the thin keen face.

She flashed a smile at him.

"I should love it."

THEY walked a few yards along the platform. Just before they reached the restaurant-car the young Arab in the hooded burnous passed them. It seemed to the man who was accompanying the Jewess that a brown hand stretched out for a moment from the burnous and caught hers. But the dim light might have deceived him. Then the young Arab glided silently toward the rear of the train.

The Jewess climbed aboard, revealing high-heeled shoes of an expensive character and shapely ankles that justified them. The man followed her, and they seated themselves at one of the tables.

Only then did the man remove his soft felt hat. He revealed a carefully brushed head of bright red hair. The Jewess settled herself with a contented sigh and placing her elbows on the table, stared into his gray quizzical eyes.

"I've been wanting to meet you for ever so long a time—Paul Rodgers, Red Wolf of Arabia!" she murmured.

The man betrayed no surprise. He smiled imperturbably.

"I'm charmed," he replied.

And then a series of shrill, hysterical whistles sounded. There was a shouting and babble of voices. The locomotive spurted with steam. The dim oil lamps began to flicker past and, in a few seconds, were replaced by the desert. The Jerusalem Express had started on its nightly run.

"Then let us say, to our better acquaintance!" smiled Rodgers, raising his glass.

She smiled back eagerly at him.

"Till this moment," she said, "you have always been a legend to me. I had heard of your adventures—who has not?—of your strange wanderings and your equally strange disguises. Is it true that you were once a leader of Arab brigands?"

"Do not believe any story you hear of me," said the Intelligence officer, lighting another cigarette.

"Oh, but why?" Her rich red lips pouted delightfully.

"Because most of them are untrue, some are quite improbable, and, of course, all are wildly exaggerated."

"Well," she said, her beautiful face provocatively near to him, "you have at least proved this evening that one of the stories I heard about you is untrue."

"And that is?"

"That you had left the desert and gone back to civilization in Europe."

He laughed, and drained his glass.

"It was partly true. I have been in Europe. But let us say that I have now left civilization and am going back to the desert."

Instinctively his eyes sought the window where the black emptiness beyond told of the Arabian Desert. In his unflinching gray eyes was the suspiciously sentimental gleam of a man who is nearing his real home.

"So you didn't like the lands that lie beyond the desert?" she asked.

Still in a reverie, Paul Rodgers shook his head.

"I heard good music, but also bad," he murmured. "I couldn't understand what was wrong with me until, one day in Berlin, I heard a very modern piece of cacophony by a very modern composer. It was a racketing, tin-can symphony. Then I suddenly realized it was right. Modern civilization is a racketing, tin-can affair. That composer had captured its robot soul. And I discovered at the same time that I didn't belong. I was as alien as an Arab. I was homesick for the desert. I went and hired a room and a piano. I played Chopin for four hours on end just to myself. It was no use. I had to come back."

"What a strange orgy," she said, "playing Chopin for four hours."

"Yes," he nodded. "But it was my own funeral march. I died that day in Berlin and my soul has carried me back here. This is my first night in the desert."

"And still a civilized one," she murmured, looking round at the comfortable restaurant-car with its electric lights and shining tables. "May I have another drink?"

"I was about to suggest one," he said. He nodded to the waiter, and then turned

toward her. She faced the keen gaze of his gray eyes smilingly.

"Incidentally," he went on, "I'm curious about one thing."

"Yes?"

"Who told you I was Paul Rodgers?"

She was startled for a moment.

"Oh, an Arab," she faltered.

He waited.

Her tone gained confidence.

"An Arab porter who placed my baggage aboard the ferry across the canal pointed you out."

"I see. I'm sorry about that."

"Sorry! Why?"

"Because otherwise we might have been introduced and I should know your name."

She laughed softly at this.

"My name is Kober—Judith Kober. You may have heard of my father, Sholom Kober."

"Who has not?" replied Rodgers.

In the Near East, the name of Sholom Kober was one to conjure with. A great Jewish commercial magnate, he lived in Cairo in the style of a pasha while his ramifications extended from the Mediterranean to Bagdad. It was admitted openly that Sholom Kober and his millions had done more for the Zionist movement in Palestine than any other Jew. He believed passionately in the destiny of the Jewish race, and perhaps because of that hated the Arabs with an unreasoning hereditary impulse which caused him to spurn all those with whom he came in contact.

"Yes, my father is a queer mixture of likes and dislikes," nodded the Jewess, as though sensing the thoughts that flashed through the mind of the Intelligence officer. For the moment her expression seemed troubled. She turned her face toward the desert that was flashing past. "But he does believe that the Jews can transform Palestine."

Rodgers nodded.

"And so you go to Jerusalem at the hottest and most uncomfortable time of the year," he said slowly.

"There is always work for Jews in Jerusalem," she replied simply.

But as she said it she shivered slightly despite the hot wind that came in from the desert. Then, abruptly, she rose.

"I think I'll go along to my compartment now," she said. She gave a final glance at the window. "I hate this desert which you seem to like."

Rodgers shrugged his shoulders.

"The Arabs call this the Country of Mirages—Fata Morgana," he said. "I think I shall turn in, too."

They passed out of the dining-car, crossed the swaying steel plates through which came pellets of sand whipped by the passing of the train, and entered the sleeping-car. The coaches swayed and jolted over a narrow track. The Jewess stumbled and would have fallen had not Rodgers caught her arm. For a moment her cool arm rested in his hand.

"Thank you," she smiled. They had reached her compartment. "I suppose we shall meet again in the morning."

"Sure to," smiled Rodgers in return. "For I also have work to do in Jerusalem."

"Good night, then."

"Good night."

He was left alone in the corridor of the sleeping-car.

"A queer woman," he mused, lighting another cigarette, and swaying slightly as he stood in the corridor. "Very sure of herself. Yet she managed that lie about the Arab servant very badly."

Then he stiffened to attention. Cautiously, ever so cautiously, the door of the next compartment was sliding open. A brown hand appeared. It was followed by a brown, wrinkled and bearded face surmounted with the Arab headdress. As soon as the peering face caught sight of Rodgers, it drew away and quickly the door slid to again. Yet in the brief glimpse he had, the Intelligence officer saw terror stamped on the face. The old Arab was haunted by some fear.

RODGERS stepped forward. But only a blank wooden door and windows with blinds carefully drawn confronted him. He heard a slight click within as the latch was let down.

"Queer!" he muttered once again, and passed on to his own sleeping-compartment, which was the next one along the corridor. There he found that his bed was already prepared for the night.

He considered it for a moment, and sat down. He did not feel sleepy. This was his return to the desert, and a strange excitement possessed this queer adventurer whom the natives called the Red Wolf of Arabia. He flicked up the blind and stared out of the window at the empty, sand-strewn expanse through which the

train was churning a rapid progress. But the darkness revealed nothing. A medley of stars glittered in the sky and a few pellets of sand were thrown against his face.

The kiss of the desert! To the Red Wolf it was more alluring than any woman. The call had never left him, even in the closest confines of the cities. And now he was back. The Jerusalem Express was thundering along a desert route that had known history. Moses had led the children of Israel along this path. Not many years ago another great general, Allenby, had led a victorious British army.

THE road to Jerusalem! The words of the old Hebrew prophet came to Rodgers: "And in Jerusalem shall ye be comforted." He gave a little sigh of contentment and pressed the button of the electric bell. . . .

"Oh, yes sair, a very strange sheik."

The uniformed ticket-collector of four nationalities swayed in the compartment and gossiped to Rodgers of the old Arab whom only a thin partition of wood divided from them.

"What is his tribe?" asked Rodgers, lapsing into Arabic.

The ticket-collector responded loquaciously in the same language.

"I would say he was a hillman, one of the Druses."

One of the Druses! Rodgers knew that fighting tribe well. So did the authorities in Palestine, and the French in Syria. They were Arabs who refused to be conquered. Even tanks and machine-guns had failed to drive them from their mountain fastnesses. They hated the white men, whom they regarded as interlopers. Above all, they hated the Jews whom they regarded as their enemies from the historic past.

"You have seen him before?"

"Often," replied the ticket-collector. "He comes and goes between Cairo and Jerusalem. He has business, much business in Jerusalem."

Apparently there were many aboard the Jerusalem Express who had business in the holiest of holy cities.

"A wealthy man, then," suggested the Intelligence officer, "of many camels and herds?"

"It would seem so," was the reply. "For always he travels first-class. And he must be a holy sheik, one descended from Mahomet, the greatest of all—*Allah O Akbar*—for he insists and pays for the compartment to himself."

Paul Rodgers shook his head.

"Holy—but unlike an Arab," he commented. "And is the Koran his only companion of voyage?"

"That, and a tin box, tied with rope, and a phonograph."

"A phonograph!"

The ticket-collector nodded.

"Often I hear him on the journey, playing the phonograph. He has many sad songs of the desert. Arab songs."

Red Rodgers yawned. He had begun to lose interest in the train-traveling Sheik. The ticket-collector took the hint and edged toward the door.

"Well, I go, sair," he said, lapsing once again into English. "I must fight that scum of the third-class who would cheat their way even into Paradise. Perhaps tomorrow morning when at half-past six we change at Lydda, I will have the honor of introducing you to the Sheik Sonieda."

"Maybe," nodded Rodgers.

"For the Jewish lady, Miss Kober, is also interested in the Sheik Sonieda, and has asked that she might meet him in the morning . . . . Good night, sair!"

And the door of the compartment slid to, leaving the Red Wolf alone. . . . He shrugged his shoulders and prepared himself for a few hours of sleep.

An hour went by, and the train rushed along the track that led through the desert known as the Country of Mirages. It must have been three o'clock in the morning when the Red Wolf stirred. His head jerked itself from the pillow in an attitude of listening.

A strange sound, or series of sounds came from the next compartment. Above the rumble of the train he could hear it. The shrill singing of an Arab woman. The musical sense of Paul Rodgers began to follow its queer leveling rhythm in quarter-tones. It was a song of love and passion in the desert.

A MOMENT'S silence; then the same song again. Of course—the phonograph. Rodgers glanced at his watch and muttered a curse upon this Sheik who amused himself by playing the phonograph in the Jerusalem Express at three o'clock in the morning.

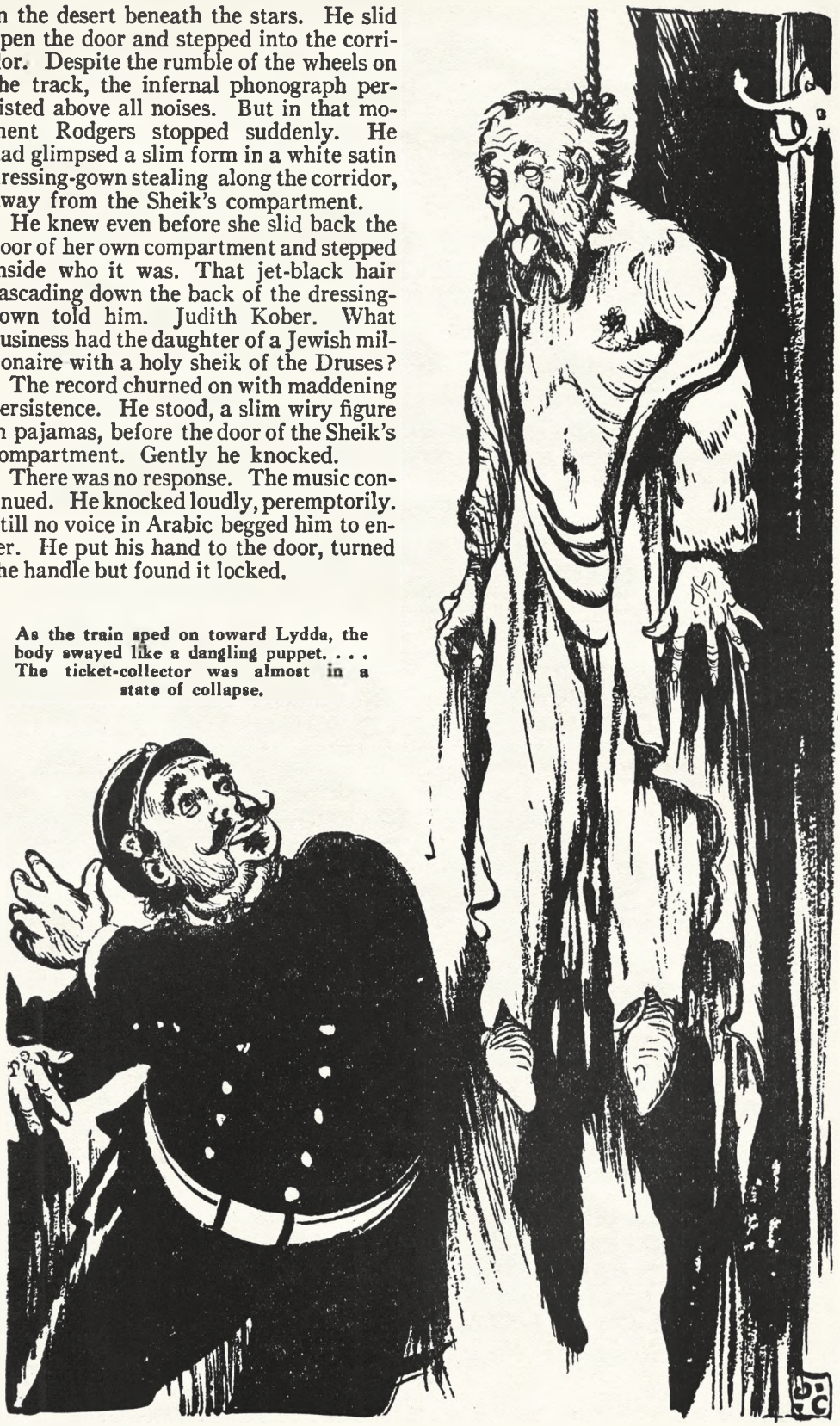
Fifteen minutes of it. Cursing again, Rodgers slid out of his bunk. He was determined to visit the musically inclined Sheik and insist upon silence for the remainder of the night. He flicked on the electric light. The windows merely reflected his own compartment. A strange, unreal interior for a man used to sleeping

in the desert beneath the stars. He slid open the door and stepped into the corridor. Despite the rumble of the wheels on the track, the infernal phonograph persisted above all noises. But in that moment Rodgers stopped suddenly. He had glimpsed a slim form in a white satin dressing-gown stealing along the corridor, away from the Sheik's compartment.

He knew even before she slid back the door of her own compartment and stepped inside who it was. That jet-black hair cascading down the back of the dressing-gown told him. Judith Kober. What business had the daughter of a Jewish millionaire with a holy sheik of the Druses?

The record churned on with maddening persistence. He stood, a slim wiry figure in pajamas, before the door of the Sheik's compartment. Gently he knocked.

There was no response. The music continued. He knocked loudly, peremptorily. Still no voice in Arabic begged him to enter. He put his hand to the door, turned the handle but found it locked.



As the train sped on toward Lydda, the body swayed like a dangling puppet. . . . The ticket-collector was almost in a state of collapse.

Even as he was about to knock for the third time, the music ceased. Or rather, there was a slurring noise that was lost in the rumble of the train. Rodgers stood there for a minute, waiting to hear the record begin again. But it did not. The Sheik had apparently sated himself on that song for the night.

Slowly the Red Wolf paced the corridor and regained his compartment. Now that the phonograph had ceased, the silence seemed to be a queer hiatus in that symphonic progress of the Jerusalem Express. But as he closed his door and slipped into his bunk, his mind was pondering that queer vision of a Jewish girl in a white satin dressing-gown, stealing away from the Sheik's compartment.

The gray eyes had narrowed. The jaw was set. It was in the attitude of thought that he at last fell into slumber.

AT six o'clock next morning, when the Jerusalem Express, steaming through a countryside of orange plantations, was approaching the junction at Lydda, a scared and hysterical ticket-collector burst in upon Paul Rodgers.

"Sair! The Sheik Sonieda!"

"Yes?"

Rodgers had completed his toilet and was smoothing that rebellious red hair.

"The Sheik is dead. He is hanging. Horrible—"

With a few swift strides Red Rodgers was in the corridor and standing in the doorway of the next compartment. It was a ghastly spectacle upon which he narrowed his keen eyes.

The Sheik Sonieda, an elderly bearded man, dangled with a rope at his neck from the baggage-rack near the roof. As the train sped on toward Lydda and the engine hooted warningly, the body swayed like a dangling puppet in the progress. Blackened by strangulation, the face was not nice to look upon. The sandaled feet pointed down toward the floor.

Rodgers heard gasping noises behind him; the ticket-collector was almost in a state of collapse. But already Rodgers had produced a sharp knife, climbed a bunk, and cut the rope. His strong brown hand lowered the body to the floor.

"Quick! Get me some water!" he commanded the ticket-collector.

With a sob of relief at being ordered to do something, the ticket-collector padded along the corridor. He did not hear Paul Rodgers slide the door to and ignore the body for a swift examination of the compartment.

The phonograph was there, the needle buried in the record. It had played itself to a finish. It must have been playing while the Sheik was gasping his life away at the end of the rope. Had he played that song of desert love in a last sentimentality before taking his life? Had he, while the phonograph churned its sad music, looped the rope, inserted his powerful neck and launched himself to death?

There was the tin box of which the ticket-collector had spoken, and the rope of course had been used—

Rodgers' jaw squared. Instinctively his hand stroked the back of his fiery crop. Something was wrong. When the ticket-collector returned with a glass of water in his hand, the Intelligence officer was bending over the body of the Sheik.

"No use," he said briefly. "He's been dead some hours."

"It is suicide, sair?"

Rodgers hesitated.

"It seems so," he said then. "You will advise the station police as soon as the train arrives at Lydda."

"Certainly, sair."

Instinctively the ticket-collector accepted the commands of this slim figure whose brown face and gray eyes were concentrated in thought.

"Keep the door closed, and don't let anyone in until you advise the police."

"Yes sair."

Rodgers stopped in the doorway.

"Was the door of this compartment locked when you came to call the Sheik this morning?"

"Yes sair. I had to use my key."

"I see."

And with an unconcerned nod Rodgers strolled away.

HE walked along the corridor, passing the next compartment. The door was open, and the Jewess, Judith Kober, was seated fully dressed on her bunk. She looked up, and he stopped. The face of cool, white beauty which he had admired in that chance meeting of the night was now drawn and haggard. The dark eyes had a gleam of fear in them.

"Is—is anything the matter?" she asked; her vibrant voice seemed hushed.

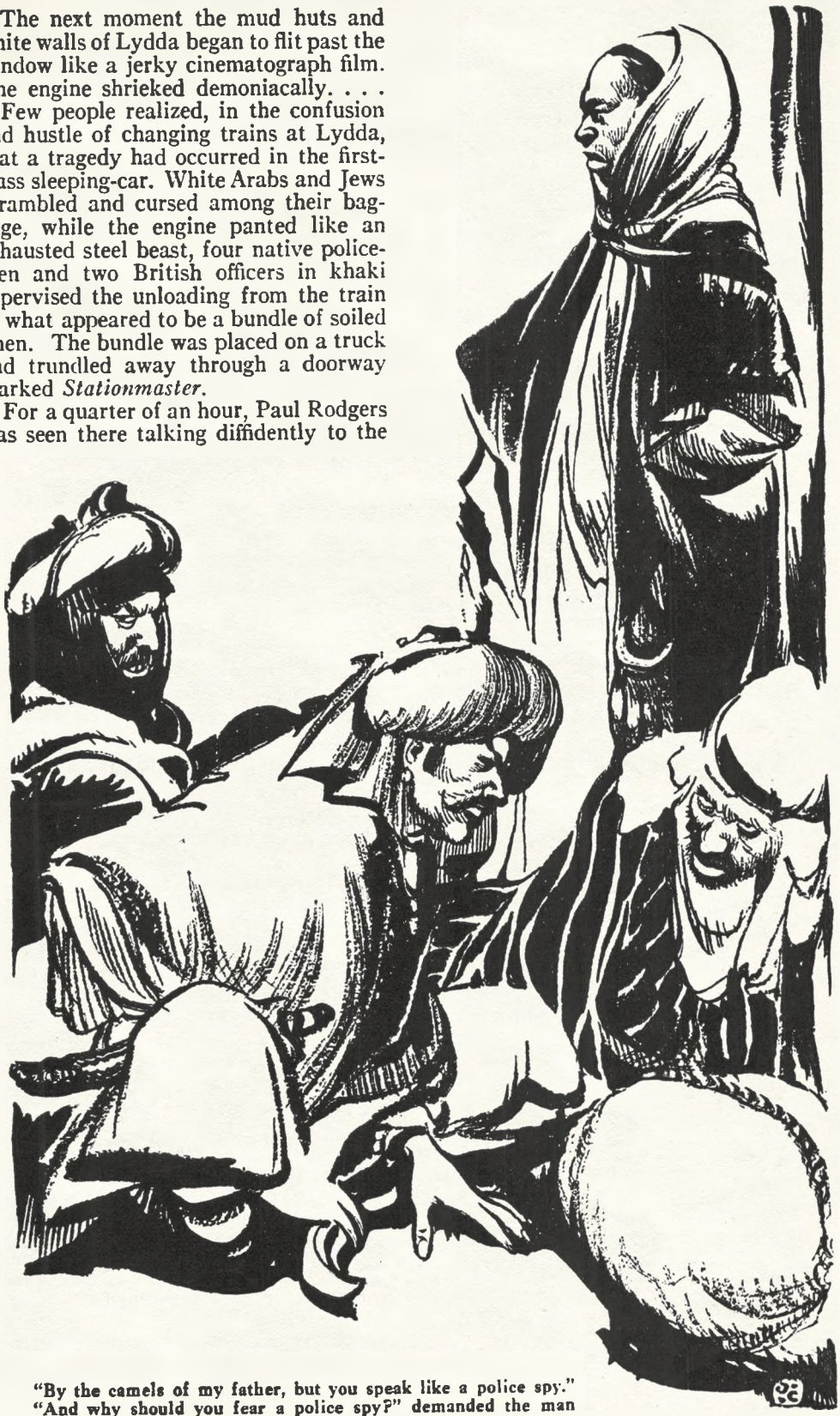
"Anything the matter!" His eyebrows were raised in surprise. "Why should there be? We shall be at Lydda in five minutes. We change there for Jerusalem."

There was all the nostalgia of centuries of exile in her sigh. When she looked up again, Rodgers had disappeared.

The next moment the mud huts and white walls of Lydda began to flit past the window like a jerky cinematograph film. The engine shrieked demoniacally. . . .

Few people realized, in the confusion and hustle of changing trains at Lydda, that a tragedy had occurred in the first-class sleeping-car. White Arabs and Jews scrambled and cursed among their baggage, while the engine panted like an exhausted steel beast, four native policemen and two British officers in khaki supervised the unloading from the train of what appeared to be a bundle of soiled linen. The bundle was placed on a truck and trundled away through a doorway marked *Stationmaster*.

For a quarter of an hour, Paul Rodgers was seen there talking diffidently to the



"By the camels of my father, but you speak like a police spy." "And why should you fear a police spy?" demanded the man in the blue burnous.

two British officers who seemed to regard him with considerable respect. He was seen there by Judith Kober, who stood apparently waiting for Rodgers to take pity on her helplessness.

But he seemed to have forgotten her. It was the whitish-brown ticket-collector who helped her aboard the sleeping-car again which had been shunted on to the train bound for Jerusalem.

"Are all the passengers going through to Jerusalem?" she asked.

The ticket-collector nodded.

"Yes, lady."

"And the Sheik, whom you promised me I should meet?"

His face went a shade paler. He fell back upon the usual Levantine gesture of despair with his hands.

"Alas, lady, he is the one passenger who has decided not to go on to Jerusalem. Everything O. K., lady."

And then he turned in relief to curse that Arab youth who was slouching indolently toward the third-class compartment of the new train.

Judith Kober was left to herself. And half an hour later, when the Jerusalem Express began to puff importantly out of Lydda station, she stood at a window of the coach seeking in vain for the romantic figure known as the Red Wolf of Arabia, the man of the desert. That gleam of fear in her dark eyes deepened.

IN the third-class compartments of the train a smelly, coffee-colored mixture of humanity began to perspire in the growing heat of the morning. Arabs, Levantines, Egyptians, and even a group of Polish Jews spat and chewed and talked and smoked. Half-veiled Syrian women with kohl-smeared eyes stared insolently over their black veils at the completely veiled Arab women. Yellow-skinned babies crawled the thumping floor of the train amidst refuse of date-stones, banana- and orange-skins and shells of nuts.

Brown arms stretched possessively about tied bundles. Tin boxes tied with rope were sat upon. Occasionally the slanting rays of the sun touched the glittering ornaments of the women, the pendants from their ears, the rings on their fingers. It also glinted upon the hafts of the curved knives worn by the men.

One Arab, in a dirty blue burnous, stumbled from seat to seat. He was restless. Occasionally he sat on the floor and played with the crawling children. But the shrill commands of women brought the children back to their mothers' skirts.

"In two hours, brother, we shall be in the holy city," sighed one Jewish immigrant who had come from the ghetto in Warsaw to endure poverty in Palestine.

TWO hours—the restless Arab seemed to hear the words and his brown hands clutched the dirty burnous closer about him. He stepped between the corded bundles of the passengers and almost stumbled over a tin box.

"May the curse of Allah fall upon you," snarled a bearded Arab in his face. "Sit you down and rest, jackal of the desert."

But the dirty blue burnous slipped past him and with bent back the Arab interloper delved deeper into that sweating, coffee-colored crowd.

The train was puffing and snorting and twisting its way among the hills. In these wild defiles Samson was born to slaughter with his strength the old enemies, the Philistines. But only the Jewish immigrants knew that story. The Arabs looked out on a landscape over which Mahomet had ridden his camels seeking trade for the widow whom he afterward married.

One hour to Jerusalem.

The Arab in the dirty blue burnous had found a seat at last. With his legs crossed beneath him he squatted on the floor beside an Arab youth in a white burnous. A bundle tied with rope was between them.

"These cursed trains are worse than our camels," he grumbled to the youth, and spat his disgust on the floor.

"*Aiee!*" grunted the youth.

He was disinclined to talk. But the Arab in the blue burnous was in a garrulous mood. He went on:

"But these steel beasts of the desert carry more than our camels. These bags, by Allah, would need a hundred camels to carry them."

And his brown hand caressed the bundle that was between them.

"*Aiee!*" nodded the youth indolently. He turned his young beardless face toward the window and gazed out upon the wild landscape.

"I see, brother," went on the garrulous Arab, "that you have been spending money in the delectable bazaars of Cairo."

The young man swung round.

"You have an inquisitive tongue," he grunted.

"And a keen eye, brother," smiled the Arab imperturbably. "For I can see that you recently walked the Street of Ropes."

"The Street of Ropes!" There was a startled gleam in the surly dark eyes. "How came you to know that?"

The brown hand of the Arab in the blue burnous was toying with the roped bundle at his side.

"Who among us who travel the desert does not know of the Street of Ropes in the Mouski? And who but the traveler of great knowledge would deal with anyone but Sorek, the maker of the best ropes in Cairo? I know only too well the cactus fiber he braids into his rope, and that black twine which is the mark of a master-craftsman."

"By the camels of my father, but you speak like a police spy."

The young Arab's lips were trembling.

"And why should you fear a police spy?" demanded the man in the blue burnous.

The young Arab held out his palms.

"I have nothing to fear." There was a forced laugh from his throat. "Allah himself protects the innocent."

"But not the murderer who hangs a true Moslem like a dog, so that he is denied paradise," whispered the man in the blue burnous fiercely.

The hand of the young Arab stole toward the knife at his belt.

"Slinking jackals should keep out of the way of dangerous men," he said.

BUT the fierceness of his tone subsided as the Arab in the blue burnous twitched a piece of rope from his robes, a rope of cactus fiber with a streak of black twine.

"Better, my brother, to have used that knife than a rope to kill a holy Sheik! This rope I took from the neck of a dead man just an hour ago. You are the only one on this train with the same rope on his baggage."

The young Arab moaned, closed his eyes and leaned back against the bundle. Silence seemed to fall upon the motley crowd, broken only by the thumping of the wheels. The train was entering the savage and rocky gorge, the Wady Ismain, which forms the pass to the highlands near Jerusalem.

"Why did you kill him?" quietly asked the Arab in the blue burnous.

The reply was startling:

"He was my father."

"Your father!"

It was the other's turn to be startled. He recovered himself and went on:

"The Holy Koran lays down that a son who kills his father shall suffer eternal damnation."

"Aiee!" The young Arab nodded wearily. "But the holy Sheik my father was going to Jerusalem with murder in his heart."

"I know," nodded the other.

"You know!"

"In the tin box that was in his compartment were papers that told of a secret society of Druses who were to sally forth this Friday and slit the throats of Jews who lamented against the Wailing Wall."

"Then you are thief, as well as interloper," said the young man, turning upon him savagely.

The Arab in the blue burnous shook his head. "I am a solver of riddles," he said simply.

"A jackal hunting for the lions," sneered the young man.

"Let us say," went on the other imperturbably, "a friend of that beautiful Jewess Judith Kober."

A hiss of surprise came from the young man.

"Then you know everything," he said. "Your riddle is solved."

The squatting figure nodded.

"In thirty minutes," he went on, quickly, "this steel monster will enter into the city of Jerusalem."

"Jerusalem!"

"The city of Jews and Arabs, races who hate each other. And Mahomet has warned the believer who dares to marry the unbeliever. Arab and Jew never mate."

"A curse upon you and the Koran!" muttered the young man.

"In Jerusalem," went on the other, "there are men who will take you and hang you like a dog, as you did that holy father of yours. A dog's death for a Moslem. It is not nice, brother."

"Aiee. I understand."

SLOWLY the young Arab rose, gathering his robe about him. Through the window he could glimpse those black rocks and the precipice of the defile. He shivered slightly. Then he drew himself up, and turned a face with a sad smile upon it to the squatting figure in the blue burnous.

"I thank you, brother. Will you tell her that my love transcends the belief of my fathers, even of all mankind?"

And with a casual gesture of the Arab who is going on a short journey he picked his way through the sprawling children, the veiled women, and the Jewish immigrants toward the door at the end of the coach.

The Arab in the blue burnous sat and waited.

Three minutes later there was a loud shriek. A Syrian woman, her veil dangling, swayed into their midst.

"He threw himself from the train—over the precipice—" she gabbled.

Pandemonium was let loose. Orders were shouted. Bells rang. The Jerusalem Express snorted to a standstill. Passengers scrambled onto the track.

"Who was it? Tell me, I beg of you."

Judith Kober clutched at the sleeve of the ticket-collector as he scurried past.

"A young Arab, lady. He gone mad. Flung himself down the rocks. Smashed to death!"

Her dark eyes scanned the crowd at the back of the train. She searched for a young man in a white burnous. He was not there.

A dirty Arab in a blue burnous passed her. She suddenly was aware that this Arab was speaking English to her.

"He asked me to tell you that his love transcends the belief of his fathers, even of all mankind."

She swayed, and leaned out a hand to save herself from falling. The Arab in the blue burnous had spoken in the voice of the Red Wolf.

"NO, you need not anticipate trouble today, sir," said Paul Rodgers, as he spoke to the Governor of Palestine in the palace at Jerusalem.

"The Arabs were ready. And today, Friday, was to be the day," said the Governor. "Don't you think we ought to post a few troops in the vicinity?"

Paul Rodgers shook his head.

"Not necessary, sir. The Arabs were ready. They waited for their leader.

A Syrian woman, her veil dangling, swayed into their midst. "He threw himself from the train—over the precipice—" she gabbled.

Their leader was murdered. That, in itself, has frightened them. And they know also that certain documents relating to their secret activities are in the hands of the police."

"Thanks to you, Rodgers," nodded the Governor.

"No. The real thanks should go to the Jewish girl, Judith Kober. Her father had heard of the premeditated massacre. He determined to prevent it. It was the beautiful Jewess who offered to do the job. And she did it in feminine fashion."

"How?"

"By emulating the Judith of the Bible. You remember the story? The people of the beleaguered city besought Judith to go to the tent of the conquering general, Holofernes, and give herself for the sake of the starving men, women and children. She did, and returned with the head of Holofernes."

"And Judith Kober—"

"She went among the Arabs in Cairo, the enemies of the Jews in Palestine. There she captivated, not the leader but his son. And when the Sheik Sonieda set out in the Jerusalem Express to lead the

massacre this Friday at the Wailing Wall, Judith Kober was also aboard the train. And secretly, so was the son of the Sheik."

"How did you guess the murderer?"

RED RODGERS smiled slightly. "At first I suspected the Jewess. But then the rope and the phonograph gave the murderer away. I was puzzled at first to understand how the murderer had entered the compartment when the Sheik, in fear of his life, always kept the door locked. That again made me suspect the woman.

"But when I found the youth with the rope and he told me that he was the son of the Sheik, I realized how he had entered. He had only to knock, and reveal himself to the astonished father who believed his son was at home in Cairo, to be instantly admitted. The youth must have been helplessly infatuated with the Jewess to attempt the crime he did. He deliberately kept the phonograph playing so no one would hear the strangulated gurgles of the old man. He did not use his knife because of the difficulty of avoiding bloodstains on his white burnous."

"But your report states that the door of the compartment was locked when the body was discovered by the ticket-collector," the Governor pointed out.

Rodgers nodded.

"The youth did not wish the crime to be discovered too soon. So he left the compartment by the window and made his way along the footboard of the train as it sped through the night—a simple operation for an agile Arab."

"And afterward you persuaded the young Arab to walk to his death."

"It saved your hangman an unpleasant and disturbing job," murmured the Intelligence officer.

"And the Jewess?"

A strange gleam came into the eyes of Red Rodgers.

"She has done her work, but at a great cost. She thought hers was only make-believe love. Too late she discovered that she was helplessly in love with the Arab youth. That is the heavy price she has to pay for saving her people."

"I wonder if Judith was in love with Holofernes," mused the Governor.

"Alas, the Apocrypha does not tell us," replied Rodgers.

The Governor eyed him.

"You lead queer lives, you Intelligence fellows," he murmured.

"Queer, but exciting," added Rodgers.

"Well, you've saved us from what might have been a series of street battles in Jerusalem," said the Governor.

"My day's work," smiled the Intelligence officer, and took his departure.

Later, Paul Rodgers walked slowly along the street that tumbles its surface of rough stones alongside the sacred mosque of Omar.

He came to the south of the wall that cuts off the mosque square from the city of Jerusalem. There were the few yards of black and gray stones known to the Jews as the Wailing Wall. A hundred men and women were standing there in attitudes suggesting devout despair. They were grieving for the loss of the city of their fathers.

A strangely mixed crowd. The newer immigrant Jews wore the cheap modern suits of civilization. They clutched Hebrew prayer-books in their roughened hands. And in sober, workaday skirts, their women stood at their side.

But there were others among the men who wore the traditional curls and the long gaberdines. Some had fur caps and heavy plush coats. And the women had gayer clothes, with the mark of the Oriental on them.

All moaned and sobbed in hysterical grief. They were wailing the persecution of centuries, and their tears were for dark and bloody deeds done to their race throughout history.

Slowly Red Rodgers passed this line of sobbing figures. His gaze lighted upon one Jewish girl, garbed in the traditional fashion. Big tears coursed from her dark eyes and trickled down a face that was stamped with grief.

It was Judith Kober.

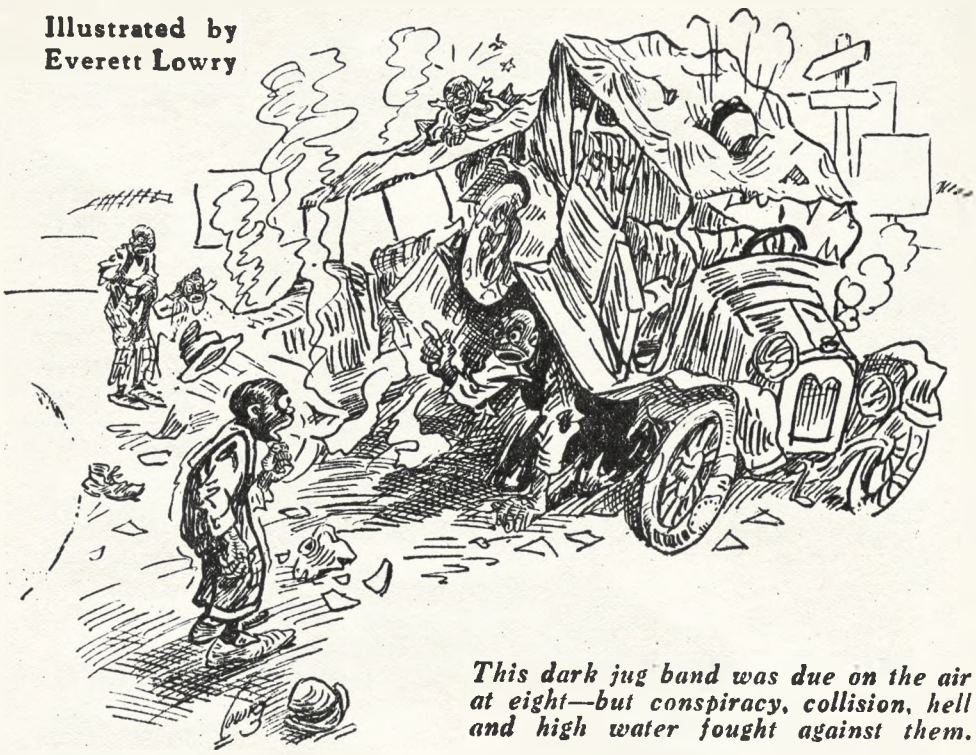
SHE moaned with the others that she was an exile in their own land. But more than that, Judith Kober was shaken by the grief of a young lover who was dead. Those rich red lips kissed dusty stones and not the quick responding lips of a young Arab. Judith had once again saved her people in their despair. But her heart was dead within.

With a sigh, the man known as the Red Wolf of Arabia passed on. Perhaps, somewhere deep within her she had desired the rumored massacre. By killing her body, they would at least ease her of this terrible ache of something dead within her.

But the peace of Jerusalem was not broken. The sobbing continued.

Another intriguing tale of the Red Wolf of Arabia will appear in an early issue.

Illustrated by
Everett Lowry



This dark jug band was due on the air at eight—but conspiracy, collision, hell and high water fought against them.

Jug Band Blues

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

FROM the offices of the Columbus Collins Detective Agency (for Colored) there issued uncouth and unsleuthlike sounds, as of a thousand overfed bottle-flies in a well, in anguish, and with banjo accompaniment.

These sounds wrote upon the face of a five-foot pedestrian shuffling the littered length of Hogan's Alley toward them a larger and more visible woe than even the combination of his immediate past and future had already imprinted there. For to "Bugwine" Breck the disturbance meant that the Dunn and Collins "jug band" was rehearsing again. And while music—if the output of a jug band could be called such—might tame the savage breast, the big thing now for Bugwine was, could it tame Columbus when he got the report his aide was fixing to render to him? . . . . Fearfully Bugwine "cracked" the agency door, and braced himself for the worst.

Columbus accommodated him. The rhythmic uproar within suddenly ceased as the gangling Mr. Collins, hitherto busied with blowing sonorously and with the above-mentioned bottle-fly effect into the neck of an empty jug, paused in midnote. So did the two shorter and sadder darkies similarly equipped, and a lengthier one who had been practically tearing his banjo limb from limb in his musical madness.

"Dat you, Bugwine?" His chief glared at the aperture created by Mr. Breck.

"Here me," admitted that knob-eyed subordinate unhappily. One of the other jug-artists within was Asbestos Dunn. And Asbestos was mixed up in what Bugwine had to confess too.

"Well, is you recover back dat stole car of Asbestos'?" the question Mr. Breck dreaded most followed instantly.

"Uh—'spectin' 'pohtant developments widin forty-eight hours, and—"

"Point yo' car towards detectin'-headquarters, Skilletface," Bugwine directed. "Us'll get a boy what can read, to look at dat policy of your'n."

"Quit lyin'!" cut in his superior testily. "You aint 'spectin' nothin' but a kick in de pants—which you is fixin' to git! Says, is you git dat car back?"

"Aint sniff out no good clues to work wid yit," the truth sounded as feeble as Bugwine felt.

"You got de description and license-plate number, aint you?"

"Yeah, but half de flivvers in town looks and sounds jest like Asbestos' do. Besides, cain't read numbers gwine away from me fast enough, and Alabama aint use no front plate; cain't never tell who *gwine* to run over you—jest who *is*."

"And *another* reason you is got to git dat car back quick," continued Mr. Collins harshly, "is de jug band needs it."

"Needs it for what?" Mr. Breck eyed the assembled musical misfits morosely.

"To fill a rad-dio broadcastin' engagement wid, dat what."

Bugwine's mouth opened, to help his brains; but it failed signally.

"Up in Bumin'ham," elaborated Columbus caustically, for the benefit of any mental defectives in the audience, "us done hired out to broadcast de jug band for one night only. Got to git dar to fill it. *I* blows 'first-jug' noble in de band."

"Rad-dio, huh?" blinked Bugwine. "When you-all gwine up dar?"

"Got to be on de air at eight tonight. So do yo' stuff, shawt-boy, do yo' stuff!"

"How-come '*my* stuff'?" still puzzled Mr. Breck.

"Recoverin' back Asbestos' car, so de jug band can ride to Bumin'ham in it, dat what. Else us got to soak eve'ything but de jugs to git up enough money to hire a taxi for de trip. Too busted to bus it. So, boy, find dat car!"

Bugwine Breck belonged to that numerous race of employees whose work is more visibly and vigorously done if the foreman is looking. Stimulated now by both the words and implications of his chief, the harried and hurried little detective broke into a veritable frenzy of sleuthing. Bear-trap handcuffs clinking and yardstick clattering against the lenseless magnifying-glass at his belt, he galloped up one alley and dog-trotted down another. He measured footprints,

tire-prints, and hoof-prints; but all to no avail. He peered fearfully into garages and hopefully into weed-grown back lots, but Asbestos' lost car still eluded him.

Yet persistence pays. As the perspiring and pigeon-toed Mr. Breck was soon to prove. For down Kaufman's Alley at length came a stranger, in a car—if it could be called such—a stove-hued stranger driving the type of flivver to which the Alabama darky, if untampered with, is most often addicted. Its top was tattered and its body battered; stuffing protruded from its cushions, its fenders were aflap, and the engine was scarcely able to be out alone, while huge wens here and there upon its worn tires betrayed the prospective sites of impending blow-outs.

Opposite Bugwine this car shivered, swerved crabwise at the application of maladjusted brakes, and halted. Its driver hailed him with: "Aint want to buy no good car cheap, is you, boy?"

Bugwine started. Here, it flashed over him, was the sure spoor of the car-thief; trying to sell it cheap—but *this* time to Bugwine Breck, the human bloodhound, who always got his man!

WITH one movement, Mr. Breck flipped back his overalls jumper to display his pan-sized star, and stepped upon the sagging running-board. Then, "Boy, what's your name? Whar-at you git dis car?" he astounded its driver with a fast follow-up of his instant suspicions.

"Name's 'Skilletface' Pegram. From Bumin'ham, and sho wishes I was back dar! Buys ten gallons of gas yesterday, and dey throws in de car. Why?"

"What you doin' way down here wid it, den?"

"Tryin' to git in a collision."

"Says huh? Look like you done *been* in one!" Mr. Breck eyed the wreck.

"Dat just wear and tear. But dis here paper,"—Mr. Pegram was producing a decorated document from his pocket,—"come wid de car. Say it's a collision policy. Run into nothin', and it pays off. Only I cain't never hit nothin'. Done ride a hundred miles, and aint nothin' happen but blow-outs, what de policy aint cover."

"Means you gits paid off, is you git in a smash?" Bugwine checked up on the incredible.

"Me and de other boy, too. But white folks is funny; dey got to see de policy *and* de wreck whar it happened or dey still aint pay off, neither."

From over the roofs of Hogan's Alley just here sounded and resounded the *zizz* and *zoom* of the jug band in rehearsal, reminding Mr. Breck once more of his predicament—and his duty.

"Point yo' car towards detectin'-headquarters, Skilletface; up dis here next alley," he directed firmly. "Columbus Collins detectin' agency *always* gits its crook. Sniffs 'em out whar others jest smells about. Us'll git a boy dar what can read, to look at dat policy of yourn; aint look good to *me*. Also, let Asbestos Dunn, what had his'n stole, look at dis car you is in. It aint look good neither."

BUT arrival before the combined rehearsal-hall and detective agency with his prey proved no triumph for Mr. Breck. On the contrary, the saddle-colored savant called in to read Mr. Pegram's policy reported it was just that, plus establishing to Bugwine's further detriment as a detective that it confirmed by name and engine-number Skilletface's ownership of the rambling wreck.

Mr. Collins looked blisteringly upon his aide. "Uh-huh! Done mess up a case again!" he scorned him and all his works. "All time treein' de wrong crook! Barkin' up de wrong tree! Well, lemme tell you somep'n, Einstein: Pull *another* bone like fotchin' in a travelin' boy for drivin' his own car, and you quits detectin'—turns you over to de Red Cross to feed, and clean up a couple of parks wid a shovel! So show results or start shovelin'. Git back Asbestos' car. Time gittin' short, and de band done busted!"

Round-shouldered with despair, Bugwine again took up the trail, until the call of hunger detoured him within the doors of Mr. "Bees'-Knees" Thompson's barbecue-stand—where he stumbled at last upon a clue!

"Boy was in here jest now from over in Livingston," confided Mr. Thompson in a low tone, as he precipitately rescued an inadvertent thumb from the inner and hotter side of Mr. Breck's cup of coffee. "Say he seen a car dar yest'day what look and shimmy jest like Asbestos' car."

Bugwine's ears practically met, quivering, above his scalp. He craved clues, and, right away, here was one!

"Yeah? What make him think it was Asbestos Dunn's car?" he trod cautiously, nevertheless. Another false step now would set him to shoveling.

Bees'-Knees lowered his voice still further, against any eavesdropping on the

part of his other patron, a jovial-appearing stranger farther down the counter. "He say," he continued, "de top all tore up, fenders flappin', cushions fixin' to bust, and one wheel aint so hot at de bottom. License too muddy to make out, on de back."

"Sho sounds like de one!" enthused Mr. Breck, the scent of a clue again in his nostrils. "And, boy, git dat car back now, and I is made!" Then, however, recalling time and distance, "But dat aint help de jug band none *now*."

"How-come what aint?"

"Livingston's too fur off to git dat car back in time for Columbus and de jug band to arrive up in Bumin'ham in it, in time to broadcast tonight. 'Bleeged to be on de air dar at eight."

"What you mean, fur off? You can ride to Livingston in a hour."

"*Ride*, yeah. But take all day, dogback."

Mr. Thompson glanced down at the scrap-leather, plentifully windowed for his bunions, long employed by Mr. Breck for shoes, and got his point.

"Sho wish I could git to Livingston quick, though!" sighed Bugwine more loudly.

He was overheard. "You cravin' to git to Livingston?" inquired the stranger four stools away.

"Got a little mess of business to attend to over dar," evaded the little sleuth warily. "Been thinkin' some about gwine."

The other brightened. "Bronson de name—Bonaparte Bronson," he introduced himself affably.

"Sounds noble!" admired Bugwine, overlooking the mutual nature of introductions ordinarily.

"Gits named after a big man—but it aint take," explained Bonaparte philosophically. "Now, I got to deliver a car in Livingston; how about you gwine along and help me carry it dar?"

Mr. Breck saw service when it came his way. "Right wid you!" he accepted with alacrity. "Soon as I see another boy about somethin'. Meet you here?"

"Right here. Twelve o'clock, and us walks out to whar de car is, in a garage."

"BUGWINE, you messes round like de clock and calendar was both done broke down and standin' still in de road!" quarreled Columbus as his stunted assistant again slid unobtrusively inside the agency's door. "Jug band rearin' to ride, and you still aint recover back Asbestos' car for 'em to ride in. Look at dem boys!"

"'Spectin' pohtant developments in less'n no time, now," bugled Mr. Breck. "Jest gits me a hot clue, and busy bayin' on de trail dat car now—only it's over in Livingston, too fur off to git back here wid so de band can git to Bumin'ham before eight. But I gits me a ride over dar after it. Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, always gits his man—"

"Ride wid who?" cut in Columbus disbelievingly.

"Bonaparte Bronson."

"Aint know him. And jest like you to git a clue in some place off where you aint do de jug band no good. Us got to hire a taxi now for it, account you so dumb and slow—right when de boys is so busted dey got to git paid off before dey can eat after dey gits to Bumin'ham even. Be broadcastin' on empty stomachs. Says look at 'em, again!"

Bugwine looked, but the assembled musicians were even less comfort now to the eye than they had been to the ear.

"Short boy wid de vinegar-jug aint et since Sunday," pointed out Mr. Collins pessimistically. "Already blowin' weak in de jug. Us racin' starvation wid him for dat microphome now. Banjo-boy's wife is got a job, but *she* plays a saxophome—looks down so fur on jug-players she cain't see 'em to feed 'em."

AGAIN responsibility pressed upon Mr. Breck. A whole broadcast, plus nourishment for the broadcasters, was up to him. But what could an undersized sleuth do to provide transportation when the car that could save them was too far away for possible recovery in time for their trip?

When again inspiration stepped in. Bugwine saw light. A whole mess of birds could be knocked off this limb with one rock: amends and a bargain could be combined, to transport the band and prove at last the brilliance of Mr. Breck.

"Knows how you-all can git to Bumin'ham cheaper dan in no taxi!" it burst from him. "And widout waitin' on me to fotch Asbestos' car back."

The jug band changed instantly from stomachs to ears.

"Dat boy Skilletface Pegram down here from dar," the scheme followed. "He aint doin' no good here, and itchin' to git back, is he had de gas. So he'll hire his car cheap, and let de boys work their way, fixin' flats. How dat sound?"

"Sounds so smart I aint think *you*

"Dat you, Bugwine?" His chief glared at the aperture. "Here me," admitted that knob-eyed subordinate unhappily.

thunk it up," Columbus diluted its power by doubting its paternity.

"Dat car of Skilletface's git about nine miles to de blow-out," estimated the banjoist pessimistically.

"But it beats bunions—and not eatin' —at dat," rebutted the vinegar-jug artist wanly.

"Done told you what you can do," Mr. Breck forthwith washed his hands of the unappreciative. "Me, I got to meet dat Bonaparte Bronson at noontime; start ridin' to recover back Asbestos' car. Always gits my man!"

"De *wrong* man—yeah!" gloomed Mr. Dunn, seeking solace in a mournful B-flat on his jug.

"Us hires Skilletface, den, and starts for Bumin'ham directly," capitulated Columbus ungraciously. "By way of Tuscaloosa; and not forgittin' whose idea it was, Bugwine, is nothin' go flooey on de way!"

But, with the jug band's business so brilliantly disposed of with one revolution of his brain, Mr. Breck grew inclined to strut as he neared the stand of Bees'-Knees now; Mr. Bronson was going to have trouble losing him!

But trouble seemed no longer on Bugwine's list. As demonstrated by the sight, shortly, of Mr. Bonaparte Bronson, obligingly if retiringly awaiting his hitch-hiker in a secluded nook alongside the barbecue-stand. Bonaparte was not conspicuous, but he was always *there!* Reliable.

"Livingston, here I comes!" Mr. Breck maltreated a famous saying.

"Cain't git dar too quick for me, neither: Demopolis warmin' up," contributed Bonaparte as they set forth along Ash Street. "Keeps car in old garage belongs to de white folks what I works for. Dat way, aint have to bring it back through Baptist Hill to git out of town; parks as close to Livingston as I can."

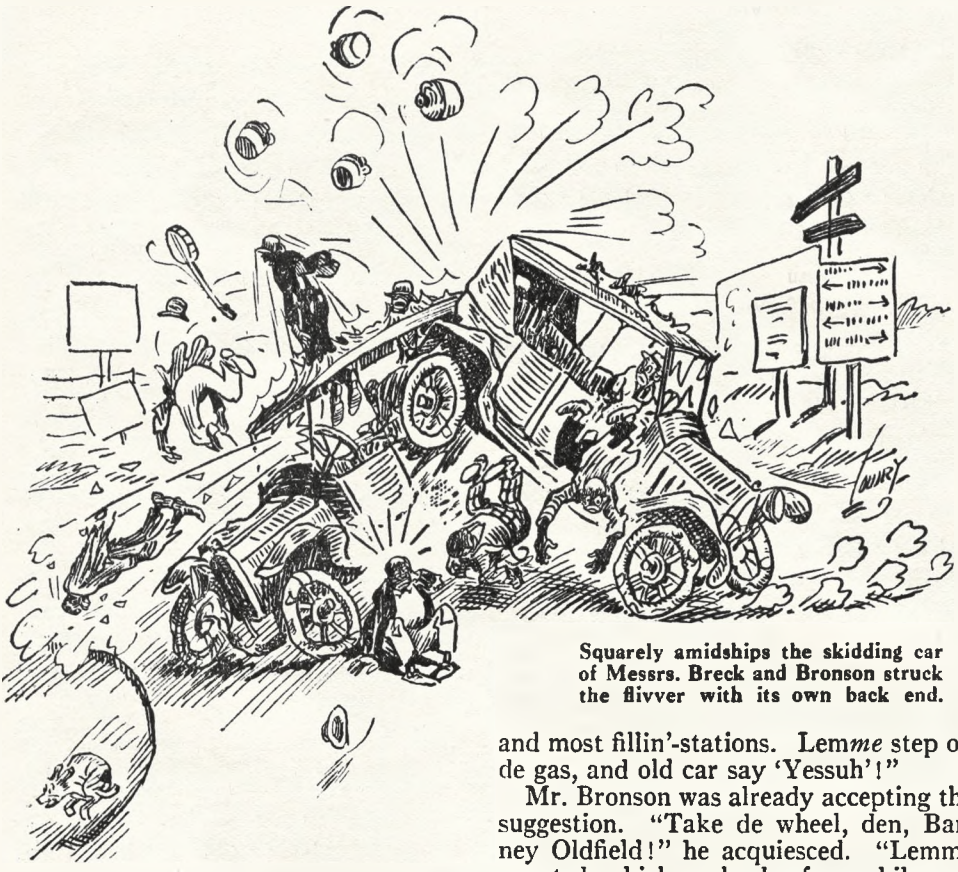
"Less de Hill see, de less dey got to lie about," Mr. Breck saluted and abetted wisdom when he heard it. "What kind of car you takin'?"

"Well, it aint so new—and it aint so old: sort of a medium car," estimated Mr. Bronson conservatively.

"Dat's de best kind," Mr. Breck continued to agree with whoever was hauling him free. "Aint all time havin' to git out to see is you done scratch it nowhar."

"What you gwine to do in Livingston?" Bonaparte sought to change a badly exhausted subject.

"Look around, jest look around—see how things looks," Bugwine immediately grew vague. A detective had to keep his



Squarely amidships the skidding car of Messrs. Breck and Bronson struck the flivver with its own back end.

mouth shut to keep his foot out of it: look at what had nearly happened the last time he talked too much—to Skillet-face!

"Here de garage now; let's git gwine," proposed Bonaparte as they edged into an outlying alley. "What sort of driver is you?"

"Fast but keerful. Hires me for most all de big races round here."

"Jest de way I sized you up from de start!" Mr. Bronson seemed still more pleased with his passenger now.

Bugwine grew pigeon-breasted as well as pigeon-toed. Here was some one who saw his true worth from the start!

"What you got to watch on de road, Mist' Bronson," Mr. Breck launched fresh language under his ensuing expansion, "is de *other* boy! One in de *other* car is what gits a good driver in a jam."

"Aint it so!" Bonaparte's appetite for bromides seemed insatiable. "Sees you *is* a driver!"

"Slap *me* under no steerin'-wheel," chattered Bugwine as he closed the garage doors behind their battered flivver, "and all you got do is watch 'em move over to lemme by! Passes all cars and most fillin'-stations. Lem*me* step on de gas, and old car say 'Yessuh'!"

Mr. Bronson was already accepting the suggestion. "Take de wheel, den, Barney Oldfield!" he acquiesced. "Lemme count de chickens back of us while you watches de road!"

And, in a most pleasing clatter and clamor, they were wheeling toward the open road and Livingston.

"Aint never see a car what back-fire better gwine down de hills," complimented Mr. Breck shortly, as that pleasing feature developed.

"Runs more better wid de cut-out open, too," contributed his host above its ear-splitting detonations. "Start climbin' a hill, and folks knows it plumb to California!"

"Hold yo' hat now, and watch me git up some speed," exulted Bugwine as the road at length leveled before them.

"Old sign say 'Cross-road yander," cautioned Bonaparte as the din and distance mounted.

"And old horn say, 'Stand back and let Mist' Bronson go by'—too!" Bugwine but laid a heavier hoof on the gas, a louder hand on the horn.

The result was magnificent, even if short-lived. Dust and gravel spurting wildly from beneath frayed tires, two chickens and a rabbit already flattened in their wake, the two motorists clamored royally on the road to Livingston.

But, if Bugwine did not believe in signs, neither, it was to prove, did another driver. For, rolling grandly into the highway from the side-road leading back to Demopolis, squarely in front of that speeding show-off Mr. Breck, suddenly appeared a second flivver! One distinguished by age and the fact that an Alabama darky never rides alone. His gas-tank may be empty, but his seats never.

With an anguished squawk of terror, Mr. Breck slammed on his brakes, only to find that Thursdays were their half-day off. To their ineffective shriek as the vehicle changed ends on the loose gravel, was added the slither of the skid and the simultaneous blowing-out of two tires, plus the vocalized anguish of Mr. Bronson, whose personal unloading was being delayed by a jammed door.

Then the crash! Squarely amidships, the careening, skidding car of Messrs. Breck and Bronson struck the overstuffed flivver with its own back-end, to bury it there.

Instantly the road was paved with sprawling darkies, piled and plastered upon it, in every conceivable position.

But as the horror-stricken and squalling chauffeur Breck went out backward over his own seat, to land with an awful *Oooof!* upon something soft, scared, and resentful already in the road, his gaze and head fell simultaneously and identifyingly upon another rounded object there that froze him with fresh horror.

Then indeed Bugwine loosed squalls of despair! Squalls that made his earlier efforts seem but the faint cheepings of a laryngitic deaf-and-dumb canary by comparison. For to the knot on his head he was now excruciatingly adding further fatal evidence that he had just pulled the major boner of his career!

WILDLY he looked about, upon a scene of havoc. Draped upon the top rail of a roadside fence was something limp and feebly flopping, in the clothes of Bonaparte Bronson. From a ditch crawled two dazed and disgusted passengers. Here and there upon the graveled surface of the highway others began to move and moan—while what had first alarmed and inspired Mr. Breck to give tongue was repeated now until it seemed to him that the whole road was literally littered with jugs!

He had wrecked the jug band!

The scrambled remnants of the overturned car he had struck here began to heave and stir under the efforts of a still another buried victim to free himself.

Then he emerged. Bugwine's mouth kept on working but the air-supply failed it as there crawled forth in final confirmation of the worst—Columbus!

But if Bugwine's voice had quit, Mr. Collins' was just starting. He was pawing the wreckage of his derby from down about his ears, but bellowing in his darkness as he battled: "Whar-at de boy what hit us? Lead me to de boy what hit us! Lead me and leave me—dat's all I craves! Jest leave me wid him! Cash-and-carry business for de undertaker, dat all he gwine be in no time now!"

THEN—all too soon for Bugwine—the derby was dislodged. Columbus glared wildly about him, caught a glimpse of the cowering Mr. Breck before him—and instantly Cause and Effect met in the mind of Mr. Collins!

"You! *You!*" he howled hoarsely. "You got to mess a fresh mess, is you! I sends you to run down a clue, and *you runs down de jug band* instead!"

Mr. Breck gulped, swallowed, and shrank farther into his frayed overalls. For a limping figure, still identifiable as Asbestos Dunn, business manager of the jug band, was now crawling from the roadside grass with murder in his eye and a head-sized rock in his hands. Asbestos, with whom Bugwine was already in poor and irregular standing anyhow about the missing car that Mr. Breck was continuing to fail to find.

But Columbus had taken fresh thought with fresh breath. *"Now,"* he loosed both devastatingly upon the unhappy Mr. Breck, "how is us goin' to keep dat rad-dio date up in Bumin'ham, huh? Aint got started good before *you* is got to wreck Skilletface's car before you ever recovers back Asbestos' car, huh?"

Sharper than the Scriptural serpent's tooth, his inability to answer such questions tore at the vitals of Bugwine.

"*Dumb!* So dumb you whistles when you tries to think—and *den* cain't think!" bellowed Columbus, gaining in form and fury. "Everything you touches, runt, you gits backward! And ricollects now it was your idea, us hirin' Skilletface's car, too!"

If possible, Mr. Breck suffered some more. So *again* he had gummed up Skilletface, had he? First with false arrest, now with an accident! Bugwine's cup of woe ran over, and splashed all over the surrounding scenery.

"Now, stand hitched while I counts up some more de damage you is did!" menaced Columbus.

The jug band members were busy in the background, sorting out arms, legs, and jugs; checking up on rips, tears, and abrasions. "Cain't help but miss dat broadcastin' *now!*" mourned the boy who blew second-jug. "And sho is been promisin' my stomach a mess of eatin'-vittles here lately, too!"

"Old banjo looks all right hangin' on dat limb yander—but is it?" quarreled the banjoist apprehensively.

"Sho is just about *ruin* my car now!" wailed a limping Skilletface, digging dully in its twisted remnants. "So bow-legged in de front wheels it'd run into itself every two feet, was it to run. And *cain't* run, on account de engine knocked loose from de carburetor and gas tank. Not countin' dis here other car settin' in de back-seat's lap. Aint nothin' left but couple tires, and *dey's* weakenin'."

"Who dat hangin' on de fence yander?" pursued the bandaged banjoist.

"Aint know: stranger to me; jest sort of passed me in de air, comin' out of Bugwine's car when us hits," returned the jug artist indifferently.

COLUMBUS and Asbestos, as heads of the expedition, were in a huddle alongside the wreckage now—with one of Columbus' ham-sized hands firm in the neckband of the discredited Mr. Breck as they conferred.

"If he *had* brains, he couldn't think up no worse ways of gummin' up our business dan he does jest natural, wid-*out* 'em!" raved Mr. Collins in his conclusions. "Here us is nine miles from Demopolis—and ninety to go, wid no time left to fool around in—and dis dumbbell is got to run into us and wreck de *only* way us is got left to git to de broadcastin' in! After us done paid Skilletface in advance, too, for all de gas what's done run out on de ground now!"

Mr. Breck looked upward at earthworms, spiritually speaking, and noticed anew that clouds didn't come with silver linings any more. In fact, the more a boy examined this one of his own making, the darker it looked, on both sides. Until, startlingly, it was beginning to look exactly like a shovel in his hands! Telepathy, too, seemed at work here at this, as: "Tells you, is you mess no more messes, you quits detectin' and goes to work—wid a shovel!" bawled Columbus, working himself up to a yet mightier wrath amid the wreckage of his broadcast. "And you done messed yo'self one now what *is* a mess!"

"Cost about seven bucks,"—Mr. Dunn interposed an estimate,—"to git Skilletface's car repaired up now to whar he could sell it for scrap for six." He was poking gloomily about in the ruins, tugging tentatively at where the car driven by Bugwine was jammed back-foremost into the side of Skilletface's chariot.

"Bugwine Breck, de human bloodhound, always gits his man!" croaked a voice from the tomb, as it were: a Bugwine discovered to have passed out, mentally, under the strain of what had happened to him, plus what was fixing to happen as soon as his chief got around to it.

"Set him down in de road, so he won't have to stretch hisself so far to pick up dem little rocks and sticks he's reachin' for now," advised an Asbestos who had seen that same glassy look in the eyes of the intellectually inert before.

Columbus complied, with the precaution of standing upon the slack of the slightly twitching Mr. Breck's overalls, in case of any premature recovery.

Asbestos meanwhile was circling the car in which Bugwine had so lately ridden to ruin. He shook it, listened, kicked its two sound tires—and voiced a discovery. "Here de answer!" jubilance crept into it. "On account of its *backin'* into de wreck, dis car aint hurt so bad. Liable still run—as soon as us swaps dem two unblowed-out tires off Skilletface's car on to it. Maybe us git to Bumin'ham to broadcast wid dem jugs *yit!*"

Hope dared feebly to raise its head—in all breasts but Bugwine's and Skilletface's.

"Come on here, you boys!" summoned Mr. Dunn, gaining in optimism as he struggled. "Rally to ride! Be rollin' from dis wreck yit, is eve'ybody rally round and push! Gather dem jugs!"

Forthwith the groaning artists gathered.

"Git in it, Columbus, see is it able to start," urged Mr. Dunn optimistically. "Den pull it out from Skilletface's car while I stays at de back-end and shoves."

THE advice proved sound. As the motor spun, sputtered, and took hold while the bandsmen strained, the quick was separated noisily from the dead. The car so lately and disastrously piloted by Bugwine again stood forth upon its

own; shaking and clattering in its every member, but undeniably ready to run.

"Now, swap dem tires before dat boy on de fence finishes comin' to," ordered Asbestos as he checked up on a steadily progressing revival there. "Us be on de air at eight, yit! Tells you I—"

But just here the busied Asbestos interrupted himself by a startled, strangled squawk, indicative of new developments in an already hectic situation. A cry that reached down into even the dim depths of the mind of Bugwine, and brought him blinking feebly back to consciousness.

IT was Columbus, however, who saw all first. *Again* Bugwine was the answer! Again Bugwine had blundered, piling Pelion upon an Ossa of error! Rage was shaking Mr. Collins now like a rat. He transferred the shaking to the frog-eyed but reviving Mr. Breck. "Stand hitched, runt, while I chokes you!" he clutched the neck of his ex-aide. "Hold still while I assassinates! I thunk you was dumb when you wrecks us, but, boy, I aint *seen* no dumbness den, beside what I sees *now!*"

Mr. Breck crowed, gurgled—goggle-eyed and grayish-gilled with what he could not grasp at all. "Dumb how?" he croaked bewilderedly.

"Hitch-hikin' to Livingston, dat's how!" roared Columbus. "—To find de car what *you is been ridin' in* all de time! Dis here's Asbestos' car you was *in*: he recognize it as soon as us pulls it loose far enough for him to read de license on de back!"

Bugwine's mouth fell to flapping wordlessly. Astonishment and humiliation stunned and spun him. As a sleuth he was indeed a flop. Shovels re-beckoned. Past boastings returned, to ring hollowly in his anguished ears. In not recovering Asbestos' car until it was practically found upon his person— But suddenly in the vast darkness of his despair here came a glow, a flickering pin-point of light. If this were Asbestos' car, then—

With a wheezing bay as of some asthmatic hound on a startling trail, the disgraced but dazzled Bugwine broke from his surprised chief's grip, to flee at a gallop toward the near-by fence, whence there burst sharply forth next the pæan of a human bloodhound snatching last-moment victory from black defeat! Drowning the click of his bear-trap handcuffs upon a startled leg with his bugled: "*Now* I knows why you aint want to drive dat car through Baptist Hill! *Now* I knows why you wants *me* to do all de drivin', too! Starts listenin' yourself to dem Jail-house Blues instead of jug bands now, Bonaparte Bronson; becaze Bugwine Breck always gits his man . . . even if it *aint* nothin' but a accident—to somebody else's car!"

But again it was Columbus who crippled him in mid-crow; brought the soaring Bugwine low with the buckshot of facts momentarily forgotten in his flight.

"Okay, dim-bulb," rasped Mr. Collins significantly as he and the bandaged jug band embarked again on the long road—and the longer shot that Asbestos' flivver would make Birmingham by evening! "Old accident done saved you one more time wid *me;* but you still jest startin' wid *Skilletface!* What you gwine say when him and de Sheriff starts collectin' from you for what dat same accident of yourn done to his car dar, *huh?*"

A reminder of unfinished business so fraught with possibilities of personal peril was this, that it was eleven miles and two hours later before it occurred to the freshly fleeing Mr. Breck that a disaster at times carried in itself the seeds of its own cure. And timorously, sheepishly, he turned back to see—and to prove once more that the blunder could be mightier than the brain.

"AND now, ladies and gentlemen,"—that evening at eight a mellow-voiced announcer told a waiting world—including the diligently dining patrons of Mr. Bees'-Knees Thompson,—"you are to hear the musical novelty of the ages, the Demopolis jug band, in *'Go Down, Moses.'* All right, Columbus; let her go!"

But above twin bowls of Brunswick stew, the zoom and buzz of the jug band, life went on. "How long, Mist' Skilletface," sleuthing's newest five-foot star was inquiring, "is you think you got to stay here now?"

"Well, I aint exactly know, Mist' Breck," Mr. Pegram ran his mind gratefully over events so soon to culminate now in his heart's desire—temporarily overlooked in the excitement. "But, thanks to de way your *brain* sleeps while *you* works, de adjustin'-gentleman say he aim to have de check ready for me by noontime tomorrer. You says you always gits your man; but boy, *I* says: Drive fast enough, and you always gits your collision, too!"

After Worlds Collide

The Story Thus Far:

ALONE in creation, so far as they knew, stood forty-four men, fifty-seven women and two children—the survivors of the end of the earth. . . .

Two worlds, you may remember—two planets came hurtling out of space. Once they had circled some distant sun which we on our earth could have seen only as a star. But a celestial catastrophe occurred. And these two stranger planets were torn away from their sun.

They drifted out into the darkness. The light and heat from their sun must have diminished until that sun dwindled to the appearance of a star; but long before that time came, there could have been no living being left upon either of those planets. All animal life must have disappeared. The seas and at last the very atmosphere—the air—froze solid. The planets were in the all but absolute cold of space between the stars.

Through this cold and dark of space, they journeyed together, held to each other by gravitational attraction.

At last they approached our sun; and the sunlight, shining on them far away, made them visible worlds once more. They had stumbled into a section of the universe where lived beings with eyes to see; more than that, they had stumbled upon the path of another planet: Our earth.

Night after night, as they were seen to approach and grow brighter in the southern skies, astronomers studied them; and they discovered that one of these planets, hurtling out of space, was sweeping toward the earth (and the moon that accompanied the earth) on an orbit that would bring about a collision. It must destroy the moon and then the earth; destroy it utterly.

This destroying planet was the larger of the two. Its companion planet was smaller; it resembled the world in size; and it was physically of the same order of object as the earth. Its path, while carrying it close to the world, would bear it by; it would approach but not collide with the earth; and it would make its closest approach before its huge comrade destroyed us.

So, before the cataclysm, there might be—*might be*—a chance of escape.

How some human beings, driven by doom itself, prepared their escape from the earth, and how they accomplished it—by means of an ark of the air—a giant space ship driven rocketlike by the new atomic engines—already has been told. This is the chronicle of their adventures on this new world of Bronson Beta.

They had landed near the coast of a great sea. And directed by their leader the old scientist Cole Hendron, they established a temporary camp and explored the immediate vicinity. They found a river of sweet water near by, and a valley green with mosses and ferns whose spores had withstood the age-long cold. They found a forest of dead trees, preserved through the ages. More, they found a long smooth-paved road extending into the far distance, and a tablet of some unknown substance inscribed with what might have been writing. And at a turn of the road they came upon the wreck of a machine, a vehicle apparently, built of some unknown crimson metal. Had it been driven, æons ago, by human beings or by creatures of another sort?

They set up their radio apparatus, and kept constant vigil, hoping to receive word of some other of the space ships which had also fled the old earth. And one night—they heard the drone of an airplane overhead, caught the flash of a wing-surface. But the visitor vanished without signal or landing. *(The story continues in detail:)*

SOMEBODY threw a log onto the fire. It blazed up freshly, and illuminated the strained, immobile faces of the emigrants from earth. Nobody spoke. They only looked at each other.

Out of the night, out of the darkness, out of the remote, infinitely distant, impersonal Nowhere, had come that humming, throbbing reality. Somewhere on Bronson Beta there were other human beings. Another still more dreadful thought curdled the imaginations of the

By EDWIN BALMER *and* PHILIP WYLIE

The terrific adventure of the daring men and women who left this earth before the cosmic collision which destroyed it, and became pioneers beyond the sun on a new planet.

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

Tony took hold of a heavy metal ring fitted in the end of a lever in a slot at the side of the gate. He pulled it—and to his astonishment the two gates quietly and swiftly separated. . . . They walked through.

people who sat around the camp-fires: were those other beings human?

Hendron, the leader of these brave people, had never felt upon himself pressure for greater leadership—had never felt himself more incompetent to explain the mystery of that night.

He moved among his fellows almost uncertainly. He walked up to the campfire and addressed his comrades. "I think," he said slowly, "that the thought now engraving the imaginations of many of you may be discarded. I mean the thought that the plane which approached our camp was piloted by other than human beings."

ELIOT JAMES interrupted, speaking with a confidence he did not feel. "It looked like an ordinary airplane."

Cole Hendron shook his head. "From the glimpse we had, no one could say. What we saw was merely a glint upon some sort of material. However, we must use our reason to rescue us from impossible conclusions. We must infer from our glimpse of that machine in the sky, and from the sound of its flight, that some other party on earth was successful in completing a ship capable of taking the leap from Earth to Bronson Beta; and that, also, they were fortunate in the flight; and that they have succeeded, as well as we, in establishing themselves here."

"They must be established very well," somebody else said grimly. "We haven't got a plane."

Hendron nodded. "No; nor did we include an airplane in the equipment of our larger Ark. Therefore it could not have been our comrades from our own camp on Earth whom we heard in this sky. Were they the English, perhaps? Or the Russians? The Italians? Or the Japanese?"

"If they were any people from earth," Jeremiah Post countered, "why should they have approached so near, and yet not give any sign they had seen us?"

Cole Hendron faced this objector calmly. He was aware that Post was one of the younger men who believed that he, the leader of the party on earth, and the captain on the voyage through space, had served his purpose. "Have you come to believe," he challenged the metallurgist, "that any of the people native to this planet could have survived?"

"I believe," retorted Post, "that we certainly are not safe in excluding that possibility from our calculations. As you all know," he continued, addressing the whole group now rather than Hendron, "I have given extended study to the vehicle of the Other People which we have found. Not only in its mechanical design and method of propulsion was it utterly beyond any vehicle developed on earth, but its metallurgy was in a class by itself—compared to ours. These People had far surpassed our achievement in the sole fields of science from which we yet have any sample. Is it not natural to suppose that, likewise, they were beyond us in other endeavors?"

"Particularly?" Hendron challenged him.

"Particularly, perhaps, in preservation of themselves. I will not be so absurd as to imagine that any large number of them could have survived the extreme ordeals of—space. But is it utterly inconceivable that a few could?"

"How?" said Hendron.

"You know," Jeremiah Post cast back at his leader, "that is not a fair question. I suggest a possibility that some people of this planet may have survived through application of principles or processes far beyond our knowledge; and then you ask me to describe the method. Of course I can't."

"Of course not," agreed Hendron apologetically. "I withdraw that question. However, in order that each of us may form his and her own opinion of the possibilities, I will ask Duquesne to acquaint you with the physical experience of this planet as we now perceive it."

THE Frenchman readily arose and loomed larger than ever in the flickering flare of the fire:

"My friends, it is completely plain to all of us that once this world, which has given us refuge, was attached to some distant sun which we, on the world, saw as a star.

"That star might have been a sun of the same order as our sun, which this world has now found. If such were the case, it seems likely that Bronson Beta circled its original sun at some distance similar to our distance from our sun; for the climatic conditions here seem in the past to have been similar, at least, to the conditions on earth.

"There are two other alternatives, however. The original star, about which Bronson Beta revolved, might have been a much larger and hotter sun; in that

case, this planet must have swung about that star in an enormous orbit with a year perhaps ten or fifty times as long as our old years. On the other hand, the original sun might have been smaller and feebler—a 'white dwarf,' perhaps, or one of the stars that are nearly spent. In that case, Bronson Beta must have circled it much more closely to have obtained the climate which once here prevailed, and which has been reëstablished now that this planet has found our sun.

"These are fascinating points which we hope to clear up later; we can only speculate upon them now. However, whether the original sun for this planet was a yellow star of moderate size, like our own sun, or whether it was one of the giant stars, or a 'white dwarf,' this world must have been satisfactorily situated with regard to it for millions and hundreds of millions of years.

"Orderly evolution must have proceeded for an immense period to produce, for instance, that log—the material which we burn before me to give us, tonight, light and heat; and to produce the People who made the vehicle which my colleague Jeremiah Post so admirably has analyzed.

"Beings of a high order of intelligence dwelt here. We have evidence that in science they had progressed beyond us—unfortunately for themselves. Poor fellows!"

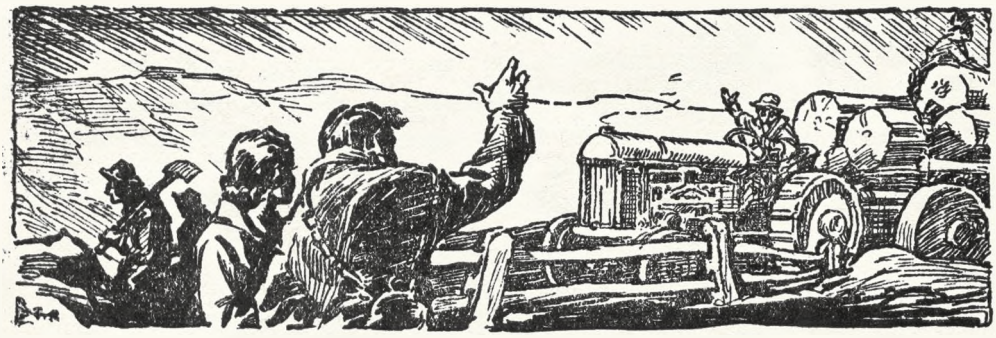
Dramatically, Duquesne stopped.

Some one—it was a girl—did not permit him the full moment of his halt. "Why unfortunately?"

"Their science must have showed them their doom so plainly and for so frightfully long a period—a doom from which there scarcely could have been, even for the most favored few, any means of escape. Theirs was a fate far more terrible than was ours—a fate incomparably more frightful than mere complete catastrophe.

"Attend! There they were, in some other part of the heavens, circling, at some satisfactory distance, their sun! For millions and millions of years this

They were able to see that a huge cylinder—like their own Ark, but larger—lay toppled upon its side. Standing beside the searchlight were doll-like figures. "It's our other people!" Tony said, and his voice choked.



As days passed—the long slow days of Bronson Beta—the camp was roused

world upon which now we stand went its orderly way. Then its astronomers noticed that a star was approaching. A star—a mere point of light on its starry nights—swelled and became brighter.

"We may be sure that telescopes upon this world turned upon it; and the beings—whose actual forms we have yet to discover—made their calculations. Their sun, with its retinue of planets, was approaching another star. There would be no collision; we do not believe that such a thing occurred. There was merely an approach of another sun close enough to counteract, by its own attraction, the attraction of the original sun upon this planet, and upon Bronson Alpha.

"The suns—the stars—battled between themselves from millions and perhaps hundreds of millions of miles away; and neither conquered completely. The new sun tore the planets away from the first sun, but it failed to capture them for itself. Between the stars, this planet and its companion, which we called Bronson Alpha, drifted together into the darkness and cold of space.

"The point is, that this must have been a torturingly prolonged process of the inhabitants here. The approach of a star is not like the approach of a planet. We discovered Bronson Alpha and Bronson Beta only a few months before they were upon us; the Beings here must have known for generations, for centuries, the approach of the stranger star!

"Knowing it, for hundreds of years, could any of the inhabitants here have schemed a way of saving themselves? That seems to be the question now before us.

"I cannot say that they could not. I can only say that we could not have devised anything adequate to meet their situation. Yet—*they* might have. They knew more than we: they had much more time, but their problem was terrific—the problem of surviving through nearly absolute cold and darkness, a drift through space, of a million or millions of years. If any of you believe that problem could have been met by the Beings here, he has as much right to his opinion as I have to mine."

"Which is?" Jeremiah Post demanded.

"That the People here tried to solve that problem," replied Duquesne without evasion, "and failed; but that they made a magnificent attempt. When we find them, we will find—I hope and believe—the method of their tremendous attempt."

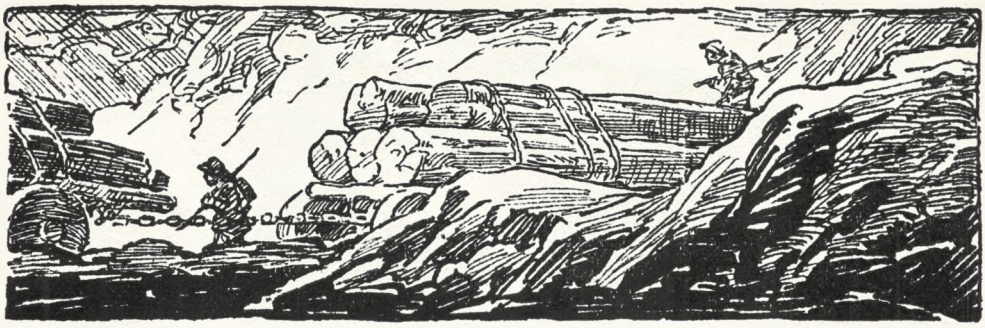
Shirley Cotton stood up. She always moved with an almost languid voluptuousness. Now, in these tense moments, her actions were seemingly doubly calculated to be slow and indolent.

"What, M. Duquesne," she inquired, "would be the attitude of the Beings if they survived and found us here?"

THE Frenchman shook his head. "Before imagining their attitude, I must first imagine them surviving. I have confessed my failure at that task."

"But *if* some of them survived?" Shirley persisted.

"Their attitude, after awaking from a million years' sleep, would combine, among other elements, surprise and caution, I should suggest," the Frenchman concluded courteously. "But, engaging as such speculations may be, our position demands that we be practical. We must assume that aircraft we saw in these skies came from earth. If there are other people from our world upon Bronson Beta, we prefer to be friends with them. That attitude, besides being rational, is our natural inclination. However,"—he shrugged his huge shoulders eloquently,—"it does not therefore fol-



to a feverish activity. Lumber was still being brought in from the forest.

low that another party of emigrants from earth would want to be friendly to us. We cannot assume that the same emotions sway them. It is possible that, finding themselves here, they prefer private possession of this planet."

Eve, sitting beside Tony, leaned toward him and whispered: "I can imagine that. Can't you?"

Tony nodded. "That's what I've been doing. I was in Russia during the days on earth," he said, and repeated, "*during the days on earth,*" feeling how it seemed an epoch long ago, though it was not yet a month since they fled before the final catastrophe; and as Duquesne had reminded them, it was less than two years since they all had been living on the world unwarned that its end was at hand. Only a little more than two years ago, Tony had traveled as he liked on the world, and had visited, among other countries, Russia.

"Suppose that a Russian party made the hop," Tony continued. "Since we did, why not? They worked along lines of their own, but they had some of the world's best scientists. If they made it, you may be sure they packed their ship with first-class communists—the most vigorous and the most fanatic. When they found themselves here, what would they feel most?"

"I know," Eve nodded. "They'd feel that they had a world to themselves, where they could work out the millennium according to their own ideals."

"And," Tony finished for her, "that they must beat down, at the very outset, possible interference."

They were whispering only to each other; but many heads bent near to listen; and Hendron, seeing that Tony caught this attention, called to him: "You have a suggestion?"

"Two," said Tony, rising to his feet. "I suggest, Cole, that we organize at once an adequate exploring expedition; and at the same time, prepare defenses."

Nobody in the encampment had ever before called Hendron by his first name. Tony's use of it was involuntary and instinctive. Having to oppose his leader in again urging exploration, he took from it any air of antagonism by addressing him as "Cole."

Hendron appreciated this.

"Will you lead the exploring party—and choose its members?" he asked Tony.

"Gladly."

"I," said Hendron, "will be responsible for the defenses here."

The people about Tony pressed closer. "Take me! . . . Me! . . . Tony, I want to go! Take me!"

FROM the gloom, where Eliot James sat rose his calm, twangy voice: "So we have come to the end of our honeymoon!"

Eve reached for Tony's arm and clung to him as he moved out of the group gathered about him.

"Take me too, Tony."

"Not you."

"Why not?"

"I wouldn't on earth; why would I here? Besides, I want to come back to you. I want to feel, when I'm away, I'm risking whatever we happen to risk, for you. You see, I love you. It's like on earth, when I'm with you away from the others. See the stars up there." The clouds were cleared from a patch in the sky. "There's Cepheus and the Dragon; and Vega and the Swan, as we've always seen them. And the earth hard and cold at our feet; so comfortably solid and substantial, this earth, which came to us torn from some distant star for a couch, sometime, for you and me!"

Night deepened. The company of emigrants from the earth heaped higher the fire with the wood from the forest which had leafed on this land of Bronson Beta a million years ago. Some of the company—men as well as women—shivered with a chill not instilled in their veins by the sharpness of night, as this side of the planet turned away from the sun it had found at the end of its incalculable wandering. Slowly, lazily, the stars swung in the sky; for this planet rotated much less swiftly than the earth upon its axis. The earth people had learned not to lie down too soon to sleep, but to wait out the first hours of the long night in talk; and doubts, terrors, phantasms, easier to dismiss by day, plagued them.

That night, as Eliot James had said, they felt "the honeymoon over." The triumph of their flight, the enormous excitement and relief at finding themselves safe on the new world, could suffice them no longer. Others besides themselves were on this world.

Survivors of the People of the Past! That idea would not down. Contrarily, it increased with the night.

Survivors of the People of the Past—or other emigrants from Earth who had made the journey safely, established themselves and already were exploring, and who, having found this encampment, had swung away again to report. Report what? And to whom?

NOTHING happened.

Days passed—the long, slow days of Bronson Beta. The murmuring specter of the sky put in no further appearance; but the consequences of its evanescent presence continued. The camp was roused to a feverish activity which reminded the emigrants of the days of the Ark-building on earth. Indeed, this was Ark-building again, but on a far smaller scale; for the Ark was being taken down, and its materials—especially the last of the lining of the propulsion tubes—were being adapted to an exploration ship.

In the section of building which had been originally dedicated to research, rivet-hammers now rang, and metal in work glowed whitely. The crew that manned the farm was still at its post. Lumber was still being brought from the forest. But the most skillful and the most energetic members of the colony were working upon a small metal jet-propulsion ship hastily designed to travel in Bronson Beta's atmosphere—a ship with lifting surfaces—but a ship with an enclosed cockpit; a ship which could travel very rapidly through the atmosphere of the new planet, and which could rise above that atmosphere if it became necessary.

The throbbing of the motor of the strange plane had changed the entire tempo of the lives of the colonists; it had re-aroused them to themselves. If they were to preserve the intelligent pattern of their plans, it was essential to learn at once what interference threatened them. They could look upon themselves no longer as law unto themselves. Some other beings—survivors of the People of this planet or others from the earth—shared this new world with them.

Hendron's people no longer could endure delay in learning, at whatever risks, what lay beyond these silent horizons.

ON the morning of the fifty-sixth Bronson Beta day after their arrival, the airship was ready. Streamlined, egg-shaped, with quartz glass windows and duraluminum wings, with most of the available Ransdell-metal lining its diagonally down-thrust propulsion tubes, it stood glittering in the sunshine five hundred yards from the half-wrecked cylinder of the Ark. At about noon of that day Tony and Eliot James climbed into the hatch of the ship after Tony, under Hendron's tutelage, had been familiarizing himself with the controls.

They were to make the exploration alone; the ship had been built only for pilot and observer. Both carried pistols.

It was proof of Hendron's high practicality that, among the implements cargoed from earth, were pistols and ammunition. Policing might have to be done, if there were no other use for arms; and so there were pistols not only for Tony and Eliot James, but for others who remained in the camp.

As long as the explorers stayed in their ship, they possessed, of course, weapons far more deadly than pistols—the jet-propulsion tubes which had proved their terrible deadliness on the night of the raid on the camp in Michigan.

The camp here owned the same weapons; for all of the tubes from the Ark had not been broken up to supply the little exploration ship. Hendron, keeping his word to prepare defense for the camp, had had the extra tubes prepared and mounted almost like cannon—which he hoped never to use. But he had them.

Hendron watched Eliot James establish himself in the cockpit beside Tony; then he beckoned him out. Hendron would make one last trial flight with Tony at the controls. So James reluctantly stepped out; Hendron stepped in, and the ship rose.

IT rose—shot, indeed, crazily forward, spun, jumped still higher and finally rushed southward along the coast till the camp was nearly out of sight. Then Tony brought it back, pushing away Hendron's hands that wanted to help him. He made a landing on the barren acres selected a mile from the camp; and after waiting a few minutes, Tony and then Hendron leaped over the hot earth which surrounded the ship, and went to meet the people hurrying from the camp.

Eve was with the first of them; and Tony saw her pale and shaken. "Oh, Tony!" she exclaimed. "You nearly—"

He looked at her and grinned. "I certainly nearly did whatever you were going to say."

Hendron said: "He did well enough."

"All right now?" asked Eliot James eagerly.

"All right," said Hendron; and yet he held them, reluctant to let them go. "I've had everything put in place—everything you are likely to need. In all our observations from the earth, we made out a great continent here nearly two thousand miles wide and seven thousand in length. We believe we landed about the middle of the east coast of that continent."

He had reviewed this time and time again with Tony and Eliot James, separately and together; yet he had to do it again at the last moment before he let them go:

"Your charts have spotted in them the sites of the cities that we thought we observed. Go to the nearest points first, and then as much farther as—as circumstances dictate.

"If you get into any kind of trouble, radio us. We may not be able to help; yet it is essential to us to learn what may be happening to you. Remember you have a deadly weapon of defense in your tubes.

"Remember, if you come upon survivors of the original People of this planet, their first impulse may be to protect themselves against you. I cannot myself imagine how any of the People of this planet could have survived; yet I must admit the possibility. If they live, they probably have weapons or materials of defense and offense utterly strange to us. . . . Far more probably, you may find other people from earth. If you possibly can, avoid conflict of any sort with them. Nothing could be more tragic than warfare between us here. Yet—if they attack, you must defend yourselves. Fight to kill—to annihilate, if need be! May the God of this world go with you!"

He stepped back and, for a moment, Tony merely stared at him. No moment since they had gained the ground of this strange planet had been as pregnant with the emotions of the Earth. Fight to kill—to annihilate, if need be!

It was the sensible thing; and for it, Tony was himself prepared. Yet it was shocking to hear it announced on this desolate world resuming life again after its long journey through dark and cold.

Eve broke the spell. She stepped forward. "Good-by, Tony."

She gave him her hand; and he longed to draw her to him, and though before them all, to clasp her close and kiss her again. Suddenly, defiantly, he did it. She clung to him. It was another very earthly moment.

His eyes caught Hendron's and found in her father's—in his leader's—no reproach. Hendron, indeed, nodded.

Shirley Cotton spoke to him; he grasped her hand, and she kissed his cheek. She kissed also Eliot James. Others crowded about.

Eliot himself saved the situation.

"It's awfully nice of all you girls to see me to the train," he half declaimed, half chanted, in his comedy twang, a refrain of years ago. "So long, Mary!"

Then Hendron signaled men and women alike away from the ship. Tony and Eliot climbed in; but they waited until their friends had retreated nearly half a mile before they set the jet-propulsion tubes in action.

There was a tremendous roar. The ship bounded forth and took the air. A few moments later it was out of sight; a spark in the sunshine—then nothing.

Eve sat down and wept. Hendron knelt beside her, encircling her with his arms, and remained there staring toward the west in silence.

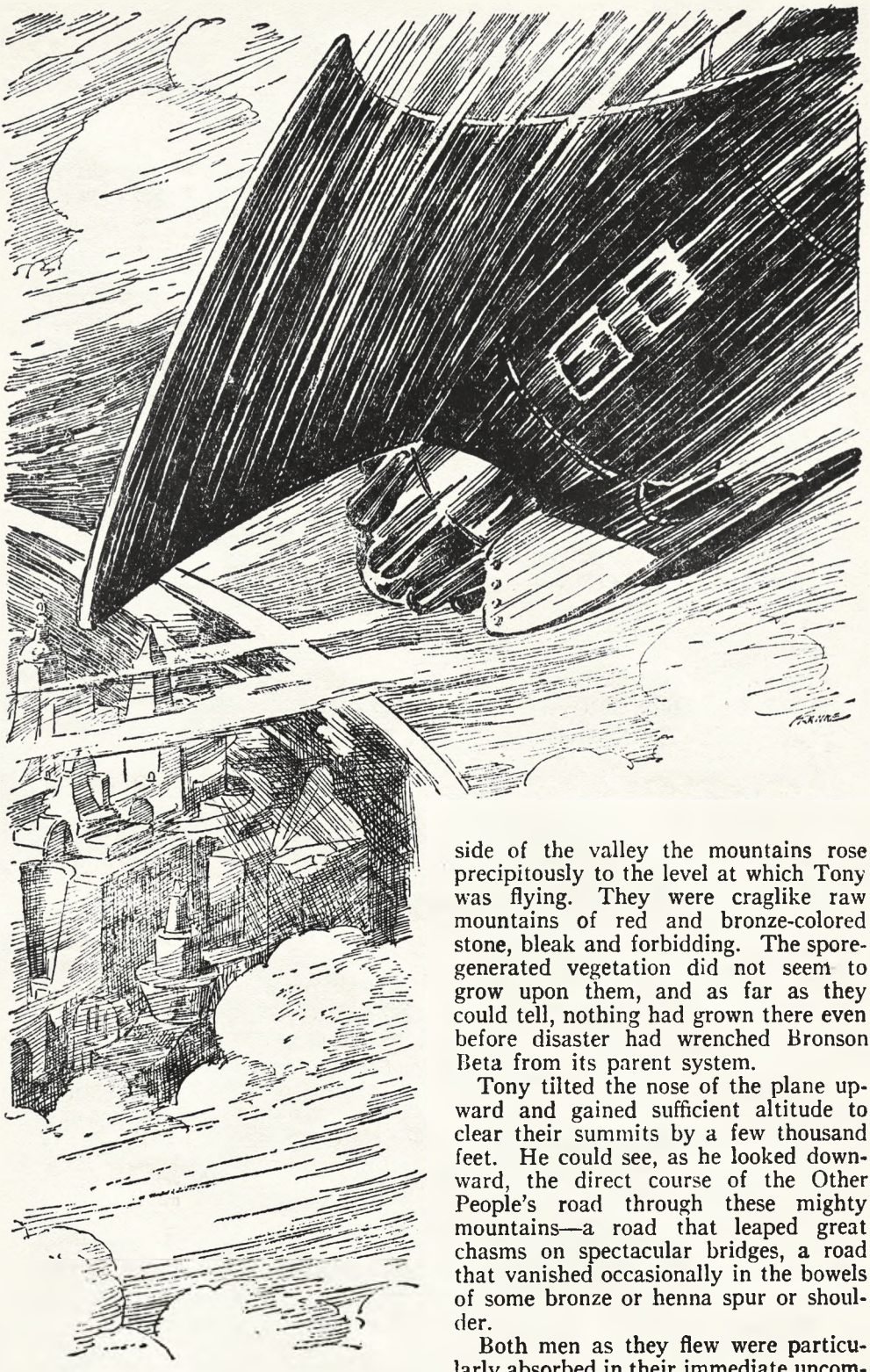
TRAVEL in the hastily contrived combination of rocket-ship and airplane was not pleasant. Its insulation

and cooling systems were inadequate, so that its interior became hot.

Tony flew at a height of five thousand feet. At this height the blast of the Ark would have seared the earth underneath, but the less powerful jets of the airship were dissipated before they reached the ground and caused no damage.

They followed the Other People's road inland. When they had been flying for a few minutes, Eliot James pointed downward; and Tony, looking through a quartz window in the floor, had a fleeting glimpse of a magnificent metal bridge which carried the road across a deep valley. A little later they both concentrated their gaze upon a vast green thicket that reached to the horizon—a cover evidently composed of ferns. They soon left it behind them, and the mountains loomed directly ahead.

At their base was a desert valley some twenty miles in width. From the far



As they flew, they were able to see what was within the bubble. Inside was a city—so perfect that it might have been a model.

side of the valley the mountains rose precipitously to the level at which Tony was flying. They were craglike raw mountains of red and bronze-colored stone, bleak and forbidding. The spore-generated vegetation did not seem to grow upon them, and as far as they could tell, nothing had grown there even before disaster had wrenched Bronson Beta from its parent system.

Tony tilted the nose of the plane upward and gained sufficient altitude to clear their summits by a few thousand feet. He could see, as he looked downward, the direct course of the Other People's road through these mighty mountains—a road that leaped great chasms on spectacular bridges, a road that vanished occasionally in the bowels of some bronze or henna spur or shoulder.

Both men as they flew were particularly absorbed in their immediate uncomfortablenesses, but still more occupied by the same thought: what would lie upon the other side of this mighty range of mountains? Up to that moment they

had seen nothing which gave any indication of the existence of living intelligence. The Other People's road was a monument in a dead world—and for the rest, all that lived and grew was vegetation.

They rose higher to surmount still loftier peaks, penetrating the upper altitudes of the thin greenish atmosphere of Bronson Beta. For almost half an hour they flew straight west across the mountains, and then, far away, they saw a break in the turmoil of upthrust peaks. The mountains turned into hills of lesser altitude which finally gave way to a broad flat plain. It was a plain that seemed endless and through its heart, like an arrow, ran the metal road.

Tony occupied himself with the business of losing altitude for a few moments and abruptly felt his arm gripped by James' hand. Once again he followed the outstretched finger of his companion and he drew in his breath in astonishment.

CHAPTER V

The Other People

FAR away on the horizon, blazing in the pathway of the sun, was a mighty iridescent bubble. From the windows of the plane it appeared to be small, and yet its distance was so great that the senses immediately made the proper adjustment in scale. It was like half of a soap bubble, five or ten miles in diameter, sitting on the earth. Its curvature was perfect. It was obviously not a natural formation. The road pointed toward it and Tony followed the road. What it was he could not guess.

As they flew, they shouted conjectures to each other, meaningless guesses. Tony said: "It looks like some kind of giant greenhouse." And Eliot James hazarded a notion: "Perhaps the people of Bronson Beta lived under those things when they began to drift out in Space."

The bubble stretched out laterally before them as they flew, and quite suddenly they were able to see in the opalescent glitters of its surface what was within it. It was about six miles in width and more than a mile in height at its center. Inside it, completely contained by it, was a city—a city laid out in a circular geometrical pattern, a city which had at regular intervals gigantic terraced metal skyscrapers—a city with countless layers of roads and streets leading from one group of buildings to the next—a city around the outer edge of which ran a huge trestled railroad.

It was so perfect a city that it might have been a model made by some inspired artist who was handicapped by no structural materials and who allowed his orderly invention no limitations commensurate with logic. Architecturally the plan of the city within that bubble was perfect. The materials of its composition harmonized with each other in a pattern of shimmering beauty.

TONY flew directly to the bubble and circled it at a short distance from its perimeter. The men looked down in stunned silence as the ship wheeled slowly round the great transparent bubble. Both observers realized that the city had been enclosed for some such reason as to keep out cold or to keep its internal temperature unchanged.

Dimly Tony heard James shouting: "It's magnificent!" And in an almost choked voice he replied: "They must have been amazing." In the majestic streets beneath that dome no living thing moved. No lights glowed in those streets where the setting sun allowed shadows to fall; no smoke, no steam, no fire showed anywhere, and although their motor made hearing impossible, they knew instinctively that the colossal, triumphant metropolis below them was as silent as the grave.

Eliot James spoke: "Guess we'd better have a look-see."

Tony nodded. He had already noted that several metal roads led up to the bubble which covered the city, and that the bubble itself was penetrated by gateways. He tipped the nose of the ship toward one of the gates and a few moments later rolled up to a stop on the smooth metal roadway which entered through the locked gate. The two men sat for a moment staring at the spectacle before them, and then, arming themselves, they climbed out of the ship to the ground.

When they put their feet on the ground and looked toward the city, one gate of which was now only a few rods from where they stood, its majesty was a thousand times more apparent than it had been from the air.

When the roar of the motor of their plane had died, when the ringing it left in their ears had abated, when they stood finally at the gate of the city in the sunset, their imaginations were stag-

gered, their very souls were confounded with the awful silence and lonesomeness of the place. They looked at each other without speaking, but their words might very well have been:

"Here are we, two men—two members of a race that appeared on a planet which is no longer—untold millions of miles away from their home—the scouts of their expedition, their eyes and ears for the unknown peril which overshadows them. Here are we, facing a city that we do not understand, facing dangers that are nameless—and all we have is four frail hands, two inadequate minds."

However frail their hands might have been in comparison to the task to which they must be set, however weak and inadequate their minds were in comparison to the Titanic problems confronting them, it could be said that they did not lack in resolution. The haunted expressions left their faces. Tony turned to Eliot James and grinned.

"Here we are, pal!"

"Sure. Here we are. What do you suppose this is—their Chicago? New Orleans? Paris, Bombay, Tokio?"

"Search me," said Tony, trying to down his awe. Suddenly he shouted, yelled; and Eliot James joined in his half-hysterical cry.

PARTLY it was a reflex from their wonder, partly a confession that their feelings subdued their intelligence. They knew that this was the city of the dead; it must be. But, standing there at its gate, they could not feel it.

Their eyes searched the curved slope of the great glass dome over the geometrical angles of the metal gate. Nothing stirred; nothing sounded. Not even an echo returned.

They looked down at each other; and on their foreheads glistened the cold sweat of their awed excitement.

"Maybe everybody's asleep," said Eliot James, and knew he made no sense. "Maybe everybody's taking a walk."

"We'll find them inside. We must find some of them inside," said Tony.

"Dead, of course," said Eliot.

"Yes," agreed Tony. "Of course, they're dead." But he had never been further from believing it.

The city stood so in order that it seemed its inhabitants *must* be going about within. It seemed that, down the wide road to this gate, some one must be coming.

Tony suddenly spun about, startling Eliot who jerked around, also.

No one and nothing approached. The wide, smooth, hard road remained utterly deserted.

AGAIN they looked at the gate.

"How do you suppose we can get in here?" Eliot asked.

"There's something that looks very much like a knocker right over there." Tony pointed to a heavy metal ring which was apparently fitted in the end of a lever in a slot at the side of the gate. They walked over to it. The gate itself was perhaps thirty feet in width and forty feet high. The ring was about at the level of Tony's eyes. Above it was an inscription in the unknown language of the unknown inhabitants of Bronson Beta. Tony took hold of the ring and pulled it. Much to his astonishment two gates quietly and swiftly separated. Air blew from the city with a gusty sound, air that seemed age-old, and continued to blow as they hesitantly walked through the gate.

Inside, under the mighty glass dome, they were confronted by a stupendous spectacle. Straight through the heart of the circular city ran a highway along the edge of which were two rails, so that by leaning over they ascertained a moment later that underneath this top street were other thoroughfares at lower levels. On both sides of the street, which was wider than the main avenue of any of the earth's cities, towered colossal buildings. The tallest of them, in the center of the city, must have been more than half a mile in height, and they were made of materials which took brilliant colors, which gave back in the sunlight myriad glittering hues. Exquisitely suspended bridges connected these buildings which rose at intervals of about a quarter of a mile. From their airplane the city had looked like a spangled toy town, but from its own streets it looked like the royal city of Titans. There was no sound in it. Except for the air that whispered through the open gates, not a murmur, not a throb, not a tinkle or a pulsation—just silence. Nothing moved.

A few feet from the gate by which they had entered was a big poster in bright red and white material which was covered by the strange writing of the inhabitants of Bronson Beta. They walked forward almost on tiptoe after looking at the runes beside the gate.

They stared down the avenue ahead of

them and aside along the ways that crossed it.

"Where are they, Tony?" Eliot James whispered. He meant not, "Where are living beings?" For he knew the people who built this city must be dead; but he expected, at least, their bodies.

Tony, too, had failed to drive away such expectation. If not living, where were the dead? He could not help expecting the streets to be, somehow, like those of Pompeii after the débris and ash of Vesuvius was cleared away; he could not help expecting to see bones of the Beings, fallen in flight from their city.

BUT conditions here had been the opposite of those in Pompeii. There it was sudden destruction of fiery blasts, and burial from volcanic ash, that had overwhelmed the people and caught and buried them. Here, instead of sudden, consuming heat, had come slow, creeping cold—cold and darkness, of the coming of which they had been warned for generations. Such a death could have caught no one unprepared on the streets of the city.

"Where are they, Tony?" Eliot James whispered again, as his senses reminded him of the situation. "Where did they go to die? Did they stay in their homes, do you think? Will we find them in these buildings?"

"I don't think so," Tony tried to say steadily, improving his tone above a whisper.

"Where will we find them, then?"

"We won't find them—any of them here, I think," Tony said.

"Why? What did they do?"

"What would such people do?" Tony returned. "Such people as could build this city? What would they do against annihilation which they could see coming for a century?"

"They eliminated themselves, of course: they ceased to reproduce themselves; they ceased to have children."

"That," said Tony, "seems certainly the logical thing to do; and these people appear to have been logical. But there must have been some group who were the last. They could scarcely have buried themselves after they died. Somewhere we will find—somebody."

"It's marvelous," said Eliot James, "how they left this city. They'd covered it over and closed it almost as if they meant to preserve it for us."

"How could they dream of us?" challenged Tony.

"Of course they didn't. Shall we move on?"

"All right," agreed Tony, and ended their paralysis of amazement. "This was a store, I suppose," he said, turning from the stupendous vistas of the streets to the building beside him.

The face of the building was glass, streaked but yet remarkably clear over much of its surface. Behind the glass was an empty area which suggested space for display of goods; but none showed behind the huge high window. The ceiling was perhaps twenty feet high; and above, up and up, stretched glass divided by sills and panels of the multicolored metals.

"Did they live up there, do you suppose?" Eliot James appealed to Tony. Staring up, staring about, but keeping close together, they walked on the silent, utterly empty street. "Did they die up there? If we climbed, would we see—them?"

"The street," said Tony, "might have been swept yesterday."

"They swept it before they left—or died in here," Eliot replied. "They drew their gates and shut out the wind. After they left—or died—what else could disturb it? But, my God, they were neat. No rubbish, no litter."

"And everything locked," Tony said, having halted to try a door. The order of everything, and the utter stillness, was getting his nerves again. "Where've they gone? Where'd they go—leaving it like this?"

Eliot James did not answer; he had run ahead.

"Tables!" he called. "Tables and chairs! This was a restaurant!"

His nose was pressed against the glass, and Tony swiftly joined him. Within stood rows of metal tables and what were, unquestionably, chairs of metal. All bare; and all, of course, empty. It resembled nothing so much as a restaurant; and looking in, no one from earth could doubt that that was what it had been.

THE place looked immaculate, as if put in order an hour ago—and then deserted.

"Where are they?" Eliot James appealed again. "Oh, Tony, where did they go?"

"What were they?" Tony countered. "That's what I want to know. Were they huge ants? Were they human-brained reptiles? Were they—"

"They sat in chairs," said Eliot James. "They ate at tables. They ran a car that

Tony and Eliot stopped as if they were struck. *They looked at the likeness of a young woman!*

steered by pedals and a wheel. Their equipment would fit us; their floors and steps are on our scale. Let's break in here."

He tried the door, which was fitted with a handle; but this did not turn or budge, however pulled or pressed. There was no keyhole; no locking device was anywhere apparent; but the door was to be moved no more than those that they had tried before.

Tony looked about. A shudder convulsed him. A thousand windows looked down on this stretch of the silent street; a thousand pairs of eyes once had looked down. It seemed to Tony that they must —they must do it again. Eyes of what? Huge, sentient, intelligent insects? Reptiles of some strange, semi-human sort?

What lay dead by the tens of thousands in those silent rooms overhead?

Tony was pulling at his pistol. Some-

how, it reassured him to hold it in his hand. He reversed it, and beat the butt on the great glass pane behind which stood the strange metal tables and chairs.

The glass did not give way. It twanged, not like glass but like sheet metal—metal utterly transparent.

Tony caught the butt in his palm, and he pulled the trigger. The shot roared and reëchoed. But the metal pane was not pierced. The bullet he had fired lay at Tony's feet. Hysterically, he emptied his pistol.

With the last shot, he jerked about again and stared up at the rows and rows of windows. Did something up there stir?

Eliot James jumped and pointed; and Tony stiffened as he stared.

Something fluttered a hundred yards overhead and farther down the street; something light, like a cloth or a paper. One way, now another, it fluttered as it fell in the still air of that strange sealed city. It reached the street and lay there.

Ten thousand eyes gazed down, it seemed to Tony. It seemed to him that if he could look up twice as quick, he would catch *them* at their windows gazing down at him. But he never could catch them. Always, when he looked up, *they* had anticipated him; *they* were gone; *they* had snatched their heads away.

So he never saw anything but glass and metal—and the single fluttering object which had fallen down.

"We'll go see what that is," he said to Eliot James, wetting his dry lips so he could speak.

BUT before they gained the object, they forgot it. A window, evidently the vitrine of a gallery of art, confronted them; within the glass was a portrait.

Simultaneously, Tony and Eliot saw it. They stopped as if they were struck; and their breath left them. Breath of relief, and wonder!

They looked at the likeness of a woman!

She was a young woman, strange and fascinating. She was not fair; nor was she dark of skin. Her hair and brows were black—hair arranged with an air that might be individual but which, these discoverers of her felt, was racial.

And of what race?

Not the Caucasian, not the Mongolian; not the Ethiopian, surely; not the Indian. She was of no race upon earth; but she was human.

More than that, she had been sensitive, eager, filled with the joy of living. Her bosom and body were like that of a lovely woman on earth, slight and graceful. Her eyes were wide apart and gray; her cheek-bones were very far apart; and her lips, which were bright red, perhaps because they had been rouged, were pleasant and amiable.

"So," said Eliot James, who first succeeded in speaking, "so they were human! By God, you feel you'd like to know her."

Tony relaxed his hands, which had clenched. "Where did she live, do you suppose, Eliot? Did she live up behind one of these windows?"

"She had a name," said Eliot James. "And surely she had lovers. Where are they?"

"Dead," said Tony. "Dead with her—maybe a million years ago. Let's go on."

"Why go on?" demanded Eliot James. "Why? To pick up a scarf on the street? We've got to get into one of these buildings somewhere. We can break in somehow—with nobody to stop us. We might as well begin here."

SO together they attacked the door, which, like those they had pushed and pulled at before, showed no lock, yet was secure.

The door, like the walls of the buildings, was of metal and glass. Indeed, it was difficult to distinguish by texture between the glass and the metal. The panes appeared to be transparent metal. Jeremiah Post had spoken conservatively when, after the examination of the wrecked vehicle discovered near camp, he had said that the People of Bronson Beta had far surpassed any people on earth in metallurgy.

This door evidently was designed to lift; it should rise and slip into the metal wall overhanging it; but no pushing or straining at it, no hammering and pounding, could cause it to budge. And the glass in it—the panel of transparent metal—was not to be broken.

Weary and sweating from their straining at it, Tony and Eliot stepped back.

Their own blows, their own thudding and their gasping for breath, had made the only sound in the silent city.

Repeatedly, while they had worked at the door, each of them had spun about for a glance over his shoulder. The metal seemed so new—some one *must* be about this city standing all in such order.

Tony kept trying his game of looking up quickly, without warning, to catch the heads of the people behind the upper

windows who always—so he felt—had jerked back just in time.

Now, as the two men from earth stood side by side staring about them, the slightest of sounds reached them; and a door—not the door at which they had pushed and pounded, but a door some twenty steps beyond—began rising.

Tony and Eliot shrank closer together. They pulled out their pistols, which they had reloaded. Up, up steadily, slowly, the metal door was lifted.

"Counterbalanced!" exclaimed Tony to his companion; but his voice was husky. "It was counterbalanced, of course! Our pounding affected some mechanism inside!"

It was the reasonable, rational explanation. For the people of this city could not be alive; it was impossible that they had survived! Yet, here in their city, you could not believe that.

"They're human, anyway," whispered Eliot James.

"Yes," said Tony, his eyes fastened on the aperture under the rising door. "See —anything?"

"Say it, Tony," returned Eliot James. "Or I will."

"All right," said Tony hoarsely. "See —*anyone?*"

"There's nobody there," argued Eliot, with himself as much as with his comrade. "They all died—they all died a million years ago."

"Yes," agreed Tony. The door was ceasing to rise; it had reached its limit and stopped, leaving the way into the great metal building open. "They all died a million years ago. But where did they go to die?"

"Who cares?" Eliot continued his argument. "Can a ghost live a million years? I don't believe they can. Come on in, Tony. They can't even haunt us."

"A minute," said Tony.

"Why?"

"I want to look around once more." He was doing it. "All right now!" They approached the open doorway together; and together, neither in advance or in the rear of the other, they entered it, pistols in hands. That was wholly irrational; and both knew it; but neither could help himself.

So, side by side, revolvers ready, they entered the door of the Million Years Dead.

THE walls of the hall in which they found themselves were vermilion. It did not appear to be paint. Like the colors of the exteriors, the hue was a quality of the metal. Vermilion surrounded Tony and Eliot—vermilion and gray, in vigorous, pronounced patterns.

There was no furniture in the hall; no covering upon the floor. Perhaps there never had been one; the floor was smooth and even and of agreeable texture. It was not wood nor metal, but of some composition. It might have been meant to be a dance-floor or for a meeting-hall. Nothing declared its use. An open doorway invited to an apartment beyond; and side by side, but with their pistols less at alert, Eliot and Tony stepped into this.

IT was blue—ultramarine, they would have called it on earth, with slashes of silver. Great long-beaked, long-legged birds, suggestive of cranes, flew across a marsh—a decoration done by some superlative artist.

But this room also was empty.

Tony and Eliot James went on.

"How do you feel?" demanded Tony, after they had entered the fifth great room in gay colors, with marvelous decoration, but empty.

"Feel?" repeated Eliot. "It feels to me that we're in a building that never was used, into which they never moved."

"Perhaps," said Tony, "that goes for the whole city."

"Too soon to say, much too soon to say. How do you go up, d'you suppose?"

"Elevators behind one of these doors, probably. No sign of stairs."

"How do you open the doors?"

"Pound on one of the others, probably," suggested Tony, "judging from recent experience."

"How about the one we opened?" said Eliot. "Is it still up, d'you suppose?"

"What'd lower it?"

"What lifted it?" returned Eliot. "I'll go back and look. Want to go with me?"

"No: I'll stay here and try some of these."

But he had accomplished nothing with any of them when Eliot came back.

"That closed, Tony," he reported soberly.

Tony started. "You didn't close it?"

"No."

"All right!" Tony almost yelled. "Go ahead. Say it!"

"Say what?"

"What you're thinking. Remote control of some sort! Somebody saw us, opened the door, let us walk in, closed it again."

"Somebody!" said Eliot. "Let's be sensible, Tony."

"All right," said Tony, jittering. "You be! . . . Damn it, look at that door. Look at it! That's opening now!"

For a door at the farther edge of this room now slowly was rising.

"Were you working at it?" Eliot whispered.

"Yes."

"Then, that's it. You started another counterbalance working."

"Sure," said Tony. "Sure."

They stepped to the opening. Utter darkness dropped below them. There was a shaft, there—a shaft which, under other circumstances, might have showed machinery. Now it was empty.

Tony and Eliot James knelt side by side at its edge. They shouted, and no voice came back to them.

Tony took a cartridge and dropped it. For so long did it fall silently that they were sure, as they listened, that it must have struck something which gave no sound; then they heard it strike. Tony dropped another, and they timed it. One more they timed, and they stepped back from the shaft carefully.

"Half a mile below!" said Eliot. "They went down almost as far as up; perhaps farther. Why?"

They stepped back from the shaft's threshold carefully.

"There's some control to these damn' doors," said Tony, "that probably made it utterly painless to operate them when everything was working. You maybe merely had to stand before them, and some electric gadget would work that's jammed now because the power isn't on. These doors can't all be to shafts."

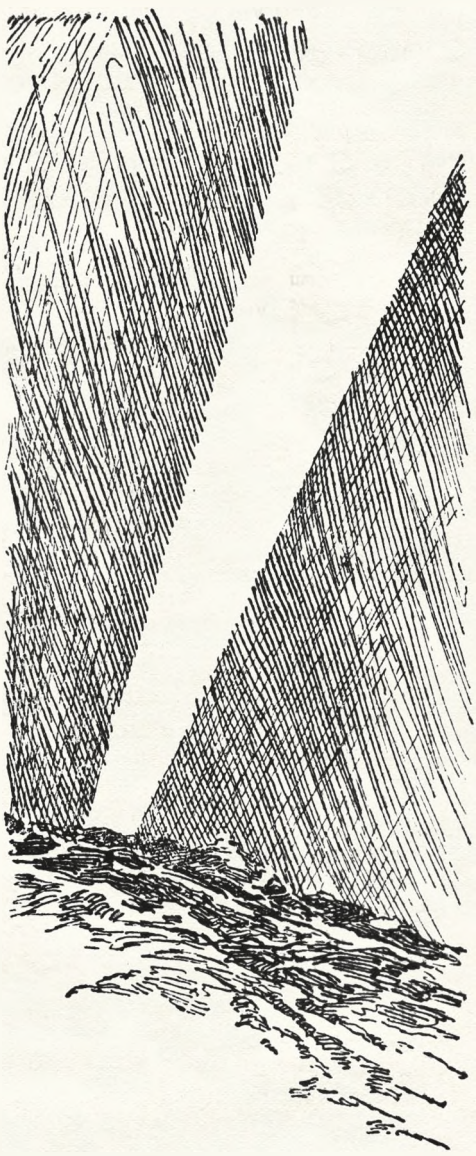
About fifteen minutes later, they had opened another that exposed a circular passage, leading both upward and downward.

"Ah!" said Eliot. "This is the stuff. No machinery. They probably had it for emergencies."

TONY, awakening, stretched, rubbed his eyes and gazed up at the ceiling. His eyes followed mechanically, forgetfully, the graceful, tenuous lines of decoration which traced down over the walls of the pleasant, beautiful chamber.

He still did not fully recollect where he was, but he realized that he was lying on a couch of soft, agreeable material. Then he saw Eliot James, in trousers and shirt but without his coat, seated at a table, writing. And Tony remembered.

Eliot and he were in the Sealed City—the amazing, stupendous metropolis of



the Other People, the People a Million Years Dead.

The light diffused through this chamber, so pleasantly and evenly—it seemed to be spread and intensified somehow by its refraction through the peculiar metal-glass of one wall—was the light of the dawn of the third long Bronson Beta day since Eliot James and Tony Drake, refugees from earth, had discovered and entered the Sealed City.

The amazements of their two days of exploration passed through Tony's mind like reviewing a dream; but they remained reality; for instead of becoming dimmer and dimmer as he sought to recall them, they became only sharper and clearer. Moreover, here before him in a heap upon one of the tables of the Other

People, and piled also on the floor, were the proofs of the actuality of what Eliot and he had done. Here were the objects —some of them understandable, more of them utterly incomprehensible as to their purpose or utility—which they had collected to carry with them back to Cole Hendron and the camp.

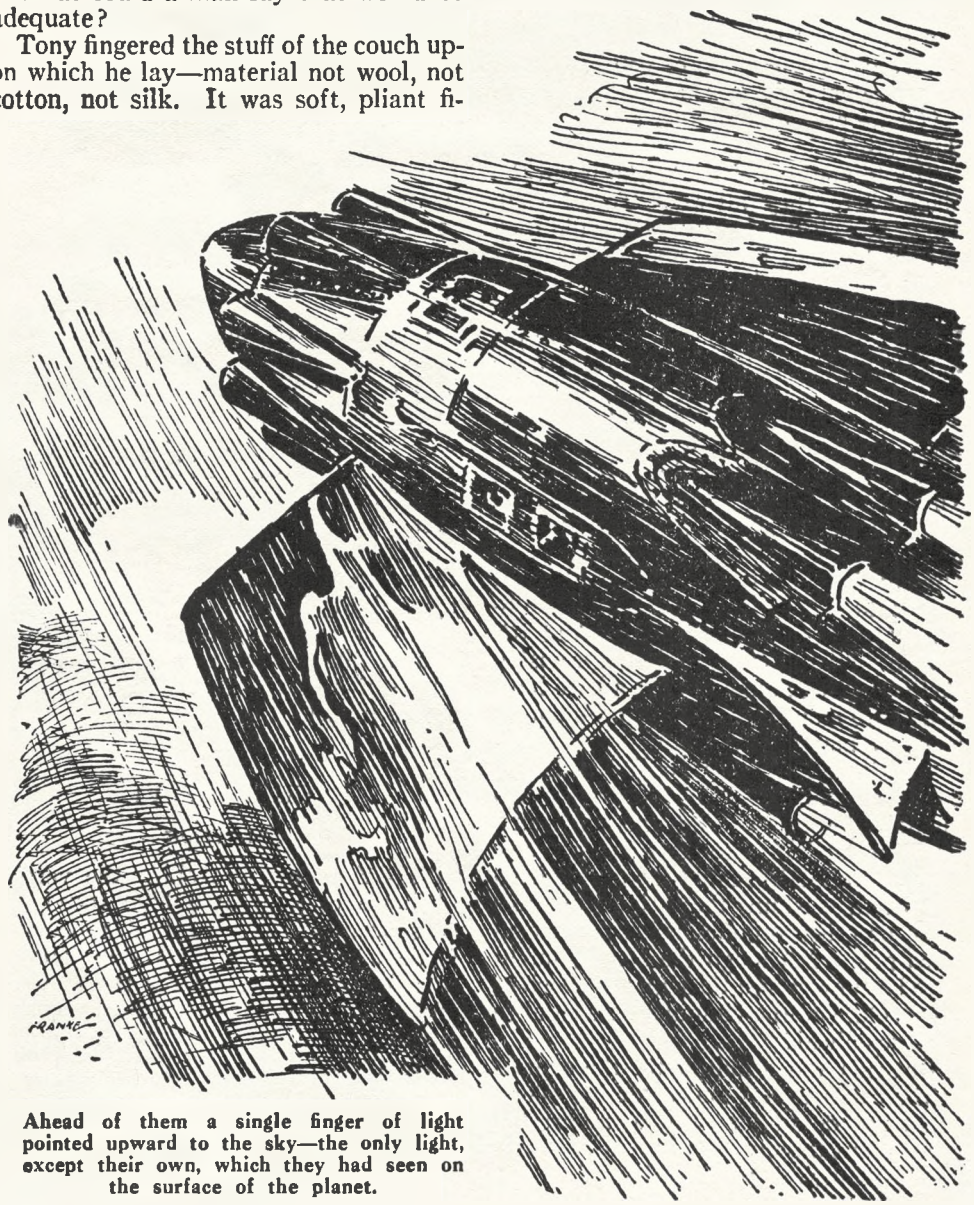
Eliot was writing so intently and absorbedly that he did not know that Tony was awake. They were in utter stillness; not a sound nor a stir in the Sealed City; and Tony lay quiet watching his companion attempting to deal through words with the wonders they had encountered.

What could a man say that would be adequate?

Tony fingered the stuff of the couch upon which he lay—material not wool, not cotton, not silk. It was soft, pliant fiber, unidentifiable. How old? A million years old, perhaps, in rigidly reckoned time; but not five years old, probably, in the practical period of its use.

It might have been new a million years ago, just before Bronson Beta was torn from its sun; thereafter the time that passed merely preserved it. It was in the utter cold and dark of space. Not even air brushed it. The air was frozen solid. Then this planet found our sun; and time, which aged materials, was resumed.

So it was with all the stuff which Eliot and he had collected; those objects might be a million years old, and yet new!



Ahead of them a single finger of light pointed upward to the sky—the only light, except their own, which they had seen on the surface of the planet.

Eliot halted his writing and arose; and glancing at Tony, saw he was awake.

"Hello."

"Hello. How long you been up?"

"Quite a while."

"You would be," complained Tony admiringly. It had been late in the long night, and both had been utterly exhausted, when they lay down to sleep. "It's the third day, isn't it?"

"That's right."

"We ought to go back now."

"Yes," agreed Eliot, "I suppose so. But how can we?"

Tony was sitting up. "How can we leave?" he agreed. "But also, how can we stay—without letting Cole Hendron and the rest of them know?"

"We can come back, of course," Eliot James reluctantly assented.

"Or we may find another city or something else."

"By 'something else,' do you mean the place where 'they' all went, Tony? God, Tony, doesn't it get you? Where did they go? Not one of them—nor the bones of one of them! And all this left in order."

HE stood at the table and sifted in his fingers the kernels of a strange grain. Not wheat, not corn, not rice nor barley nor rye; but a starchy kernel. They both had tasted it.

"There's millions of bushels of this, Tony. Should we say 'bushels' or, like the Bible, 'measures?' Well, we know there's millions of measures of this that we've already found. If it's food—and what else could it be?—we've solved our problem of provender indefinitely. And it's foolish to have our people improvising shelter and equipment when all we have to do is to move into—this. Here's equipment we never dreamed of!"

"Yes," said Tony. "Yes." But he remembered that contest that already had divided the camp. Did the emigrants from the earth dare to move into the city when found? Also, could the people from the earth sustain themselves on this grain or other supplies left by the vanished people? Though the kernels might have been preserved through the epoch of utter cold, had the vitamins—essential to life—remained?

But that was a matter for the experts of the camp to test and to decide. Tony could not doubt his duty to report the tremendous discovery.

"We'll leave today, Tony," Eliot pleaded, "but not until later. Let's look about once more."

And Tony agreed; for he too could not bear yet to abandon the amazements of the Sealed City.

It was later than they had planned, when at last they had loaded their ship with the objects—comprehensible and incomprehensible—which they had chosen to carry back to Hendron and his comrades. The sun—the old sun of the shattered world, the new sun of Bronson Beta—was low when Tony drew down once more the great metal ring which closed again the gate of the Sealed City.

"Let's not fly back to the camp by the path we came," said Eliot James.

"No," agreed Tony. "Let's loop to the south before we cut back to the seacoast."

They were in the air again, supported on the rushing golden stream of fire that emerged from their rocket-tubes. They flew through the darkness, occasionally casting upon the ground underneath the bright ray of their searchlight, and still more often thrusting it ahead of them into the gloom. There were no lights anywhere beneath them to indicate that people lived or moved or had their being there.

Long after midnight they flew across what they judged to be either a huge lake or a great inland arm of the sea.

Toward morning they were planning to alight and rest before continuing their adventures, when suddenly they were transfixed. Not in the east, where the first gray bars of the rising sun might be expected to appear, but ahead of them, to the south, a single finger of light pointed upward to the sky—the only light except their own, and except the weird inhuman illumination of the great domed city, which they had seen on the surface of the planet.

CHAPTER VI

Salvation

THEY were approaching the vertical beam of light at a high speed, but no sooner had its unnatural appearance made a mark in Tony's consciousness than his hands leaped for the controls, and the plane slowed as much as was possible—he'd cut down its elevation.

He turned to James: "What do you think it is?"

"It looks like a searchlight pointed straight up in the air."

"There seems to be a ridge between us and where it comes from."

"Right," James shouted back to him.

Tony made a gesture which outlined the process of landing the plane, and James nodded.

When they had come upon the great bubble that covered the city, it had been daylight, and there had been no sign of life about it; but light implied an intelligent agency, and besides, it was night, and their sense of caution was stirred by the very primordial influence of darkness.

NOW the plane was skimming low over the empty desert, and in the light of their abruptly switched-on beacon, they could make out racing beneath them a flat aridity.

There was no choice of spots on which to land. The thunder of the tubes had been cut off as Tony turned a switch, and his voice sounded very loud when he said: "How about it?"

"Let 'er go!" James answered, and an instant later they were racing over the ground, stirring up a cloud of dust that had been undisturbed for millennia.

They stopped. They stepped out.

The night around them was warm and clear. Its distant darknesses were weaving with the perpetual aurora of Bronson Beta. Far ahead of the waste in which the plane lay, the single finger of light pointed unwavering toward the stars.

"Shall we wait for day?" Tony asked.

Eliot James looked at the illuminated dial of his wrist-watch. "It'll be several hours in coming yet," he said after a pause. He grinned. "I've learned how to tell time by this watch in a mathematical process as complicated as the theory of relativity."

Tony did not smile at James' whimsy. He was staring at the light. "I should say, from the way it spreads, it must come together in some sort of a lens or reflector a couple of hundred feet below the other side of the ridge. If there's anybody around the base of it, I don't think they saw or heard us coming. If they saw anything, it could easily be mistaken for a meteor." He was silent.

James spoke his thoughts in the quiet of the desert night. "It may be four miles away—it may be six. The walking's pretty good; but the point is—shall we leave our ship?"

"I wonder—have we got time to get there and back before it's light?"

"Meaning the top of the ridge?"

"Exactly."

James squinted at the barren black edge of land traced upon the brief width of the light beam. "Plenty."

Tony made no further comment, but started walking through the night. They walked steadily and rapidly. The ground was sandy, and there were no large stones in it, although once or twice their ankles were nearly turned by large pebbles. They said no more. It might have been interesting to their biographers to note also that neither of them had mentioned their safe landing in the hazards of darkness and unknown terrain. That was like each of them. When you had to take a chance, you took it. When you made it, there was nothing more to be said.

They walked for half an hour before the flat plain, the arid waste, began to rise. In the dark they noticed the inclination more by the increase of their breathing than by the change in the strain on their muscles. Presently, however, the upward pitch became steep, and they realized that they were traversing a series of bare undulant ledges. They went more cautiously then, in their imaginings and their fears, not daring to use flashlights, but feeling for each step—sometimes even moving upward with the aid of their hands.

They knew for several minutes precisely when they would reach the top, and they slowed their pace to a crawl.

A breeze fanned their faces. They stepped up over the last rocky surface, and unconsciously moving on tiptoe, crossed it so they could look into the valley beyond.

Because neither of them was conventionally religious, because both of them were thunderstruck by what they saw, they cursed, fluently and sibilantly, in the night on the ridge.

AT their feet, not more than a mile away—so close that the purring of machinery was faintly audible—a single searchlight turned its unwinking eye upon the heavens. In the diffused light around the great lamp they were able to see many things. A huge cylinder, a cylinder like their own Ark but larger, lay toppled upon its side, crippled and riven. Near the cylinder was an orderly group of shelters. Standing beside the searchlight, apparently talking to each other, were doll-like figures of human beings.

"It's our other people!" Tony said, and his voice choked.

Eliot James gripped his arm. "Maybe not."

"But it must be!"

"It's about the same size, but how can you be sure? Those people who flew

over a few nights ago and didn't like us, may have come up in it. All the ships that were built to attempt this flight must have looked more or less alike."

"Come on," Tony said.

"Quietly, then."

The minutes were like hours. Both men found themselves slipping down the opposite side of the ridge, holding their breath lest their panting might be overheard in the distance, and trembling whenever a fragment of rock fell. Their thoughts were identical. If the space ship which lay wrecked beyond the searchlight was the carrier of enemies, their presence must never be known. But if it was the ship which had embarked from Michigan with themselves—if that beacon stabbing the night was a signal of distress—and what else could it be?—then—

Then they dared not think any further. They were on level ground now, sluicing through the blackness like Indians, alert, ready to run, ready to throw themselves on the ground. They were half a mile from the two figures at the light. Both of them were men; both of them had their backs turned.

AT that distance Tony and Eliot could see how horribly the space ship had been mangled when it descended. There was a great scar on the earth where it must have struck first and tipped over. Its forward end had plowed into the ground, cutting a prodigious furrow and piling at its nose a small mountain of earth and stone. The metal of which it had been made was cracked back in accordion-like pleats. Whether they were friends or enemies, their arrival on Bronson Beta had been disastrous.

That quarter-mile was cut to five hundred yards. They could see each other's faces shining palely in the radiance of the searchlight. They crept forward; the five hundred yards became four, three.

Suddenly, to the astonishment of Eliot James, Tony emitted a wild bellow which woke echoes from every corner of the night, rose to his feet and rushed across the earth toward the light. Eliot James followed him—and presently understood.

Tony's first shout had been inarticulate, but as he ran now, he called: "Ransdell! *Ransdell!* Oh, my God! It's me—Tony! Tony Drake! We've found you at last!"

And Eliot James, running like a deer, saw one of the men at the light turn around, lift his hand, try to say something, fall forward in a faint.

TEN minutes later, only ten minutes, and yet to two hundred and eighteen human souls that ten minutes had marked the beginning of salvation. They were all out now on the bare earth of Bronson Beta. Everyone was awake—all the lights were shining. The cheers still rose sporadically. Ransdell had come to, and was still rocking in the arms of Tony when he did not unclasp him long enough to embrace Eliot James. The crowd of people, delirious with joy, was trying to touch them and talk to them. All the crowd, that is, except those who had not yet recovered from the terrible smash-up of the landing—and those who would never recover.

Ransdell had fainted for the first time in his life out of pure joy, pure ecstasy, and out of cosmic fatigue. He had scrambled to his feet in time to meet Tony's rush toward him. They had not exchanged many coherent words as yet—just, "Glad to see you," "Great!" "Are you all right?" Things like that. Ransdell had managed to say, "Hendron?" Tony had been able to answer, jubilantly: "Made it all right. Everybody well and safe."

Then Ransdell succeeded in reducing his command to a momentary quiet. He said: "Tony has told me that the Ark made the trip and landed safely, and that everybody aboard her is all right."

Again the cheering rose and echoed in the night. Again people rushed forward by the score to shake Tony's hand. Jack Little was there, bandaged and grinning. Peter Vanderbilt, apparently calm but blowing his nose in a suspicious manner. Jack Taylor was there too, and Smith and Greve and a hundred other people whose faces had become the faces of friends for Tony and Eliot James in the past two years. Somebody brought from the mêlée of dunnage that had spilled out of the split-open space ship two tubs. Upon them Tony and Ransdell stood.

By waving their arms and smiling in the flood of light which had been turned on over the encampment, they made it plain the whole night could not be spent in cheering and crying. They made it plain by shouting through their dialogue that they had better trade information.

This thrilling account of the marvels encountered by the emigrants from earth in this new world continues with mounting interest in the next, the January, issue.

"More exciting than war!" decided the man behind the gun while the fight was on.

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

Pilot's Holiday

By WILLIAM F. STURM and CHARLES E. COX

DAN CHICKERING taxied the plane he had flown all the long, tiring Sunday over to the concrete apron for another load of passengers. Rebellion was in his heart. He felt as though he wanted to take the old crate ten thousand feet up, put it into a power dive and welcome the oblivion such action would speedily bring.

Two men got out of his ship and a woman and her daughter got in. "I might as well be a squirrel in a cage—flying round and round this old field!" Dan mused bitterly.

He taxied away from the surging crowd and turned into the wind. Ships landed to the left of him and to the right, but he picked a hole and gave her the gun. "One thing about it," he communed with himself, "when I get off the ground I don't have to talk or smile—no silly questions to answer."

But, oh, for a vacation—to get away from it all, even for a week! Not simply to get away, either, but to fly for hours, without coming to earth every fifteen minutes! To feel the rush of clear cold air, ten thousand feet up, instead of the dust-filled, day-in-and-day-out of passenger-hopping—to fly by map and compass once again—really to fly some place, somewhere with a real mission, instead of this squirrel-cage business of round and round, which any rookie pilot could do as well as he.

The future held no outlook for him. He was a Prometheus of the air, chained to a Middle States Airways port, doomed forever and ever to hop passengers off the ground, whirl them about for a brief interval and then bring them back again.

Back on earth again, he cleared his ship of mother and daughter. A gangling ticket-boy in a red sweater came running up. He fumbled at his trousers pocket and produced a telegram. "Just come!" he blurted, jerking his head backward toward the operations office.

"I've been expecting it," Dan told him sourly. "From Admiral Byrd, no doubt. Wants me as chief pilot on his next Polar expedition."

"Aw, honest?" the boy asked.

Dan tore open the envelope and read: *"Can you see me at the Lincoln Hotel tonight, on a matter that may interest you?"*

The signature, *John Stone,* meant nothing to Dan. Neither did the wire, for that matter, but he would go.

TWO hours later he knocked at the door of the downtown hotel room. "I'm Chickering," he announced.

The young man who had opened the door said cordially: "I'm Stone. Come in, won't you?"

The two were quite in contrast as they clasped hands. Chickering, still in his knickers, stood out strongly, his body expanding from a small waist to a good pair of shoulders. The full pillar of his neck held a large head crowned with harsh, curly hair.

The other seemed taller, but it was the slimness of his figure, clad in well-tailored tweeds, that caused the illusion. Their eyes were keenly alike—grayish-blue and sharply clear. Both faces possessed a certain quality that suggested sunbright horizons.

SEATED, Stone spread a map carefully across the writing-desk. As he did, he glanced at his watch. "It is eight-thirty now," he said. "If you go with me, we take the eleven-o'clock train for Chicago, so I'll have to talk fast, since you'll wish to make some provisions for going. You don't know me from Adam's off ox, but I am a friend of Tom Bennett's. Tom said he flew with you in France, and with the mail, and that you were the man I needed. First, my father is Randolph Stone, of Stone and Company, Chicago—that's not to brag, but to identify myself."

"Never heard of him," Chickering said crisply. "But that doesn't matter."

"Here's the story, briefly," the other began, as though he had not heard the interruption. "Two little children are held prisoner in a camp up in the wilds of Ontario. Kidnaped. Their father in Chicago is one of my best friends, and I'm sort of godfather to the youngsters. He has been directed to have a hundred thousand in cash, to be paid on demand to some one who will get in touch with him in Chicago. If he makes an appeal to the police, the children will be killed; there is no doubt of that. If he pays the money to these thugs, there is no assurance they *won't* be killed, either. There have been cases like that. The messenger will approach him for the money in four days. My plan is to rescue them. We just must, that's all.

"It so happens that in the camp where the children are held, there is a pilot friend of mine. The circumstances under which he got there are of his own making. He got mixed up with the booze racket. Can't live without thrills, and running booze by plane gave him the proper ones. He is apt to act first and think afterward. If not, he never would have got into the racket. I'm not so concerned about him—that is, how or why he is where he is—but we must get the children away safely, and he has made it possible for us to do it.

"The outfit for which he has been running booze flew to Chicago, abducted the children, and returned to camp with them. I gather he protested that booze-running was O. K. with him but that kidnaping was not. The big boss thereupon made him virtually a prisoner in the camp. He'll be killed, without any doubt, to keep him quiet, if the ransom goes through successfully.

"I have a plane at Chicago, ready to leave on a moment's notice. I am not experienced enough as a pilot to go up there and handle the plane in the way it will have to be handled. I want you to take complete charge of the expedition. It will take not over three days; if we're lucky, maybe only two. If we are not lucky, we may stay up there forever—full of bullet-holes. How Ted McGarry got this letter out to me, I don't know, but here it is."

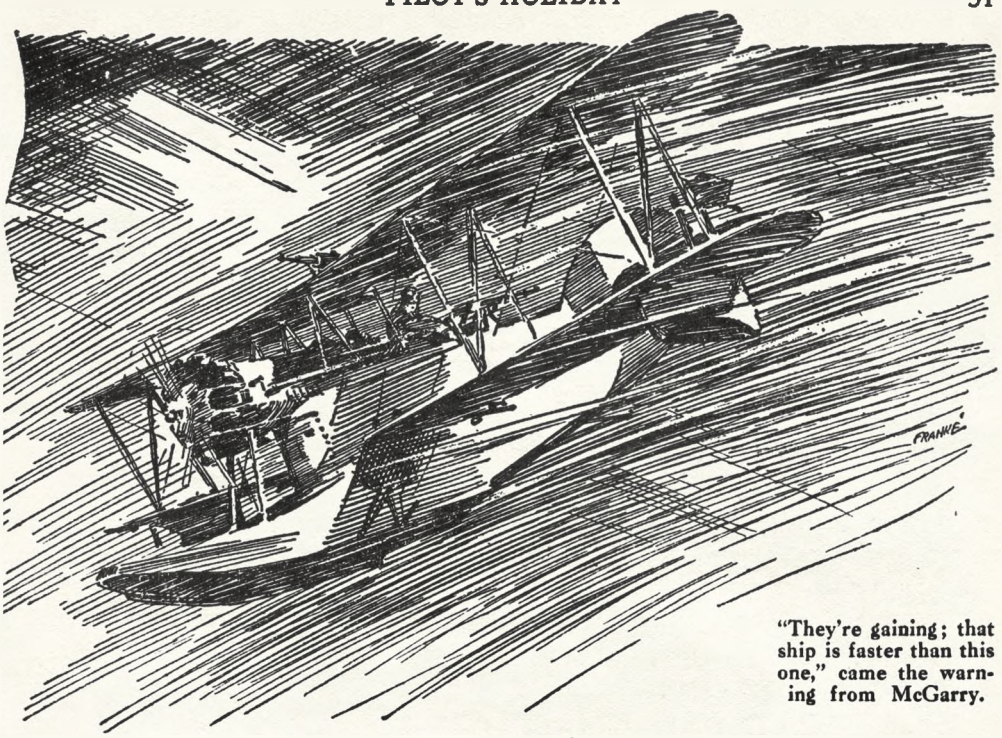
"That would not be hard, if it came out by plane. The booze racket turns up funnier things than that," Dan said, as he reached for the letter. He ran through the first page, and then focused his mind on the last one:

"Get a provincial air-map of Jackfish section 21-J. Draw a line course—but don't fly that course—125 miles out of the Soo at 38 degrees on the compass, variation counted. The line will go through a large unnamed narrow L-shaped lake. To the north of this lake is another unnamed one, like a spraddled-out W. The arm of this W lake close to the L lake is just over the ridge of land from the camp. Sketch will help."

Dan stopped reading long enough to look at the cleverly drawn map. Then he resumed reading:

"We have several cabins. I'm in the smallest one at night. Children in one near by. Get here on the 3d. Fly over at noon and I'll have a white cloth panel on the roof of my cabin—my shirt out to dry. Fly a line between Lorham and Woman rivers, and they'll think you're the Ranger patrol, which goes over about that time. Study far end of W lake as you go over. Come back at dusk and *glide* into lake, so they won't hear you. Unless I'm dead, I'll meet you on the lake shore near camp at 3 A. M., next day."

DAN stood silent as he finished the letter. A breath of night wind came through the open window and tugged at the draperies with eager, restless pulls. The stars were shining in the black sky and the noise of traffic came up in subdued tones from the street. Dan shut his eyes for a moment, as he visioned flying over cool forests and misty lakes.



"They're gaining; that ship is faster than this one," came the warning from McGarry.

He turned to Stone: "What ship?" he asked in a husky whisper.

"Traveler, 425-horse, cabin job. It cruises at one hundred and twenty-five, and is sweet to handle."

"I'll go," came the answer, again in a husky whisper. As he spoke the words, Dan Chickering felt the Middle States Airways port, with its dust and grime, its childishly interested passengers and the smoke of the city, slip behind him—as it would in a ship cruising at one hundred and twenty-five miles an hour.

"It will be dangerous." Stone turned to him, his face suddenly much older. "I'm not asking you to do it for nothing. I have a certified check in my pocket for two thousand dollars."

Dan Chickering smiled. He had lived on danger in France. And after that, ages and ages ago, it seemed, he had lived on danger when he humped the mail through at night out of New York for Cleveland. After all, what was danger compared to freedom, freedom from this squirrel-cage—freedom, with the horizon stretching limitless, with the wind in one's face, and the steady throbbing of the motor right ahead!

In the next five minutes Dan had called the operations manager of the airport and obtained leave to be gone four days. Two hours later the two were on the night train for Chicago. . . .

The thin gray of dawn edged the rim of Lake Michigan. At the seaplane ramp inside the breakwater, a big Traveler rode lightly the misty water. The powerful motor was turning over slowly, warming the oil that had congealed within its steel ribs.

Tom Bennett sat in the pilot's seat, looking back into the cabin, where Chickering and Stone were making a final check of their equipment. The rear seat had been removed from the plane, and the space taken up with camping duffle and a folding boat.

Bennett arose from the pilot's seat and got out of the plane. John Stone grasped his hand. "If you don't hear from us in four days, Tom, you will know what to do," he said quietly.

Dan moved forward to the pilot's seat; John Stone settled himself to Dan's right. The towering ramparts of office buildings were tipped with the glow of the morning sun. Ahead lay limitless sky and water, meeting at the end of one's vision. Inside the breakwater the surface was smooth; but beyond was the lift and sag of the open swell.

WHAT lay beyond? What did it matter? Dan glanced back at the paraphernalia in the rear of the plane, and smiled. He was no longer a cage-bound squirrel—he was a bird of passage.

The light wind was from the south. In position, Dan nudged the throttle and

the ship began to gather way. Dan watched the engine revolutions mount. He checked his oil temperature and pressure—let his gaze sweep the rest of the instruments. Soon the water ceased to swish around the pontoons, and the Traveler began climbing up into the blue.

Dan turned to look at Tom Bennett, a tiny figure fading into the landscape. Then the vast towers of stone and steel faded into the haze. Ahead stretched the limitless blue floor of the water, and the lighter blue dome of the sky.

IN his heart Dan realized that the danger to the two little children up in the Ontario woods was great, though what happened to Ted McGarry, a prisoner of the gangsters with whom he had formerly allied himself, was not a matter of serious concern to Dan, for he was a great believer in paying for the music to which one danced.

He concentrated on the compass, to hold it to twenty-eight degrees. His thoughts were far ahead of the plane, where a lake, like a spraddled-out W, lay at peace, reflecting the pointed tip of spruce and pine, and where a man awaited them with a piece of white cloth on a cabin roof. . . . North to Lorham, then fifty-two degrees toward Woman River. . . . Certainly was a sweet motor—oil-pressure, ninety pounds—engine revs, sixteen hundred—altitude, eight thousand feet.

Below, a toy boat trailed a feather of white. Dan pointed it out to Stone. The latter nodded, then fished about for a pack of cigarettes and lighted up. The motor acquired a monotonous *romba-domba-romba-domba* roll of sound. . . .

At the Soo they loaded up with one hundred and fifty gallons of gas—six hundred miles of fuel. A quick take-off and the nose of the plane pointed northward again.

After forty minutes of flying, Lorham lay beside the railway below. Dan swung the compass course to fifty-two degrees—bearing more to the east. There were no landmarks now, except ranges of hills and frothy white rivers. Lakes began to appear ahead, like splashes of quicksilver.

Dan throttled the motor for a moment to make himself heard more easily. "Get out your paper and pencil. Get any landmarks that will help us locate the camp tonight, and mark the cabins. I'll fly over at about two thousand feet." He looked at his watch. "In twenty minutes now we should be seeing the long L-shaped lake."

He glanced at the instrument-board. It was no place for a bad motor; if he ever needed perfection, he needed it now. The tachometer showed sixteen hundred revs; oil-pressure and temperature, O. K.

The altimeter slipped down the scale—four thousand feet, three thousand, twenty-five hundred. A small round lake slid by under them.

The country below was a vast, lonesome gray-green wilderness.

Dan pointed forward as he eased up on the throttle: "That's it ahead. There's the tip of the W lake. There's smoke! See, there's the camp!" He was amazed at the thrill he got out of hitting the spot right on the nose, when he had never expected to do anything else.

They flew a few points to the north, the motor drumming steadily. To outward appearance, it was a plane with a destination to make before dark, and with no passengers with thought of smoke from camps or white cloth panels on roofs. But the panel was there—a triangular patch on the cabin roof almost under the trees.

"Nothing wrong yet," Stone said, as he gazed earnestly out of the open window on his right. The sketch on the paper grew in detail. The cabins, the line of a path, a blasted tree, a jutting outcrop of rock in the W lake nearest the camp. Chickering was making a mental map—a trick he had learned long ago. He could carry it with him when decisions must be made and acted on in a flash of time.

NO plane rode at anchor on the lake, no signs of life were apparent; but the two in the plane knew men were below them, watching, listening to the steady drone of the motor. McGarry would be one of the listeners.

Chickering pointed to the map lashed to a board alongside his seat. He indicated a lake—long, and with no islands in it. (Thank heaven for the thoroughness of these Canadian mapmakers!) A good place to land, and a good spot to take off, especially if the wind had dropped by the time they wished to take off again.

Gradually Dan dropped the nose of the plane lower over the wide loneliness of water and forest. Ducks squattered up in fright as the plane circled to a landing. The ship shot across the quiet

Sheets of rain spilled over Dan as he waded out with Stone's limp form in his arms and started to swim.

lake and slowed with a cool rushing sound as the pontoons engaged the water.

The pilot raised his body to relax from the strain of long hours. "It's three-thirty," he said. "Let's taxi up to that cove and boil some coffee; we'll need it before dawn tomorrow."

The lake narrowed. At a rocky ledge Dan stopped the motor. They stepped out and paddled the pontoons away from the natural dock. The silence rushed at them, after the hours of throbbing engine-roar.

"Sunset at five-fifteen," Dan thought aloud. "We should be leaving about that time and get altitude."

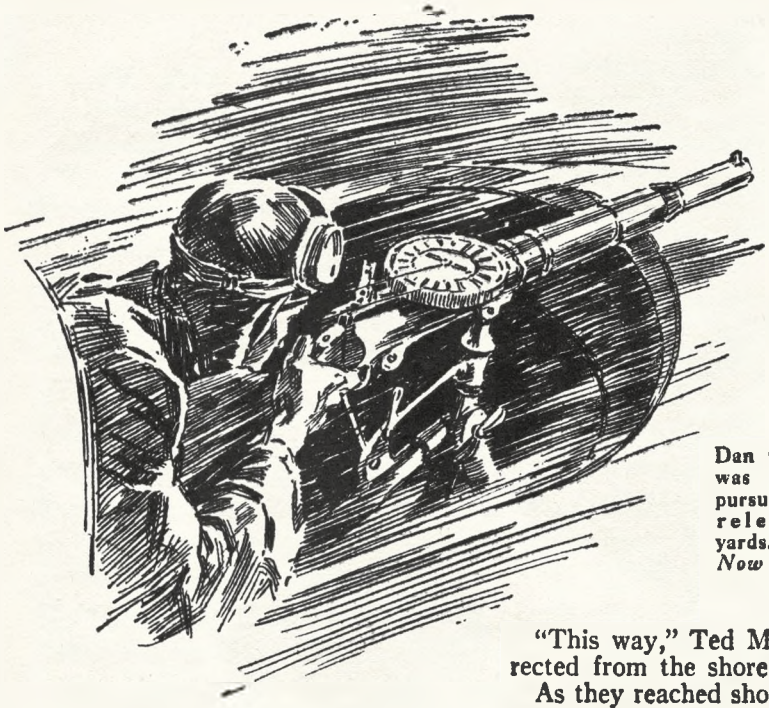
Stone climbed back into the plane in a short while. Presently he opened a hatch amidships and his head and shoulders appeared. A machine-gun mount swung upward; on it was the drum-shaped butt of an old-time Lewis gun.

"Unload it—then load it again ready to fire," Dan called. "Get familiar with it."

It had rather amused him to find Tom Bennett's old war souvenir in the plane—but it might come in handy, if this Smith gang was as bad as McGarry's letter had indicated.

The sun slipped down the western sky as they waited, throwing long shadows across the dark water. The hushed spruce limned the shore, their pointed tips clear against the color of the setting sun. Stone put the gun in order, his movements making little ripples run out from the pontoons. Chickering sipped his coffee and ruminated on life's oddities.

THEY took off again at sundown and climbed to five thousand feet. An early star hung behind in the east, as the spraddled-out W lake gleamed like dull silver ahead. Dan throttled the motor, leaned forward and flipped off both magnetos. The earth faded into



Dan Chickering's heart was pounding as the pursuing plane came on relentlessly. Fifty yards. . . . Forty. . . . *Now was the time!*

a dull carpet and the lake dulled to polished steel. A tiny prick of light marked the camp. Lower they glided—lower—until the lisping swish of water about the floats marked the landing.

"Great—fine!" Stone whispered, his hand on Dan's shoulder. "Let's let her drift a moment now, and listen."

No sound broke the quiet. As the plane's speed slackened, Dan nosed it toward the bank. Stepping out on to the pontoons, he looked things over. They made fast in a tiny bay under overhanging trees. The small boat, inflated and made ready, revolvers checked and loaded, they waited. The air chilled and the silence was oppressive.

"This is what gets me," Stone whispered, shivering, "—this waiting."

After an interminable time, they started paddling slowly over the misty water, hugging the shore-line. Finally they came to the promontory of rock that ran out near the camp. "A hundred yards now, John, and we start walking," Chickering breathed.

NOISELESSLY the boat slipped toward the bank. Wraiths of mist floated eerily past, chilling them to the bone. Then there came a voice, low and husky:

"John!"

Dan felt the startled movement of his companion at the sound.

"O. K., Ted," Stone answered softly.

"This way," Ted McGarry's voice directed from the shore.

As they reached shore, McGarry whispered: "The camp is three hundred yards over the hill, and there's an overhanging rock above us, like a cave, where we can talk."

"This is Tom Bennett's friend, Dan Chickering," Stone introduced.

Dan's hand was clasped in a firm grip that instinctively made him like Ted McGarry.

"Things have come up," McGarry began. "Turk Smith got in with his plane about an hour after you had passed over this afternoon. The twins were brought in by plane two days ago. I made a terrible mistake flying for Smith. He's a bad actor—booze wasn't so bad, but kidnaping is something different. If they don't get that money they've asked for, the twins will never see Chicago again. It's up to us."

"What's your plan?" The question came crisply from Dan.

"I hardly know," McGarry said helplessly. "They have a guard in the cabin with the children."

"As I see it," Stone cut in excitedly, "the best thing to do is for us to return to the Soo and get help. We can't handle this gang ourselves."

"The best thing to do is for one of us to fix that guard. Give me the lay-out." Chickering had assumed command.

"Easter, the guard, sleeps in the shanty-room next to the twins. Turk and five others sleep in the main cabin."

"All right." Dan spoke tensely, getting to his feet. "It's four o'clock now. John, you watch with McGarry while I'm inside. If things go wrong, one of you go as tight as you can for the ship."

The three stepped out under the trees, feeling their way, McGarry leading. It was a steep climb. The undergrowth shook drops of cold water in their faces. McGarry gave a warning hiss.

"There's the cabin! Easter's room is in this corner."

McGarry and Stone watched Dan's dim form move along the pale outline of the cabin wall. Shortly thereafter there was a muffled bumping in the cabin, as though a padded footstool had been overturned. Presently Chickering stood beside them again.

"I'll go with you, John, while you get the children," he said softly.

Together the three men moved forward. "There's the door," Dan whispered. "I'll watch the other cabin while you get them."

As Stone disappeared into the door of the cabin, there was a low outcry; then he appeared leading the twins,—a boy and a girl six or seven years old, Dan judged,—by the hand.

"Down the hill!" Dan admonished, as he reached the group. McGarry joined them and they scrambled down the slope. Halfway, Dan halted: "McGarry, you take the children and get to the plane. Warm the motor. We'll meet you upshore. John, you and I will wait here for thirty minutes in case the camp is aroused."

Chickering led the way up the slope again, with John trailing. The red was showing in the east and a morning wind was coming over the hill. "I want to be sure Easter is quiet," Dan said, "for if he gets out the jig is up. He'll wake everyone else."

AS they turned the corner of the wall, they saw a man standing between the two cabins. He was holding a hand to his head.

"I've got a gun, Easter," Dan said in a low threatening tone. "Walk toward me."

With an oath, Easter moved; a whipping shot tore past Dan's head and a bullet *chunked* in a log overhead.

"Behind the cabin!" Dan called to Stone.

Singing bullets hit the wall. Dan shot point-blank at the window in the large cabin, where he had seen a man's head. Bullets came from other directions, indicating that the gangsters had left the cabins and taken to the woods.

As Dan and John started to run, a man came out of the trees to the right. "I'll take him," Dan shouted as he halted and squeezed the trigger. The gangster went down on one knee, then fell prone.

Stone went down even as Dan heard the *plunk* of a bullet in flesh. "I'm all right," Stone mumbled, as he got slowly to his feet. He swayed and caught Dan's arm. "Hit like a ton. Not bad—but—better—get to—the cave."

THE firing had quieted as they left the cabin wall, but now it began again. Bullets shook the underbrush and glanced from the rocks to whine on over the lake. Dan shot twice at a man moving among the trees.

As they gained the cave, a measured staccato crackled on the slope behind and the lake churned from the fire.

"A submachine-gun," Stone panted. "We're in for it now—but we can hold them here. —Here it is," he said irrelevantly, as he opened his shirt. It was only a flesh wound and they plugged it quickly with a piece of clean handkerchief.

Above the rim of rock overhead the machine-gun sent bursts of singing lead. Crouching behind a huge boulder that lay balanced on the ledge, Dan returned the fire. He concentrated on a shadowy clump of undergrowth, where he had seen movement. Stone crawled up alongside him and opened fire as a man ran from the protection of one tree to another. At the shot, the fellow fell, though it was too dark under the trees to see whether or not he crawled away.

"Morning red," said Stone, "brings the rain down on our head. Look at the west."

Dan pulled his head down from the corner of the boulder and looked around. Great thunderheads were piling up in the sky, tipped with red, awesome with wrathy black below.

The fire up the slope above opened with redoubled fury. From down the bay, now white-capped with the wind, came the Traveler plane. It rode the water like a silent, white-winged gull, the motor noise drowned by the rush of the storm. The ship heeled to before the cave like a gallant little man-of-war, the tail shoreward. For an instant the wind seemed to lay, and the trees hung hushed and expectant. Then with a

shout from McGarry, the hatch flew open, the thin snout of the Lewis gun poked out, and over the cave went a ripping, crackling line of blue.

"Glory be!" Dan shouted. "Bennett had tracers in it. That'll throw the fear into 'em!" He turned to Stone: "Let's get away from here and get aboard. It'll take swimming, but I guess we can make it."

As he turned to lead the way, Stone gasped and fell in a heap. A quick glance up the slope revealed to Dan leaping figures running through the tangled undergrowth. He knelt and gathered Stone in his arms, then bolted down the slope toward the plane. As he reached the water's edge a flash of lightning all but blinded him; then came a reverberating crash of thunder. Sheets of rain spilled over him, as he waded out with the limp form in his arms and started to swim.

McGarry's gun had ceased firing, and as Dan turned to locate the plane it disappeared in the gray sweeping wall of downpouring rain. Far up the slope a man came leaping down toward the cave, shooting at the two figures in the lake; the bullets lashed the water all around them.

Where was the plane? The storm had undoubtedly blown it from shore. Dan's breathing was labored. He could not hold out much longer; the effort of keeping Stone's head above the water was sapping his strength. His hands and arms were numb from the cold. Stone's senseless body had become a leaden thing. Dan turned over on his back for a moment, trying to rest. He felt the urge to cease battling and relax—let everything go. Then he doggedly pulled himself together, and as he breathed, the keen air pierced his tortured lungs like knives.

He half-swallowed a mouthful of water as he momentarily sank beneath the surface. Just then the gray wall of the rain took on a deeper shade, and Dan bumped into a solid substance—a pontoon of the Traveler! Remotely he felt a pull on his arms, as though they were coming out by the roots; then he drifted off into complete oblivion.

WHEN he came to, little Tom McIntosh was patting his cheek. Beside him on the floor of the plane, Stone lay unconscious. Dan twisted his body and saw McGarry at the controls, peering through the rain-beaten windows. Dan felt like standing up. Rising to his feet, he smiled at the little boy and walked forward. His head felt light and his nose burned from the water.

"Taxi-ing into the wind," McGarry said, "trying to keep her out of shallow water."

"Good work," Dan said, as he turned and went back to where Stone lay. The little girl was crying.

"Is Uncle John dead?" the boy asked.

"I should say not," Dan told him. "He just bumped his head on a rock. He'll be all right in a few minutes."

IN his heart was doubt as to the truth of this assertion, but he rolled Stone over one of the bags and forced some water from his lungs, then poured a drink of fiery liquor down his throat. Stone stirred and groaned. In another five minutes he was sitting weakly against the side of the cabin, his eyes closed and his breathing labored. Dan knew he would be all right in time, but mentally he counted him out of any activities in connection with getting away from the gangsters.

Forward, Dan saw that the storm was thinning. The shores of the lake were beginning to take form out of the grayness of the falling rain.

"What do you think of Smith?" Dan asked McGarry.

"He'll follow us, sure—and there is a gun-mount on their ship, too."

"We'd better take off in a hurry, then." Dan took the pilot's seat which McGarry had vacated as they talked. Giving the ship the gun, Dan headed her into the wind as closely as he could without hitting the shore. As the plane gathered speed it lifted and headed southwest. Five minutes, ten minutes passed—still no sign of pursuit. Hope began to rise in Dan's breast.

A shout from McGarry told him what had occurred, even without looking back.

"They're behind us, and coming up fast!" McGarry shouted.

Dan opened the throttle wide, crowding the ship beyond the point he considered advisable.

"They're gaining; that ship is ten miles faster than this one," came the warning from McGarry.

Dan looked back. He knew he was at a disadvantage. His altimeter showed a thousand feet. Perhaps he had made a mistake in flying so low in an endeavor to escape observation. "What's her position?" he asked.

"Three thousand feet up and diving down on us," came the answer.

"Come up and take her over," Dan said calmly. "Fly a straight course."

Hurrying back to the machine-gun hatch, Dan peeped out and saw the pursuer a scant thousand yards away and steadily diving down. Keeping the gun concealed, he cleared the simple shell-stoppage which had occurred when McGarry had been firing the gun; then he placed a full drum of ammunition on the magazine rest.

"You two little folks walk up and stand by Mr. McGarry," he directed the McIntosh twins. After they had got out of the way, he peered through the half-open hatch.

A marked change took place in his features and in the posture of his body; his hands lay on the gun with easy familiarity. The past few years slipped away.... Diving down from the massed clouds came the thin hungry nose of the killer. Fancy painted a black cross on the mottled wings. Dan Chickering's heart was pounding; a pulsing flood of ecstasy flowed through his veins; he wanted to shout and sing. Instead, "Cold turkey," he murmured.

Only three hundred yards now. He could see the other pilot and the gunner standing with helmeted head above the hatch.

One hundred yards.... Seventy-five. The pursuing plane came on relentlessly. Its occupants were sure of the result. The pilot and the gunner were waving and pointing to a lake below. Same old war-stuff, trying to scare the pursued into landing.

Fifty yards.... Forty.... *Now was the time!*

DAN slipped the hatch open, stood up and swung the Lewis gun high, training the thin vicious barrel on the big motor behind, all in one quick movement. The occupants of the plane behind had no time for anything. Dan's fingers squeezed the cunning, well-set trigger. The gun jarred under his hands. The acrid tang of phosphorus from the tracers stung his nostrils with the old familiar smell. Lakes and forests were gone from his mind. Below was a shell-torn country; observation balloons swung in the haze of the battle smoke; the black cross on the ship became plainly marked now.

He saw his tracer-bullets shatter the glass full in the pilot's face. Saw the white line of his fire eat back along the side of the cabin to the gunner, who leaned forward awkwardly, then slid from sight. One wing of the pursuing plane tipped high, as the yellow belly showed; a black pall of smoke billowed from under the motor.

Then the plane began falling, faster and faster, trailing a black banner tongued with red. He watched it crash in the forest below.

THE big Traveler plane was three and a half hours south of the Soo.

McGarry, Stone and the twins were asleep on the cabin floor.

Dan Chickering was at the controls. There was a smile on his face, visible only to a wry-faced gnome who seemed to be sitting on a spark-plug of the throbbing motor, directly ahead.

"It was fun, wasn't it?" smirked the elf on the spark-plug.

"It was better than that," grinned Pilot Dan. "Better than the war, even."

The elf twisted the spark-plug out of the cylinder and crawled into the hole. Just as he disappeared, he thumbed his nose at Pilot Dan and shouted: "You've had your holiday. Now you go back to the squirrel business: 'Tour of the city—two passengers—five dollars!'"

"It was worth it!" Pilot Dan shouted back mentally. Then he turned to his passengers:

"Hey, John and Ted, and you twins! Chicago ahead; wake up!"

The twins flattened their little noses against the windows.

"Something unusual going on!" Dan yelled. "Look at the people and look at the boats!"

"Doing!" Stone said weakly. *"We're* what's doing! They've had my wire from the Soo. Dan, you're a hero. There's Dad on the ramp, standing out from everybody else."

The plane slid down the air gracefully, the pontoons caressing the water, which was as calm as on a sheltered pond. The pilot taxied the plane up to the ramp.

"There's P. J. McIntosh, Tom and 'Lisbeth—your dad's waiting for you. And there's your mother, too!" Stone announced.

"I'll be catching the midnight train back home," Dan said to John as he flipped off his magnetos. His voice sounded strange as he said it.

"You'll *what?*" yelled John Stone. "I have my doubts about your ever going back 'home'!"

"The police got angry; we placated them with water and wine—in bottles and carafes."

The distinguished author of "Beau Geste," "Valiant Dust," and "Blades of the Legion" here gives us another story of the Legionnaire known as Spanish Maine.

The Spanish Prisoner

By PERCIVAL CHRISTOPHER WREN

Illustrated by John Clymer

"I ENJOY these funerals, don't you?" observed Spanish Maine suddenly, as we sat outside the camp watching the ineffably glorious sunset.

It was the sort of thing he would say.

Poor young Schweitzer,—whose funeral it had been,—having decided that he could stand life no longer, had put the muzzle of his rifle into his mouth and his toe into the trigger-guard.

"Did you ever contemplate suicide—really ever get as far as deciding that you would?" inquired Spanish Maine.

"No," I replied. "Did you?"

Spanish Maine laughed.

"Well, naturally I've toyed with the idea lots of times," he said. "Most of us have, *nous autres;* and I did once decide that I would. . . Almost did it, I was so annoyed."

"Annoyed!" I observed.

"Yes. I was so peeved that I nearly cut my throat out of sheer—peevishness. Did you ever hear of Bella Lola?"

"Rather," I replied. "Famous for her jewelry, beauty, amours, dancing and singing."

"Yes," replied Spanish Maine. "In exactly that order too. . . . *Bella Lola!*" he added; I never heard a human voice express a more savage contempt.

For a minute Spanish Maine sat silent, obviously chewing the cud of bitter reflection. Suddenly he laughed, on his usual amused sardonic note.

"*And* the Spanish Prisoner," he said. "Ever hear of the Spanish Prisoner?"

"Yes, I've heard of him too. . . Quite well known in England at one time. He used to write letters from a Spanish dungeon, telling how he had been 'guided' to select you as the recipient of his confidence and of great wealth.

"He had languished forgotten in that dreadful dungeon, for unnumbered years, like Monte Cristo's *Abbé* in the Chateau d'If. And so suddenly had he been torn from his home, that he had had no time to dispose of his property, to make any arrangements, to see his

"La Bella Lola, she called herself."

lawyer, or any member of his family—all, alas, now long dead.

"Only one thing had he had time to do, and that was to hide a priceless diamond necklace that had been the pride and joy and ornament of his beloved wife, who fortunately had died before this calamity came upon him. This necklace he had concealed not a moment too soon as his servant came flying to announce that the police were at the door.

"Rushing out into the garden he had hastily concealed it in a place where it could never be found. Never, by any possible chance or any human being, however clever—except the person who had the secret. Such a person could go there and recover it, with the utmost certainty and ease. . . .

"And a mere ten pounds would buy the secret! The poor old Spanish Prisoner had not long to live, and ten pounds would buy him the few comforts he needed to solace his few remaining days. A faithful old woman, now a half-witted aged crone, once his housekeeper, could be intrusted with the money. It should be sent to the address he gave.

"'You will wonder, dear señor,' the letter would say, 'why I have not told her the secret, and got her to dispose of the necklace for me. The answer is that she would be immediately arrested if she

attempted to sell so valuable a thing. The necklace would be confiscated, and my poor old faithful retainer cast into such a gaol as this—which God forbid!'"

"That's the man," laughed Spanish Maine, "and he must have done a thriving trade, for he persisted for a quarter of a century or more, and operated in almost every country in Europe. The Spanish Prisoner!"

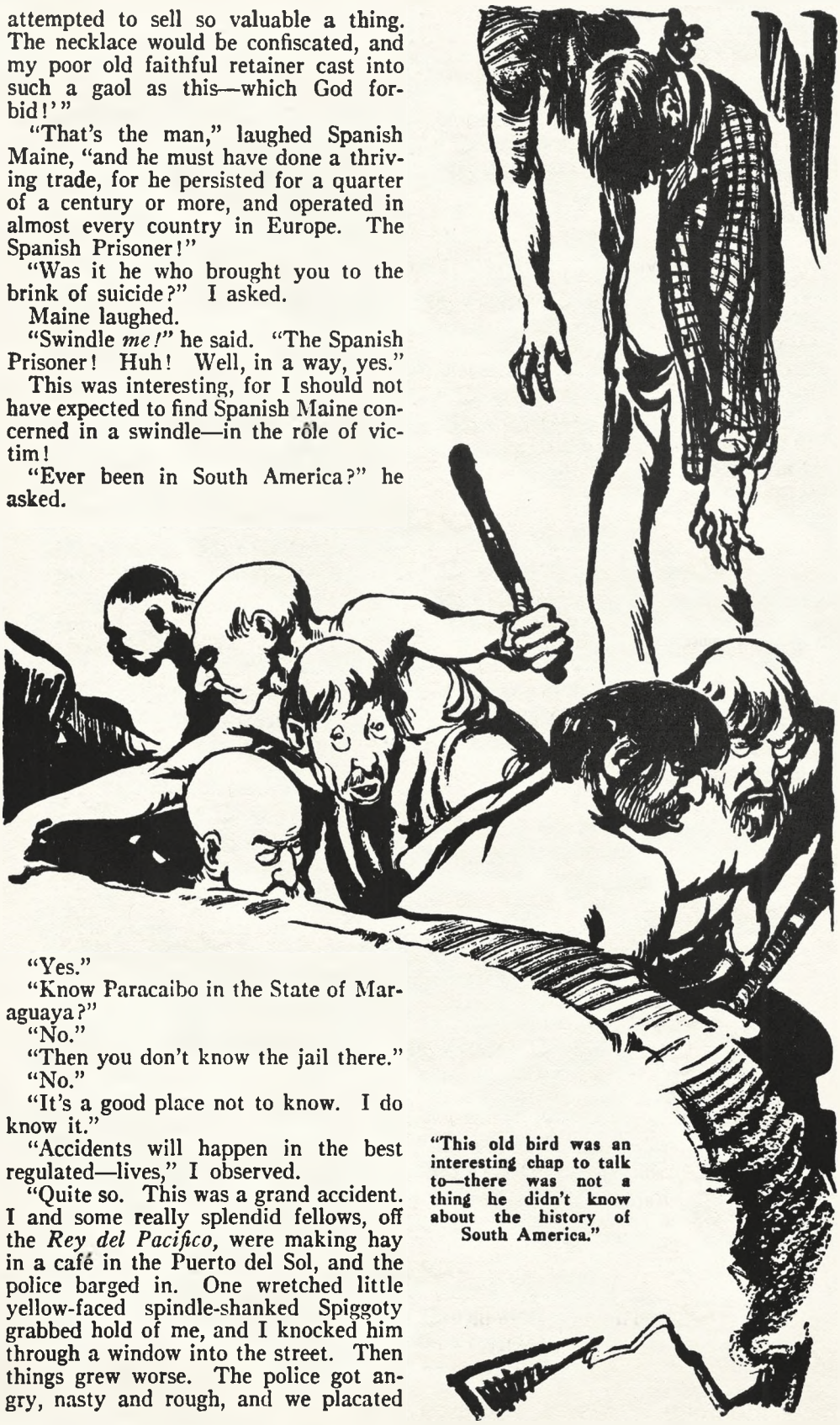
"Was it he who brought you to the brink of suicide?" I asked.

Maine laughed.

"Swindle *me!*" he said. "The Spanish Prisoner! Huh! Well, in a way, yes."

This was interesting, for I should not have expected to find Spanish Maine concerned in a swindle—in the rôle of victim!

"Ever been in South America?" he asked.



"This old bird was an interesting chap to talk to—there was not a thing he didn't know about the history of South America."

"Yes."

"Know Paracaibo in the State of Maraguaya?"

"No."

"Then you don't know the jail there."

"No."

"It's a good place not to know. I do know it."

"Accidents will happen in the best regulated—lives," I observed.

"Quite so. This was a grand accident. I and some really splendid fellows, off the *Rey del Pacifico,* were making hay in a café in the Puerto del Sol, and the police barged in. One wretched little yellow-faced spindle-shanked Spiggoty grabbed hold of me, and I knocked him through a window into the street. Then things grew worse. The police got angry, nasty and rough, and we placated

them with water and wine—in bottles and carafes. That made them worse, and soon it was automatics *versus* knives and iron chairs.

"I don't know how it ended. *I* ended in the famous La Guira jail of Paracaibo; or rather, I began there—began a new life. Awoke to a new life next day, feeling very bad. . . .

"That's a great jail, and when I felt a bit better I wasn't altogether sorry to be there. I like experiences—and this was a real one. . . . Just for a day or two I thought, until I was brought up for trial, got hold of an advocate, and learned whom to square and the least amount that would square him.

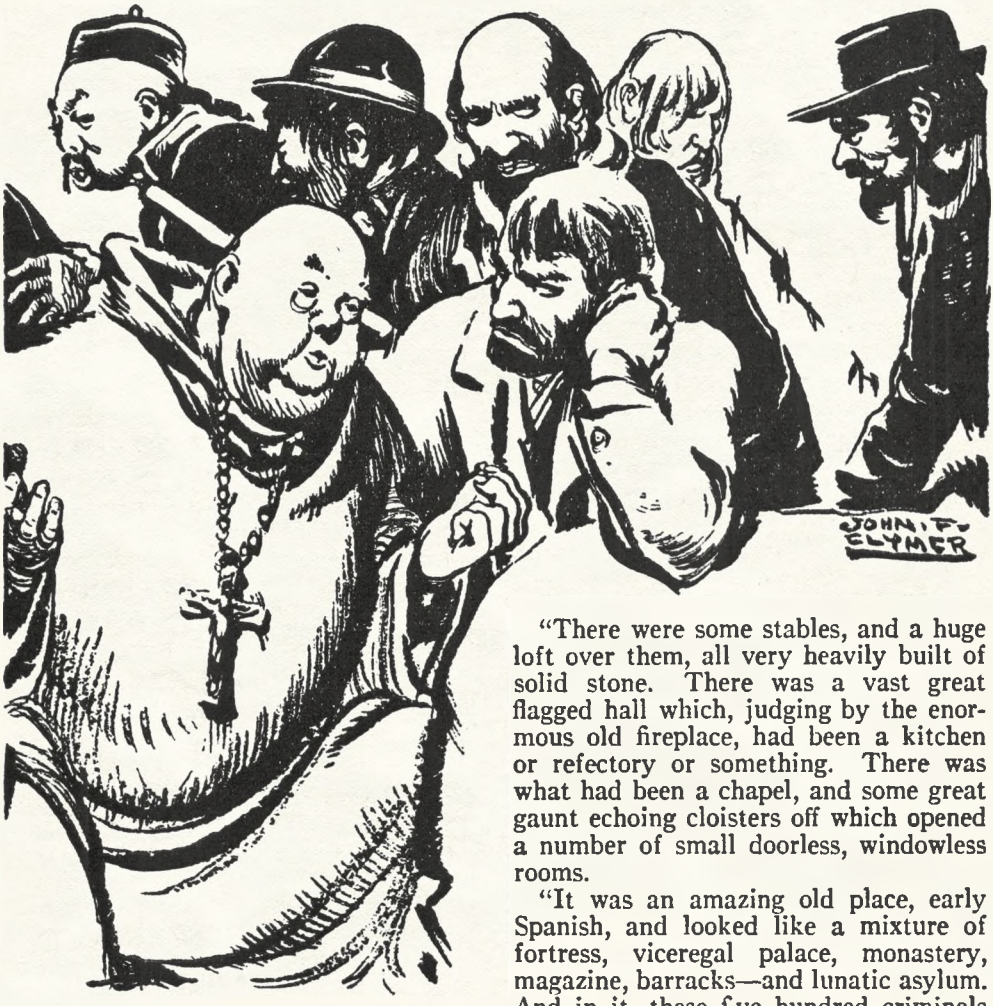
"Yes, I'd seen some queer things in some queer places, but La Guira jail at Paracaibo made the rest seem like girls' school stuff. It was the simplest thing in prisons ever invented. You were thrown through the gates, the gates were shut, and there you were—in prison. No nonsense about registration, fingerprints, head-cropping, measurement-recording, searching, photographing, convict-dress, numbers, cells—you know the sort of thing."

"H'm," I coughed noncommittally.

"No, they never heard of the Bertillon system there, and wouldn't have given a damn for it if they had. All you'd got to do was to go in; and they saw that you stayed in. There was nothing more to it than that. They didn't even feed you.

"There was one soldier, guard, or warder, or whatever you liked to call him, to every fifty convicts. And there were five hundred of those, more or less.

"It was pandemonium, the nearest thing to hell there could possibly be upon this earth. There weren't even cells.



"There were some stables, and a huge loft over them, all very heavily built of solid stone. There was a vast great flagged hall which, judging by the enormous old fireplace, had been a kitchen or refectory or something. There was what had been a chapel, and some great gaunt echoing cloisters off which opened a number of small doorless, windowless rooms.

"It was an amazing old place, early Spanish, and looked like a mixture of fortress, viceregal palace, monastery, magazine, barracks—and lunatic asylum. And in it, these five hundred criminals

roamed about and lived as they liked, or could."

"What did they live on?" I asked.

"Each other. . . . No, I don't mean cannibalism—quite! But stealing from each other, working for each other, robbing the newcomer. Alms, partly; pious people used to send food 'for the poor prisoners.' Others, who had money, could buy anything they wanted. That was how the guards lived, for I don't suppose they ever got any pay.

"Oh, yes, a guard would bring you in anything you wanted, on a fifty-percent commission. Luckily for me, I had four very useful things. A good fat money-belt, a loaded automatic, a very pretty knife—and a very ugly way with me. Otherwise I should not have survived long in the La Guira jail.

"YES, I'm glad I didn't miss it while I was visiting Paracaibo. I learned a lot there. *Madre de Dios,* they *were* a collection! Negroes, and every variety of negro half-caste; Indians, and every conceivable variety of Indian half-caste; Spaniards, Portuguese and Venezuelans, Brazilians and all sorts of creatures speaking English, French and Dutch, from the British French and Dutch Guianas. Black men, red men, yellow men, white men, every shade in between, and every language in the Tower of Babel. Priests, pimps, panders and politicians, robbers, thieves, coiners, forgers, murderers, soldiers, sailors, lawyers, tradesmen; really rich men, plump, paunchy and well-dressed; literally penniless men without a solitary possession in the world, and lucky if they could beg a crust a day; some of the vilest, most utterly revolting criminals, and perfectly innocent well-bred, well-mannered, well-behaved citizens who would not've known how to commit a crime.

"There was drunken roistering and guzzling feasting; there were moans for a cup of water; there were deaths from sheer starvation. A band of well-fed ruffians, smelling of *aguardiente,* would go round demanding your money or your life. A band of scarecrows, skeletons on whose bones flapped a few foul rags, would follow them, begging for a copper coin, a crumb, a sip of something, for the love of God.

"There were cliques, gangs, factions, feuds and fights—constant fights, varying from pitched battles to single duels. There were robberies and murders. Every crime in the calendar was committed almost daily. And yet the amusing thing was that, although, outside, these crimes were crimes, here in the prison they were not; they mattered not at all. It was a place apart, where there was no law whatever, where there was nothing at all, save imprisonment. It was a society entirely apart from society.

"And thus a curious paradox evolved, that those prisoners were, and doubtless still are, the freest people on earth—within those four walls—for, as I said, we were free to do exactly what we liked.

"And just when I had quite taken stock in this interesting institution, learned its ways, seen all that I wanted to see, and decided I'd had quite enough, the Great Rebellion of Paracaibo broke out.

"But the law had become completely dumb, so far as I was concerned. It knew nothing about me at all. I had never been charged or brought before any magistrate. The police had simply gathered me in, and there I was; there I could remain for the rest of my life, so far as the new authorities were concerned. Trapped!

"But I was going to tell you about the mad Abbé. And he really was an Abbé too, I believe. If not, he was the finest impersonator I've ever seen, on the stage or off, and had got the patter marvelously. The one foul garment that he wore might very well have been, at one time, the white habit of a monk or friar. You must have seen them about in some of the South American towns—Cistercians, are they?—in a heavy white frock and cowl of some sort of thick wool, vicuña, or something, with a rope round the middle and a big black cross dangling on the chest.

"WELL, this old bird looked like one of those, who'd been buried alive for a quarter of a century, or, at any rate, for years, in La Guira prison. God alone knows how he'd kept himself alive. A most repulsive object, fat and white, like a great slug afflicted with leprosy; and he hadn't a solitary hair on his face or head.

"But, by Jove, he was an interesting chap to talk to. There was not a thing he didn't know about the Incas and the Aztecs and everything else American, from Mexico City to Punta Arenas—Amazon flora and fauna, Maya civilization, Spanish gold-trails, exploration, geography and history, of the whole of South America.

"Yes, it was worth a bottle of wine or a meal a day, to listen to him; especially worth it to a man sufficiently well-educated to understand and appreciate him.

"And by Gad, he needed the meals, poor devil! For he'd lived by his wits, and on charity, ever since he'd been flung into the place, in the prime of life. He soon gathered from the way I lived that I had money and suddenly one day he sprang it on me.

"How I laughed! When he'd finished his story and I'd finished laughing, 'Why, you're the Spanish Prisoner himself!' I said.

"The Spanish Prisoner! And going to work it on *me!*

"It was the old, old story.

"IT was a great Brazilian diamond this time. It had belonged to the Emperor Maximilian of Brazil, the very chap the Legion fought for, and won us the annual Day of Camaron holiday, God bless them.

"Oh, a wonderful great diamond, of the first water. Maximilian had given it to the head of the Abbé's order; and when the Emperor was overthrown and killed, there was a lot of dirty work at every crossroads; and a monastery of this order was either looted and burned, or besieged by Bolivar's troops and defended by the Royalists who had taken refuge there. I forget the patter but, anyhow, a monk had been intrusted with the diamond and instructions to take it to a place of safety.

"He, poor chap, had succumbed to temptation, and when the Andes were between him and home, he had hidden the diamond instead of taking it to the headquarters monastery at Vallombrosa, or wherever it was.

"Quite good patter, with lots of local color and the usual ending. My Abbé had heard of its whereabouts through the deathbed confession of the monk's nephew, on whose conscience the stolen diamond lay heavily.

"Then, like the dear old Spanish Prisoner, *my* friend had been falsely accused on some political charge, during the discovery of a revolutionary plot, had been suddenly arrested, and thrown headfirst into La Guira jail, before he had had time to dispose of the diamond.

"Not that he had been going to 'dispose' of it in the ordinary sense of the word. Oh, no! . . . He had only just arrived with it, and was going to take it to the cathedral, or the monastery, or somewhere or other. I forgot the details of the yarn. But there was the diamond—for the taking. And I could take it, provided I would also take the most solemn oath that he could devise, and swear by everything he could think of, that I would take the diamond straight to the Archbishop or Archdeacon, or Archimandrite or Archangel of somewhere or other.

"And I would, of course, give him what I could spare, in return for the honor and privilege and glory that he was conferring upon me in making me the chosen vessel, the appointed and anointed messenger, who was to restore the great diamond to its rightful place.

"Laugh! How I did laugh, as I patted the old dear on the back. I think it was the best entertainment he had given me.

"'You are *the* Spanish Prisoner himself!' I said. 'A real old Spanish Prisoner in the flesh. I *am* glad to have met you!'

"Of course I was not playing my part properly at all. Instead of laughing, my eyes should have sparkled with unholy pleasure and shone with the fierce cold gleam of cupidity. My face should have assumed its most cunning expression. I should have taken a dozen oaths that I would act with the strictest honesty. And then I should have given him his price for his secret, and every assurance of good faith, while firmly intending—when I escaped from jail—to gather in the diamond, and live happy ever after.

"Well, it was all very good fun. Very amusing indeed—especially in that incredible nightmare den of thieves, that combination of Newgate and Colney Hatch. And although I laughed heartily, I played up to the engaging rascal, and made a solemn league and covenant, a soul-binding hell-dooming contract. And when he was satisfied with my oaths, promises and protestations, and with my little contribution, what did the amazing old lunatic do but—produce the 'diamond!'

"He'd got it there with him, in a dirty *papier-mâché* snuff-box, under some snuff.

"THIS gave me another good laugh, to think he rated my intelligence so low as to imagine I'd believe he'd kept a priceless diamond there, all those years, safe, in the middle of the finest prize collection of cutthroats on the face of the earth.

"However, I humored him; and just before I escaped, he secretly and solemn-

ly handed it over to me in the still small hours of one dark morning, when, at length and at last, even that hellish pandemonium was at peace, and quiet for an hour or two.

"It looked like the top of the stopper of a scent-bottle—unless it were actually one of those glass jewels manufactured as such, for use on the stage or for the adornment of images in the poorest kind of Indian Mission chapel—and it was set in a claw, an ugly clumsy silver sort of brooch thing.

"I put it in my trousers-pocket, smote the old dear on the back, once again hailed him as the Father of Lies and of all Spanish Prisoners, and gave him a few million *milreis*—value about ten pounds sterling. He was worth it, for he'd whiled away endless hours for me, not only with his funny little swindle, but with really good talk. And, mind you, he was, like myself, a Spaniard and a gentleman. . . .

"How did I escape? Like all great schemes, plans and inventions, it was simplicity itself. Once a year, or once a century perhaps, a Commission used to visit the prison and report upon it.

"Who they were, I don't know. Some gang of rogues as bad as any in the jail. Probably the Chief Judge of the High Court—the whole bench and bar—the Recorder of Paracaibo, with sheriffs, marshals, mace-bearers and the other rag-tag and bobtail. In theory, this precious crew received petitions from the prisoners, took them away with them, and gave them their earnest consideration. In practice, only a few of the most ignorant newcomers, or the permanently mad, took the trouble to do anything of the sort.

"A few wags wrote scurrilous lampoons on the boss of the gang, the Lord Chief Justice or Lord Chancellor, or whatever he was. And others, screeds of horrible blasphemies and invectives. Most of the prisoners took no notice of them, beyond trying to make a touch, or trying even harder to tell them what they looked like.

"Well, I came to know that the annual, or centennial, visitation was due shortly—and I had an idea and acted on it: I got one guard to buy me a very nice hat such as worn by the grave and reverend Señors, another, to get me a black frock coat; another, a pair of snappy trousers; another a white 'boiled' shirt, stiff collar and fashionable tie; another, a pair of yellow buttoned boots, such as were worn by all the best people

"Lola played her part well; she never gave the diamond another glance, but simply made up to me for all she was worth—told me how she had yearned for a true heart's love. Oh, a very good line of patter!"

—until I had assembled the sort of outfit that would be worn by a judge off duty, or some sort of rogue on duty!

"And on the great day I rose bright and early, shaved off my beard and mustache, dressed myself in this beautiful raiment—unobtrusively joined the procession, and even more unobtrusively, walked out with it!

"To the eyes of the sentry at the wicket in the great gates, as he stared straight before him, giving his famous impersonation of a soldier standing to attention, I must have seemed, if he saw me at all, one of the Paracaibo legal luminaries, or some such thing.

"Anyhow it worked, or I should not be here now; I should still be there.

"On the *Parana,* by which I crossed to Europe, there was the usual collection of Argentine millionaires, Peruvian and Chilean nitrate kings, pampas cattle kings and silver kings—all sorts of kings. And amongst the women there was one queen. . . . La Bella Lola, as she called herself.

"I freely admit that she was then the loveliest woman I had ever seen—absolutely sheerly lovely; and I lost my heart to her as well as my head.

"Being, in those days, a handsome as well as accomplished, agreeable and attractive young man, I soon made Lola's acquaintance and good headway in her graces.

"But although I fell desperately in love with La Bella Lola, she did not fall in love, desperately or otherwise, with me.

"We all know that with wise people, time is money. With Lola, love was money. Synonymous! And I hadn't enough—couldn't compete with the kings at all. When I tried to make love to her, she told me frankly, and coldly, that I tangoed splendidly, and that she would always be charmed to tango with me, when she felt like dancing. A real snub.

"NOW, perhaps it is unnecessary to tell you, my friend, that I am not often snubbed, nor do I take a snub kindly. In fact, I don't take it at all. I return it. And though I would sooner have loved La Bella Lola than hated her, still, if she wouldn't have the one, she could have the other. I gave the matter my prolonged consideration, and was not satisfied with the small triumph I enjoyed when La Bella—to show off before her large circle of admirers and supporters—wished to dance the tango that same evening with the best tangoist aboard.

"The band struck up the beautiful 'O Donna Carmelita' air, and La Bella, leaning against the rail watching the fairies' path of moonlight across the water, turned to me and said:

"'Shall we show these good people how to dance, Señor Maine?'

"'Why, certainly, señorita,' said I. 'You get hold of a good dancer and—so will I.'

"La Bella Lola didn't speak to me again until the night of the fancy-dress ball, a few days later.

"Fancy dress on this occasion was to be absolutely improvised. No one was to wear a ready-made costume, if you know what I mean. Ladies were to make their own dresses, and men fake up something or other from what they had got.

"I went as a rajah—silk pajamas, gaudy dressing-gown, red morocco shoes, and a turban made from a small towel covered with a silk handkerchief.

"Just as I was leaving my cabin to go to the dining-saloon—for we were to dine in our fancy dress—I remembered my old friend the mad Abbé, and his 'diamond' brooch. It would be the very thing to pin in the middle of the front of my turban!

"I stuck it in, and viewing myself in the wardrobe mirror, I flattered myself there would not be a better improvised turn-out at the ball. I looked the part, a tall slim young rajah, from the top of my turban to the turned-up tips of my morocco-leather shoes.

"I WAS a success and won the first prize.

"Evidently La Bella Lola agreed with the general verdict, for to my immense surprise, quite early in the evening she came up to me and most prettily apologized for having, in some way, offended me. How she had done it she could not imagine, but obviously I was annoyed—or hurt perhaps. She could not tell me how sorry she was, and how troubled she had been, to find that I had turned from friendship—kindness—affection—to this distant coldness.

"Promptly I assured her she was mistaken, and gave her to understand that I really hadn't bothered to be distant or cold, and hadn't noticed any change in our relationship—if there had been any relationship at all. . . .

"But Lola wasn't having any.

"She was, as the vulgar say, 'all over me.' I couldn't understand it, or her. I was puzzled; and when I am puzzled by a woman, I walk warily. At their best they are puzzling enough, God knows, but at their worst—

"So I smiled sardonically and hummed 'Woman is fickle.'

"'No; *I'm* not capricious, or changeable, Señor Maine—Manoel! It is *you,*' she said. '*You* were friendly and nice and kind and loving, and now—'

"She pouted and made eyes at me. Lovely creature!

"What was the game? I was suspicious. I scented a trap. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. I had publicly scorned her, suggesting that she, one of

the most famous dancers in the world, was not good enough to tango with me; telling her to find herself a partner and I would find myself a *good* one. And here she was, making up to me, as the schoolboys say, for all she was worth. I might have been a royal prince, or the handsomest millionaire on board.

"No, I didn't get the idea at all.

"THEN suddenly it came to me, and I refrained from bursting into a roar of laughter. But oh, how consumedly I laughed inside, as with a gentle smile I walked wide-eyed into the trap, and played the fatuous ass. Walked into the trap, and sprang it—on her.

"Laugh! . . . How many more laughs was I to get from my dear old mad Abbé's lump of glass? For I had seen Lola's lovely eyes stray to the bottle-stopper in my turban!

"Well, well, well! . . . Now I'd be the Spanish Prisoner myself, for a change. The Spanish Prisoner of Love, prisoner of La Bella Lola.

"She played her part well—nearly as well as the Abbé had played his. And her patter was good too. She never gave the diamond another glance, but simply made love to me—threw herself at my head—told me how she had done her best to refrain from falling in love with me—how she had tried to steel her heart against such folly as romantic love. But how she had yearned, for how long she had yearned, for a real true *amant de cœur,* a real lover, a heart's love, surrounded though she was—or because she was—by these purchasers of 'love', these swine and apes that wallowed in the mire at Circe's feet.

"Oh, a very good line of patter. . . . Quite as good as the Abbé's!

"And mine wasn't bad, if I may say so. I played the sensitive proud youth who had nothing in the world but a warm loving heart—well, nothing but one other thing—a romantic heart that he had laid at the feet of the loveliest lady in the world, only to see it trampled and kicked aside by her tiny perfect feet.

"Oh, but no! she insisted. She had never dreamed of such a thing! Never trampled it; never kicked it aside. She had not known; not understood. Why, her own heart had— But there, let misunderstandings be forgotten. Love conquers all. Love. . . . love. . . . And what was my other possession beside the noble heart so warm, so loving, so romantic?

"Oh, nothing to be mentioned in the same breath with a loving heart. Only a jewel, bright and cold and hard.

"'A jewel?'

"Yes. Quite a decent diamond. . . . Value? Oh, it was worth quite a lot of money, of course, but its real value was sentimental. It had belonged to Catherine the Great of Russia, and had been given by her to one of her lovers, a noble Englishman, an officer in her service. . . . Yes, an ancestor, a Colonel Sir Marmaduke Maine. Been in the family ever since, except for a short time when my grandfather gave it to the Emperor Maximilian of Brazil, to be sold for the payment of his troops and the purchase of munitions of war, just as the nobles and gentlemen of England gave their silver plate to be melted down to raise troops for King Charles the First.

"Yes, yes, very romantic and historical and interesting, and that sort of thing. My father had bought it back again, after the fall and death of the Emperor Maximilian. It cost him a lot—almost ruined him. Twenty thousand pounds.

"Did I have it on board?

"Oh, yes. . . . Hadn't she noticed it in my turban, at the ball the other night? . . . And so it went on.

"HOW I used to chuckle! Myself playing with La Bella Lola the game that the dear old mad Abbé had played with me—the only difference being that I was getting away with it, and that Lola swallowed it all as gospel truth.

"Nor was the *dénouement* long delayed, my little vengeance long postponed.

"I became her *amant de cœur,* heart of her heart, the first and last, the one and only true love of Lola's life. *And* the bottle-stopper became Lola's property!

"Laugh! How I did laugh! And how I blessed the dear old Abbé and his piece of cut glass that had bought me the 'love' of La Bella Lola, admittedly the most beautiful woman in the world.

"Yes, in those halcyon days life was all love—and laughter."

"It wasn't then that you felt peevish to the point of suicide," I observed.

"No," he answered. "It was when we reached Madrid and Lola discovered the truth about the Abbé's 'bottle-stopper'.

"It was really a perfect Brazilian diamond. She took twenty-five thousand pounds for it—and an exceedingly prompt farewell of me!"

Another of these inimitable tales will appear in an early issue.

The Master Killer

The story of a little known but specially interesting American animal by the author of "The Passing of the Thunder Herd" and other memorable stories.*

By BIGELOW NEAL

DEEP under the banks of Clear Creek, in a chamber that had once been the home of a beaver, lay a very small bundle of fur. It was a brown bundle not more than twice the size of a tightly clenched fist—and alternately it whimpered from hunger, and trembled in fear, as faint sounds came up through the water-filled tunnel below.

It would require a far stretch of the imagination to see in that shivering bundle the beginning of a formidable or even a useful citizen among the wild folk along the stream. And yet, granting that Midapoka, as the red men called him, survived the dangers now surrounding him and lived to grow to maturity,—and taking also into consideration his size and weight,—it is probable that no animal in the whole of the Clear Creek Valley could offer him even an effective show of opposition; for Midapoka was of a bloody clan. He belonged to the weasel family, but he was a baby otter.

Just now, however, on this afternoon in the latter part of March, when the sun hung low above the Bad-lands of Dakota, the baby otter not only constituted no threat to others, but it was a matter of grave doubt whether he would even survive. For two days and two nights he had been alone, with neither protection nor food. His mother had left him, as she had on so many occasions before—but this time she had not returned.

For hours he had lain curled in a quivering little heap, his nose thrust under his belly, as if by shutting out the sights and sounds about him he might procure a measure of safety. But a gnawing in the region of his stomach, which had grown more troublesome hour by hour, had now become so acute that it could no longer be withstood. Some action was imperative; he withdrew his little head from beneath his body and peered about the rapidly darkening den.

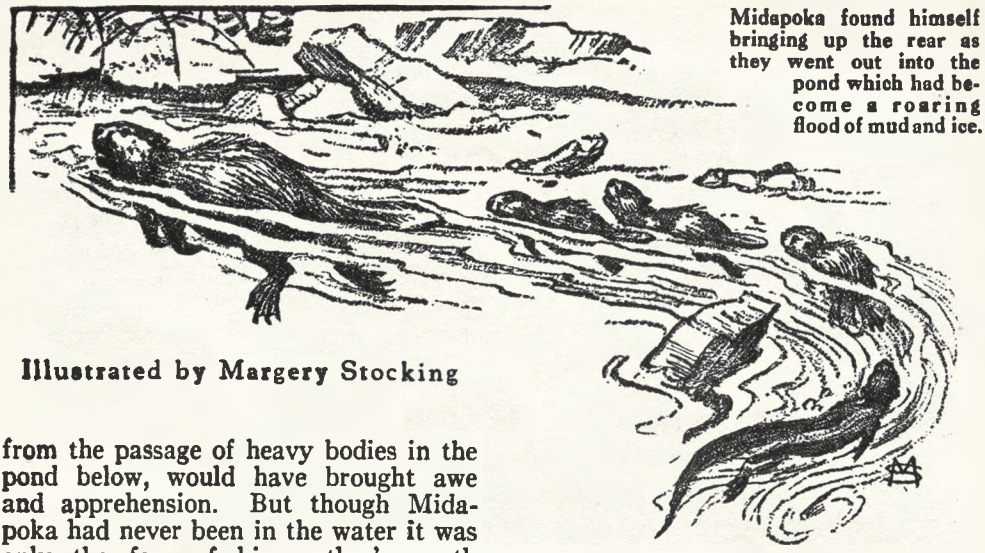
A faint glimmer of light came down from above, where the beaver engineer had left a brush-obstructed shaft for ventilation. As Midapoka uncoiled himself the light glowed softly on his dark brown, satin-smooth fur. His eyes glittered like jade beads; his tiny black nose glistened against the gray of his throat and the narrow bands of white along his cheeks. His body was very long in proportion to its width and ended in a muscular tail. His legs were ridiculously short; because of them he bore only a slight resemblance to the other long-bodied members of the weasel family. Too, he lacked the triangular, snakelike head of his cousins and his body was of more nearly equal dimensions throughout its length. His little black feet were webbed.

Presently he got to his feet and with the aid of a small prodding and sniffing nose, began a minute investigation of his surroundings. He found a fish-scale and ate it. While the scale did nothing to appease his hunger, its effect upon his enthusiasm was marked and led to redoubled effort. Spurred on by this first success, he found a small portion of a frog, and a piece of skin from a carcass of a killdeer; this he ate, feathers and all. But although the amounts were several, their total bulk was merely an aggravation to his hunger.

Having exhausted the resources of the den, he came at last to the mouth of the tunnel. Here he stopped, and thrusting his nose down near the surface of the water, he devoted a long period to the process of listening and sniffing.

To most, the dark surface of the water in the tunnel, ever-restless from mysterious subterranean movements or perhaps

*This well-remembered Blue Book success has recently been published in book form.



Midapoka found himself bringing up the rear as they went out into the pond which had become a roaring flood of mud and ice.

Illustrated by Margery Stocking

from the passage of heavy bodies in the pond below, would have brought awe and apprehension. But though Midapoka had never been in the water it was only the fear of his mother's wrath which had heretofore limited his field of operations. His present timidity came from his sense of defenselessness.

But his hunger was a potent dispeller of fear; in the end the gnawing in his stomach combined with the dictates of instinct drove him forward. Folding his short ears down against his head—another purely instinctive process—he thrust his head beneath the water and moved slowly down the inclined way.

As he took to the water a sudden change came in the actions and the appearance of the little otter. In the den he had not been particularly graceful; in the water, however, the arch dropped from his back and the alternating, awkward hopping of either end changed to a smooth, effortless, undulating motion.

Presently the darkness paled and a yellowish-green glow appeared ahead. The glow was steady and unwavering, for—as Midapoka was to find later—the pond was covered with a layer of ice and no waves ran along the surface. The water, too cold as yet to carry any great amount of sediment, was as clear as crystal and when the otter reached the lower end of the tunnel and thrust his tiny head from the opening into the pond he was looking out onto a submarine stage rendered clearly visible for long distances both above and below.

Here and there long cloudlike shadows paralleling each other marked the position of snowdrifts on the ice above and in places where pressure had cracked the ice from shore to shore, spectra hung in the water like unbent rainbows and beams of varicolored light spread fanwise toward the bottom of the pond.

Just before the little otter was a school of black-backed suckers in close-packed, serried ranks like soldiers marching in mass-formation. Beyond the suckers was another fish, a much larger fellow, blue on back and side and white along the sweep of his belly. He stood almost on his head, as catfishes often do, and inclined partly to one side. One of his long feelers lay in a spiral on the sand by his constantly sucking mouth, the other floated outward through the water, waving slowly from side to side as if in search of something which was never there. Just upstream from the suckers lay a snapping-turtle, a monster of his kind, regarding the world through cold unblinking eyes set in a triangular head—a turtle which, perhaps, was old when Herod was king. By his presence alone he had created a crescent-shaped wave in the leading ranks of the suckers. Apparently they paid him no attention, yet a strip of sand constituted a permanent no-man's land before his deadly jaws.

Suddenly a new actor crossed the watery stage, and at her advent the eyes of the baby otter bulged in wonder. The newcomer was by far the largest creature in the pond; she was a powerful swimmer, driving herself forward with a broad spread of webbed hind feet and occasional thrusts of a paddlelike tail. The otter caught a glimpse of friendly brown eyes looking down into his own; then Wah-ra-pa the beaver was gone, hurrying upstream on important business of her own.

As the baby otter watched the progress of the vanishing stranger, he became aware of a new phenomenon which held

his gaze enraptured. Not far off, where the boiling waters of a spring had kept open a circular hole in the ice, a single shaft of golden sunlight reached downward to the sand. Crowded into that shaft of sunlight was a school of carp, its ever-restless members seeking the warmest place in the sun. As they constantly shifted from side to side and from bottom to top, the sunlight played on their yellow scales, transforming them into shimmering millions of yellow nuggets, while the shaft of light itself became a pillar of flashing gold.

A warning pain in Midapoka's lungs told him he had been under water too long, and he darted back up the tunnel to lie gasping on the floor of his den. But he did not remain long, for no sooner had his lungs ceased to hurt than the gnawing in his stomach gained the ascendancy once more; presently he was back in his temporary reviewing-stand at the bottom of the pond.

During the otter kitten's absence, short though it was, a change had come over the pond. While the snapping-turtle had not moved, but peered out at the surrounding aquatic world through unblinking and expressionless eyes, as before, and while the catfish, clown that he was, still stood on his head and sucked at the sandy bottom, the school of smaller fish had shifted its position. Instead of lying in mass formation on the bottom of the pond, they now were lined along the farther shore. Indeed, most of them had disappeared—hidden by sections of overhanging bank and by a tangled, vinelike growth of roots where water-grasses swept upward to the surface. Formerly minnows drifted here and there in ever-shifting clouds, bullchubs searched for food on every hand and an occasional whitefish bumped his nose along the under surface of the ice. Now these also were gone and an atmosphere of suspense and watchful waiting seemed to permeate the water.

But the baby otter, unused to the ways of the life beyond the mouth of his den, saw nothing to fear. He had become intensely interested in an object directly in front of him, which heretofore had been hidden by the school of suckers. It was a flat slablike thing, several inches long and nearly as high, standing upright at the terminus of a tiny V-shaped trench in the sand. This remarkable thing was split at the bottom and kept opening and closing somewhat like the hinged case of a watch, and in so doing it moved slowly forward, thus continuing the excavation of the trench. Recognizing it as a clam, Midapoka remembered that his mother had brought many to the den and after cracking the shells had fed him the delectable contents. He was about to retrieve this fair promise of a meal when he caught a flash of light from down the pond which diverted his attention for the moment.

THIS latest manifestation of marine life was a wall-eyed pike. In fact, he wasn't a pike at all, but a pike-perch—a fish with all the beauties of the genuine pike and lacking the ugly shovel nose. He was a big fellow and as he came on majestically just below the under-surface of the ice he resembled nothing so much as a silvery dirigible on patrol. There was no movement of his tail, no swaying from side to side, no apparent effort. With his air-tank full, the big fellow was coming slowly on, driven only by the momentum of some previous effort, now prolonged by two sets of propellerlike fins, one pair whirring beneath his bow and the other beneath his stern. At regular intervals he opened his mouth for a fresh charge of water, exposing long rows of needlelike teeth—weapons which, coupled with the power of his jaws, made him feared, or at least highly respected, by every creature that lived in the pond.

As the otter gazed in fascination, a curious thing happened: Suddenly the flashing propellers were stilled; all for-

ward motion ceased. A double stream of air-bubbles broke from the gills and mouth of the fish, spiraling upward until they flattened against the ice. The pike was emptying his air-tank intentionally, to destroy his buoyancy, and was settling slowly toward the bottom. Once the propellers beneath his bow flashed brightly to retard the more rapid descent of his head. Then the stream of air bubbles ceased and the fish lay almost on the bottom, lifted only by the rigid cartilage in his fins, and resting on his under-carriage like a stately ship of the air. As he settled to the bottom his tail had swung around so as to bring his head up into the current, and this brought the little otter directly into his line of vision.

HAD Midapoka been older and wiser he might have known he was in the presence of danger, for hardly had the great pike come to rest than his mouth and gills began to open and close rapidly. The warrior had seen the baby otter and was preparing for an assault by forcing great quantities of water across the delicate membranes of his gills where the surplus air was sorted out and forced back into the empty tank.

On the other hand, had the pike known that the furry bundle before him was a scion of the deadly otters he probably would have continued at rest; but the killer fish had not eaten since early in the preceding fall, and when really hungry he had been known to attack and devour the young of muskrats and even to wage successful battle against the seemingly powerful bull-snakes as they attempted to cross the surface of the pond. Accordingly, waiting until his air-bladder was only partially filled, he brought his tail into action and glided upward to a point above his intended victim.

Midapoka was not unaware of the pike's movements. In fact, he was an interested observer, twisting his head up and back until his white throat came uppermost; thus, as the pike plunged like a silvery flash, his yawning jaws ready to crush the life from his prey, the otter was ready to answer the instinctive warning. The speed of the pike was lightning-fast and his aim was true, but the speed of the baby otter was even greater. A cloud of sand rose from the bottom, shot through with streaks of silver, white and brown. Then out of the cloud darted the brown, followed closely by the band of silver. Were it not for the fact that the otter had had no experience with ice, the battle would have gone by default, for Midapoka had no thought but of escape. As it was, his upward progress was terminated suddenly by a terrific jolt as he struck the ice, dazing him and cutting off his escape in that direction. The pike struck again; this time the great jaws closed about Midapoka's body.

Rendered powerless as far as swimming was concerned, and realizing escape to be impossible, the otter coiled his spring-steeled body and struck with all his might at the throat of his foe. Small he might be, and apparently powerless in the grasp of a far heavier opponent, yet in a moment of desperation all the deadly weasel in his nature came uppermost. Again and again his sharp little teeth ripped and tore at the throat of the pike, filling the water first with clouds of fluttering scales, then with a crimson stain that spread about the swirling fighters. As the stain deepened the revolving course of the battle became larger, gradually slowing down. In the end the sand-cloud settled and the area of crimson drifted away. The killer pike was quiet; the muscles of his jaws relaxed. There was a change in the otter also. Where before he had been no more than a badly frightened kitten peering into a world of which he understood little, now he too had learned to kill, and as he tore himself from the grasp of the dying pike, his eyes glittered like brown beads.

With the taste of blood in his throat, Midapoka again followed the dictates of instinct. Grasping the tail of the fish in his teeth, he set out tugging manfully toward the entrance of his den. It was fortunate the battle had lasted no longer, for as Midapoka, digging all four feet into the mud, jerking and pulling with all his might, finally backed from the runway into the dim light of the den, he loosed his hold on the tail of the fish to fall gasping for breath on the floor of his home. His first battle had well-nigh been his last, for the few minutes under water allotted to him by the capacity of his lungs had been unduly prolonged. It was some time before his strength returned, but when it did, he began to tear ravenously at the flesh of his prey.

FOR several days after his encounter with the pike, Midapoka was content to remain in the obscurity and comparative safety of his den. For the time being the fish served in two capacities—it was a source of food and it effectually blocked the entrance to the den as well, thus temporarily affording an element of safety. But this condition of affairs of course could not last indefinitely, for the otter was devouring the barricade which protected him. One night it appeared he was having unsolicited aid in its destruction, for as he was eating his supper from one end of the fish a persistent tugging in the opposite direction announced the presence of some one with an equally voracious appetite, on the other. Had the little otter known he was separated from his most deadly cousin, a mink, only by a frail partition of flesh which both of them were rapidly devouring, his sleep would have been broken by something more alarming than the protests of an overgorged stomach.

One evening when the otter awoke just as the last of daylight was fading from the ventilating-shaft of his home, he went down the tunnel for his supper. At the edge of the water he halted abruptly in amazement. The fish was gone, and nothing remained but spirals of muddy water! At that Midapoka was filled with anger, and he set out down the tunnel in pursuit. But he was not very hungry and by the time he reached the bottom of the creek he had forgotten both anger and objective.

Aside from the gloom of approaching night, the pond appeared much as it had on the occasion of Midapoka's last visit. And now into the breast of the otter came a new idea, a desire to see what mysteries lay beyond the curtains of gloom which stretched across the pond on either hand. Selecting the upstream course, he set out swimming steadily and strongly against the current. Here for the first time he became a thing of beauty and a thing of grace.

As he advanced the gloom retreated before him. The bottom of the pond alternately rose to shallows where the current was partially blocked by rocks and upturned slabs of lignite coal, and then fell away to deep green depths where the sand was a vast drawing-board traced with lines and curves by the slow-moving clams.

With the speed of a startled fish the little otter swept on. To him it was a land of many marvels and once or twice he was tempted to deviate from his course, and pause for a more complete investigation, but again instinct held him to his course, for his first and greatest necessity was a supply of air; so instead of pausing he fought off temptation and actually increased his speed until he became no more than a black streak darting through the water. Rounding an underwater promontory, he surprised a cloudlike school of baby pike, just hatched in the icy waters, and they rattled against his face and shoulders like hail. Then he was out again into clear water and forced to detour to avoid a miniature forest that seemingly grew from the bottom of the pond. Hundreds of little trees stood upright in a compact mass reaching from where the butts were embedded in the muddy bottom to where their spindling tops were frozen in the ice above. Midapoka also caught a hasty glimpse of the forester who had planted the trees—Wahra-pa the beaver, sitting on the bottom and gnawing at the wood. Just beyond, a circular shaft of clear light struck down into the water and slanting his course upward to investigate, the otter thrust his head for the first time into the fresh air of the outer world.

HE lay flat on the water for a time, his bright little eyes studying wonderingly the strange things in this outer world. The ice was seamed with drifts of snow, alternating with patches of blue where the wind had swept it bare. The creek banks were mantled in white and through the tops of the ash and choke-cherry trees the evening breeze

moaned its way. Midapoka might have been held fascinated for an indefinite time, but some shadowy form moved below him and a single flip of his body transferred him to the surface of the ice.

Here another phase of the otter's character came to the fore. Forgetting the dangers of the past, disregarding those yet to come, he began a series of evolutions seemingly possible only to one who feared nothing of the future. Leaping into the air, he performed somersaults and flip-flops worthy of a master gymnast. Springing high above the open water, he turned over and shot downward clear to the bottom of the pond; then reversing himself he popped from the water like a cork, landing far back on the ice without apparent effort. One of these leaps landed him in a mound of fluffy snow, and he began to roll and tumble in the drift much as he had done in the water. Out of this came another discovery. He found that by folding his forelegs back against his sides and leaping forward with his utmost strength, he could toboggan on the snow and ice with great speed.

AT last, breathless from his exertions, he came to rest again by the edge of the open water and as he sat there gazing into the depths he became aware of a new phase of life in the pond which to him was intriguing indeed. Of a sudden the hole seemed full of slender moving shadows, each terminating in a white wiggling nose which made tiny smacking sounds on the surface of the water. Here again instinct served the otter well, for although his knowledge of black-backed suckers was slight, he left the ice, entered the water, turned and came back again so quickly that none but the sharpest eyes would have detected his absence at all and now between his jaws he held the flopping form of a sucker—an excellent supper, caught in the twinkling of an eye.

By the time he had eaten the fish the suckers had returned and another lightning dash proved as successful as the first. With the second fish, however, he was not so ravenous and it was no more than half eaten when with hardly any disturbance of the water a broad brown head appeared on the surface almost at the otter's nose and the little fellow found himself gazing into a pair of friendly inquisitive eyes almost as brown as the fur about them. And as he looked another curious thing happened. Just beyond the eyes two oval-shaped ears appeared with a sudden snap which sent tiny beads of water flying to either side.

KNOWING but little of fear, the baby otter became interested; and putting his fish aside for the moment he thrust his tiny nose downward until it touched the broad nostrils below. Drawing a deep breath, he expelled it slowly —and the stranger did likewise, neither finding any cause for alarm in the scent of the other. Then the brown head gradually enlarged, extending itself toward the rear until the open water was filled with a broad brown back. A pair of handlike forefeet came from under the head, grasped the edge of the ice with long sharp claws, and with no seeming effort at all the body flowed from the water up onto the ice.

At first the otter was inclined to retreat, for clear of the water and sitting erect the beaver appeared formidable indeed, but in the end the little fellow's inquisitiveness got the better of his caution and he returned near enough to begin a new series of exploratory sniffings. A beaver is never a seeker of trouble and this one did no more than to sit bolt upright, thump her broad tail on the surface of the ice and bang her teeth together in a series of chattering sounds somewhat like the wailing of a buzzsaw with a broken tooth. The racket, however, caused a new retreat on the part of the otter and he took up his position by the side of his half-eaten fish where he divided his time between nibbling at the supper he really did not need and gazing with undiminished interest at his new acquaintance.

At this juncture his attention was attracted by a disturbance among the suckers. Because their need of air had proved greater than their fear of the otter, they had returned to the air-hole. Now another panic swept through their ranks and the blue depths of the water turned momentarily to white as they darted this way and that in search of safety. Then again the waters heaved.

This time it was a mink that came up from below and when his long, snakelike body and his bullet-shaped head turned, his glittering green eyes focused themselves on the little otter and the half-eaten fish. Instantly he leaped to the assault.

Midapoka saw the blow coming but apparently there was no chance of es-

cape, so quickly did the mink flash across the open water. In desperation the little fellow turned with a speed fully equal to that of the mink, and tried with all his might to crawl beneath the up-reared form of the beaver. With his head and shoulders wormed in to comparative safety, he felt a searing pain in his back where the teeth of the mink struck.

Slowly he was being dragged forth to certain death, when without any warning to either antagonist, the great tail of the beaver swept over the little otter with the force of a battering-ram and struck the mink full in the side, sweeping the would-be killer from his feet and hurling him end over end against a snowbank, with such force that his body broke the crust of the drift, and he disappeared as completely as would a bullet in a bag of feathers. Again the beaver thumped her tail on the ice, emitted a new series of chatterings and scratched her belly with both hands while the little otter clung closely to her side.

At about the time that Midapoka first appeared on the ice, a cottontail rabbit was sitting upright among the chokecherry trees on the slopes above. There were others about, hopping from place to place or crouching low in the snow as they nibbled at tender twigs and bark, but this one sat upright on the crest of an ant-hill which gave him a commanding view above the tops of the buckbrush and along the beaver trail leading back among the trees. His slender ears stood erect and his nostrils quivered constantly as he sampled every shifting air-current for a scent which might tell him of danger.

NOW the breeze, shifting again, came along the beaver trail from the opposite direction. The rabbit raised himself to the tips of his toes as a new scent filtered through his nostrils. He could see a movement along the path, a gray shadow blocking out the brilliance of the snow, and then two phosphorescent orbs glowing pale-green in the night. Suddenly the ant-hill was bare; a bevy of smaller shadows scampered this way and that, to disappear in covered runways among the brush. For a moment there was the pattering of tiny feet on twigs and leaves and hard-packed snow, as a magpie took the air with a hoarse cry of alarm and a prairie chicken hurtled upward with a whir from its hole in the snow, a fluttering projectile shooting skyward. Then silence again, broken only by the moaning of the wind, as Mika-sika the prairie wolf came along the beaver trail—so slowly that the buckbrush and wild rosebushes on either hand parted and closed again with scarcely a sound, and so softly that his great pads were soundless even among the restless leaves. At times, as he paused in his progress to listen, to moisten his nostrils and to sort the air-currents, his shadow became no more than a blur, but always there were his telltale eyes glowing weirdly through the night.

He was tall and long, rangy and gaunt. And the glitter which hardened the glow of his eyes when sounds came up from the ice below, was the glitter of a hunger amounting almost to desperation. The winter had been an open one. Fatalities among the cattle and horses of the range had been slight. Because the jackrabbits showed white against the grass, eagles had all but driven them from the prairies. Cottontails, protected as they were by the thorny growths which usually covered their runways and by the fact that they never ventured far into the open, were a doubtful source of food. All winter long Mika-sika had depended almost entirely upon mice and an occasional prairie-chicken.

ONCE Mika-sika had caught a beaver. It was a surprise attack and from the rear. The memory of that meal had never deserted him, and tonight he had returned to pit his wits once more against the wisest of the wild folk. Although the wolf ranked second in intelligence, he had never yet acknowledged a master in craft. From his viewpoint success was merely a matter of repeated attempts—sometime he would catch the beaver unaware!

Tonight, as the wolf drifted like mist along the beaver trail, far more silent than the night itself and with every sense alert, he read the story on the ice correctly. He knew of the mink and he knew of the otter, but they were of secondary importance. It was the beaver he sought, that far larger form which was covered with layer after layer of fat. Now he had reached the head of the beaver slide, and he crouched close against the path; should she come his way until within striking distance and then turn her back, even for a moment, his quest would not be a fruitless one.

Meanwhile conditions on the ice had changed but slightly, although the mink

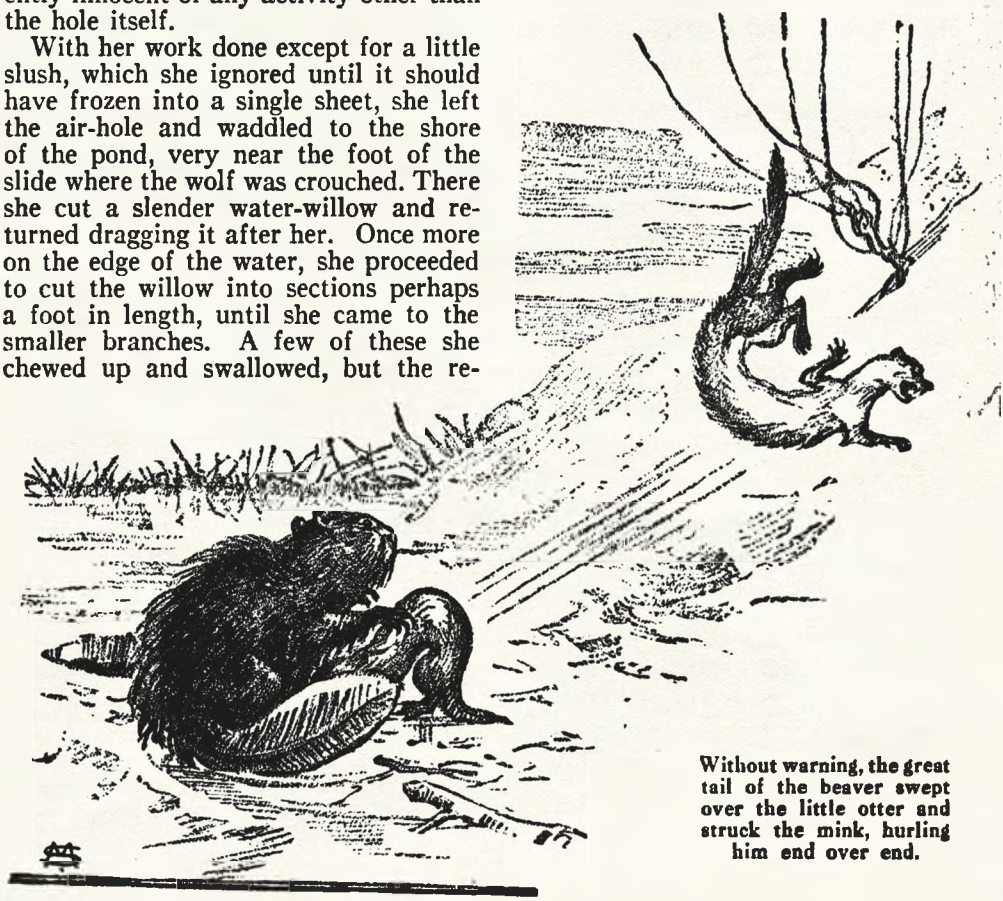
had dug himself out of the snow and retreated along the shore of the pond until he had passed from sight—but he had done it sullenly and with many a backward glance in eloquent promise of what he would do should he ever catch the baby otter alone.

Wah-ra-pa had undertaken a type of activity very common to her kind but a great novelty to the little otter—so much of a novelty, in fact, that he had forgotten all about the remnants of his fish and sat watching her with curious and highly interested eyes. She was using her tail as a club to break up the ice which had formed around the edge of her air-hole. Under the impact of that powerful tail, the thin ice broke with ease and as the pieces came away she did something which has puzzled wiser people than Midapoka. Instead of throwing the loose ice out on the surface of the frozen pond, in what would seem the obvious solution of her difficulty, she took the pieces one by one in her hands and thrust them below the main ice-sheet on the downstream side, thus leaving the surface of the pond apparently innocent of any activity other than the hole itself.

With her work done except for a little slush, which she ignored until it should have frozen into a single sheet, she left the air-hole and waddled to the shore of the pond, very near the foot of the slide where the wolf was crouched. There she cut a slender water-willow and returned dragging it after her. Once more on the edge of the water, she proceeded to cut the willow into sections perhaps a foot in length, until she came to the smaller branches. A few of these she chewed up and swallowed, but the remainder of the top she thrust down into the water until the sluggish current drew it beneath the ice.

Had Midapoka known his protector better, he would have suspected that her trip after the willow had netted her something more than the little tree. As a matter of fact, from that moment on her wise old head knew just about as much of the wolf as the would-be killer knew about himself. And because of her knowledge she made one concession—not once during the process of cutting up the tree did she turn her back to the slide. While she never looked in that direction, she kept it under observation every moment of the time.

When the top of the tree disappeared through the air-hole, the beaver picked up the short pieces one by one and thrust them under her arm, holding them firmly against her breast. That accomplished, she sat upright, scratched her belly with the free hand and sent out a final burst of chattering which could be interpreted as nothing less than an insult. Afterward she leaned forward until her nose rested on the edge of the



Without warning, the great tail of the beaver swept over the little otter and struck the mink, hurling him end over end.

air-hole. Apparently she was off her guard.

Suddenly, from the head of the slide, a gray bolt shot into the air. The wolf, realizing that his hoped-for prey was about to escape, had launched a last-minute assault. Sweeping out from the crest of the steep bank in a great arc, he dived straight for the defenseless back of the beaver. But this too had been anticipated, and even as the killer swept down from above, the brown form of the beaver flowed over the edge of the ice, disappearing with hardly a splash, and the wolf struck fairly on the unyielding ice where she had been.

Midapoka had never taken his gaze from the beaver; consequently the long leap of the wolf came well within his field of vision. He had plenty of time to escape, but one glance at those smoldering eyes, the fangs that seemed to glow as if bathed in phosphorus and the cruel jaws yawning for their prey, struck the youngster rigid and cold with terror. Instead of taking advantage of the golden opportunity, he remained frozen in his tracks, and so it came about that he alone remained to bear the brunt of the gray killer's anger.

DURING the brief time that the wolf struggled to regain his balance, while his great claws raked the ice to prevent plunging head-first into the water, and then, as he leaped again, this time around the edge of the air-hole to strike at the smaller prey, a savage hatred awoke in Midapoka. The reaction from fear to anger served to save his life. With the wolf almost upon him, the blood surged once more in his veins. He left his place in the killer's path like a black bullet, passing under the jaws of the wolf and on into the air-hole with a force which sent a slender column of water high in the air.

Nor did the speed of the baby otter diminish greatly when he was beneath the surface. Midapoka had no experience with enemies that could not swim and accordingly he regarded himself as perhaps no more than a lap and a half ahead of the murderous jaws of the wolf. Seeing a dark blot some distance ahead which he rightly interpreted as the form of the beaver, he struck out with all the power in his tiny body on the trail of her whom he considered his only friend.

Because the beaver was in no hurry and because her cargo of sticks cut her progress still further, the otter had no difficulty in overtaking her. Once in the back-wash of her webbed hindfeet he felt a renewed sense of safety and confidence and there he clung, following her every move, taking no chances whatever on her leaving him again.

SHE passed the feed-bed and thence over the shallows between the ponds. Below, turtles and black-backed suckers once more passed in review. At the mouth of his old home, Midapoka felt no temptation to turn aside. His memories of the mink were still vivid and he knew there was no protection there. And he was still close to the broad tail of the beaver when she suddenly changed her course downward, and entered a trench extending from the shore, well out along the bottom of the pond. At the end of the trench was a dark hole—but Midapoka came of a folk who made a specialty of dark holes, and he did not hesitate. In truth, his entrance was speeded somewhat by a long shadow darting down from above. There was another pike. It seemed the whole aquatic and semi-aquatic world was bent on his destruction. Somewhere ahead was the beaver. There was but one course open, so he darted into the tunnel.

Like the approach to the home that he had so lately called his own, this tunnel also led upward at a steep slope. A short scramble took him to the surface of the water, where he paused a moment to recharge his lungs with air. Ahead there was absolute darkness, but he nevertheless continued until a collision with something ahead told him that the beaver was blocking the end of the hole. Here little streams of water followed the floor of the tunnel, coming from the body of the draining beaver and Midapoka found it difficult to maintain his footing. A series of meaningless sounds coming from below brought a renewal of his fears and he pressed close against the beaver. In doing so he found better footing on something which was flat and rough—and thus it was that the baby otter rode into his new home on the tail of the beaver!

At the end of the tunnel, however, where it widened to become the lower chamber or storehouse of the beaver's home, a sudden flip sent the baby otter end over end until he wound up with a crash in a tangle of sticks and mud. But this had exactly the opposite of the desired effect, for not recognizing the

offending tail as a part of the beaver, and convinced that some new enemy threatened his existence, Midapoka turned and promptly dived beneath the beaver's forefeet, driving himself so far beneath her belly that what little of him remained exposed was inconsequential.

A maneuver of this kind perpetrated against—or on, or under—any other animal than a beaver probably would have resulted in immediate and total annihilation, and the fact that he was not immediately exterminated was due entirely to the natural gentleness of beaver nature. Because of this she did nothing more drastic or violent than to grasp him gently by the rump, pull him from under her and redeposit him on the pile of sticks. But if he understood little of her nature it was obvious that she knew less of his, for no sooner had she got rid of him than he was back again, diving into the same place with approximately the same velocity. Finally his persistence won; evidently coming to the conclusion that the little fellow could not be permanently expelled, she chose to ignore him altogether and collecting her bundle of sticks she resumed her progress toward the upper part of her home.

The beaver's house consisted of two rooms, one above the other. The lower served as a draining-chamber and storeroom for surplus food; the living-room was above, larger and dryer and getting a certain amount of light from a ventilating-shaft very much the same as the one to which Midapoka had been accustomed. Here a portion of the floor was carpeted with fine twigs mixed with water-grass and rushes, and when the little otter, still following in the tracks of the beaver, entered the room the nest was occupied by a brown furry bundle perhaps the size of a football.

AS the mother approached, the bundle fell apart, resolving itself into three baby beavers each about the size of the otter. With a great show of activity they swarmed over their mother, prodding her industriously from end to end and subsiding into degrees of smacking silence only when they had obtained the objects of their search. Meanwhile the otter, evidently feeling that there was a limit to his relationship with the family, passed the line of ecstatically wiggling tails and took up a position in a corner. Here he shortened himself until his back rose into an arch; then he settled down to a leisurely study of the interesting family before him. But—he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was dark, the beaver was gone, and he was cold. He heard the deep breathing and babyish snores of the little beavers and he edged closer to them. When an eerie moaning sound, probably the wind, came down the ventilating-shaft, his longing for companionship increased and in another moment he had driven his nose into the bundle and was pushing with all his might. When the mother beaver returned with the dawn, her family bundle was considerably larger than it had ever been before; she took it apart to investigate, and once again threw the little otter back into his corner.

THAT night Midapoka took up the second phase of his existence. When the old beaver left to begin her night's work he was hungry again and followed her down through the storeroom, into the tunnel and so out into the pond.

At the air-hole he caught a sucker and a fair-sized perch. With his hunger satisfied, he turned his attention again to the beaver. He watched her as she cut a bush and ate her supper; then he followed closely in her wake as she slipped under the ice and set out downstream.

On this occasion she did not stop at her home, but continued on until she thrust her head out through the narrow band of open water which skirted her dam. Midapoka popped his head out behind her, got caught in the current and was immediately swept over the spillway. After turning over and over several times he wound up, bobbing about in the seething waters below the dam, sharing honors with a dancing cone of frozen foam.

But it was all good fun and he scrambled back to the head of the spillway where he spent most of the night investigating clamshells which the beaver brought up from the bottom of the pond for repair work on the dam. Most of the shells of course were empty, but by morning he had collected several which were still occupied. Unable to crack them, he found a pool of quiet water under the foot of the dam and there he began a collection which was to grow steadily until some mink came along and ate it up.

When day broke the beaver ceased her work on the dam and secured another

cherry tree. This she cut into sections as before, making her breakfast from the twigs and branches as usual. Still paying no attention to the otter, she slipped under the ice and set out for home. But she beat Midapoka there only by the length of her own tail! That night established a routine which was followed closely for a considerable length of time.

There was no further evidence of the wolf; but one night Midapoka had an adventure which is worthy of note. He was playing below the dam when he came face to face with a mink. Too frightened to run, he stood his ground and in doing so made a discovery which was to have a decided effect on his morale. He found that this particular mink was equally afraid of him, and took to its heels with no more than a single hiss of hatred. Evidently Midapoka was rapidly outgrowing some of his smaller enemies. . . .

Spring arrived on the crest of a southwest wind. It grew colder at first, but the wind was a chinook and toward morning the cold began to moderate. By the time the queerly assorted pair knocked off their night's labors the hard brilliance of the snow had softened and the sun came up on a morning charged with the promise of spring.

BY night rivulets were streaming into the pond through every depression. There were several inches of water on the ice and from the valley came the song of water falling below the greater snowdrifts on the hills. That morning Midapoka swam behind a beaver he could no longer see, for the waters were black and yellow with hurrying mud and clay. Throughout the day they listened to the roaring stream and the splintering crashes of ice almost at the walls of their home, and by night the flood had backed up until the storeroom was flooded.

Finding the water so close to her little ones, the old beaver instead of going out as usual lay at the head of the tunnel watching the water as it crept inch by inch toward the nest. When it became evident that they could no longer remain in the home, she separated the bundle of little beavers, and carried on some kind of conversation with its component parts. Evidently the little ones understood, for when the mother turned and entered the water they were so close at her heels that Midapoka found himself crowded into fourth place and bringing up the rear of the procession.

Down into the dark water they went, and out into the pond which had become a roaring flood of mud and sticks and ice. Here the fate of the little ones and the otter would have been problematical indeed had it not been for the wisdom of their guide. She led them swiftly, well below the pitching ice-cakes, until she was out of the channel and into quieter waters under the shore of the pond. There after a short, hard struggle with the ice, they popped to the surface

As the gray projectile hurtled downward, a black one rose to meet it. The terrible teeth of Midapoka drove into the shaggy throat of the wolf.

one by one and sat in a huddled brown row along the shore.

The three little beavers and Midapoka had come through the hazardous experience without injury, but apparently there was something decidedly wrong with Wah-ra-pa. In that last struggle she had been caught between two cakes of ice and now she lay with her head hanging almost to the water's edge while beads of blood gathered and dropped from her nose. Although the injury was not fatal, time was to show that it would leave her partially crippled for the rest of her life and from then on it would require the exercise of all her intelligence if she were to escape the cunning of that shaggy gray killer that so often prowled along the shores of Clear Creek on winter nights.

Unlike the beavers, huddling in a stoically shivering row, waiting calmly and in apparent indifference for whatever the fates might have in store, the otter, more buoyant and playful of disposition, was making merry over the snowbanks and drifts. Accordingly when an ice-cake ground and rolled its way along the shore of the pond, carrying on its surface a heap of mud and clamshells scooped up along the way, Midapoka succumbed to his highly inquisitive nature and clambered aboard. When he had satisfied his curiosity and paused to take stock of his surroundings the beavers had vanished from sight and he was gliding swiftly downstream.

True, he might have disembarked at any point either by swimming or by hopping ashore and so have returned to his adopted family, but after all his attachment to the beavers was largely a reaction from fear. Just now the sun was shining, there were no enemies in sight and he had become an adventurous mariner with a ship of his own. While he had little control over its course, he felt no desire to return. So he sailed boldly out into another phase of his existence, one which separated him from the beavers and led him into strange lands.

MIDAPOKA might have remained upon his craft indefinitely, even onto the bosom of the Missouri River, had not an unforeseen circumstance brought his maritime career to a sudden end. After spinning around for a number of hours he went to sleep; while he slept the erratic course of his ship landed it with a sudden crash against a rocky

shore. When the otter was fully awake he found that he had been disembarked and that his ship had passed on. And so, finding himself at the door of a rabbits' home, he crawled in to the providential sanctuary thus offered, and went to sleep again. He slept soundly, for during his sojourn with the beavers he had almost doubled in size and the experience he had gained from his association with the old beaver had given him a much higher degree of confidence in himself and in his own prowess.

Much to the relief of the rabbits, Midapoka woke with the coming of night and left the tunnel. Setting out in search of food, he found that nature had set a feast for him. Where the creek overflowed its banks, and swept, sometimes only a few inches deep, through a snarl of buckbrush, wild hops and morning-glory vines, great numbers of carp had become entangled, and eating all he could hold was merely a matter of selection.

And now there began a time in the otter's existence wherein he appeared to have but two ambitions. One was to eat and the other to sleep. He found a new home, another abandoned beaver excavation which appealed to him because of the scent he knew so well. From there he issued by night in search of food and because his increasing speed and strength made the capture of large fish less difficult, he ceased to prey upon the suckers and devoted himself almost exclusively to the larger carp.

Were it not for his constant fear of the wolf, Midapoka would have had no worries whatever, but either Mika-sika himself or else others of his shaggy tribe

constantly prowled along the shores of Clear Creek, leaving their tracks in the mud and sand, a taint of their scent in the air, and their all-but-incessant howling moan through the aisles of the timber. Thus the fear as well as the anger of the otter increased rather than diminished and sometimes, instead of scurrying away at their scent or sound, he showed a tendency to stand his ground, hissing his hatred of the wolves until they were so close that safety demanded immediate flight.

By midsummer he had learned the art of opening clams and there were places along the shores of his home where the newly cleaned shells lay in heaps beneath the shallow water.

Throughout the summer and fall his life was largely a matter of routine while he grew and grew. He broadened and lengthened and his muscles toughened and quickened until in size he was equaled only by the larger beavers, and in quickness, ranked second to none.

WITH the chilly days of autumn, as frost whitened the shores of the stream, and waves coated the drooping water-grasses with ice until the air was filled with their tinkling music, the otter made ready for winter by putting on an outer coat of hair that was thick and almost black, at the same time wrapping himself in a blanket of white fat which from then on would make him as impervious to the icy chill of the water as to the frigid breath of the blizzard. He simply would not know the meaning of cold.

And then with the coming of winter when once more the stream was sheathed in ice, a restlessness seized upon him. Nature had intended that he should be a wanderer, forever on the go. True, he might have a home to which he could return at regular intervals, but even during the mating season his visits would always be short. Between-times that restlessness would drive him on and on, over miles of ice and snow, and sometimes when the snow was soft from thaws, he might even leave the stream and take to the prairie, jumping and coasting for many miles in a search which apparently gained him nothing save the pleasure of exercise and exploration.

That was his nature—and now the call had come. One night when he left his den he sniffed the air that came from the headwaters of the stream, and set out along the ice exactly as he had done many times before. But this time Midapoka did not return with the dawn or with any dawn. He was off for the upper reaches of the stream, emboldened by his new-found size and strength to face even the dangers he so long had dreaded.

AGAIN it was a night in winter and ice lay thick on the pond above the beaver dam. A cold moon seemed to skip from cloud to cloud above the eastern horizon, as the night winds swept through and above the valley of Clear Creek, hurling masses of frigid vapor into the east. Below, the wind moaned again in the tree-tops and the air was filled with the metallic sandlike hiss of drifting snow. At one moment the pond was bathed in moonlight and a fictitious air of warmth; the next, it was dark, forbidding, and bitterly cold.

Wah-ra-pa was pounding the rapidly formed ice from her air-hole. She had come out on a night like this not because she would willingly have left the warmth of her home, but because she was driven by a sense of duty generated and ingrained in her nature through years of habit. The grinding ice-cakes had left permanent injuries and the old beaver was not as strong as she once had been. Her movements were slower now, and after periods of energetic pounding at the ice there came moments of exhaustion when she must pause until her laboring breath resumed its normal rate. Then too there were times when she appeared to lose interest both in her work and in her surroundings, when she would lie on the ice for long minutes in a retrospective mood bordering closely upon stupor. Obviously, old Wah-ra-pa had about reached the end of her labors.

And even now, had the old beaver known it, she was in the greatest peril of her life, for a gray shadow of death hung literally above her. It had come from the prairie, moving as stealthily as the shadows of the clouds themselves—and now it hung poised at the head of the slide.

When Wah-ra-pa had first come to work she had seen the rabbit, again sitting on his ant-hill, but he had become almost a part of the landscape and she gave him little attention, so little in fact that she did not notice when he had dropped from his perch to disappear in the night nor had she heard the pattering feet of his hurrying companions be-

cause of the noise of the wind and the drifting snow. Once none of these things would have escaped her, but tonight her senses were dulled and her caution had lapsed. But the shaggy one above her had lost none of his cunning—and her peril was great, the greater because she did not know.

She was pounding the ice from the landward side of the air-hole. When the last of the pieces had splintered from the edge, she crouched again to rest. As she did so, something stirred a rosebush above and behind her, but she did not notice. Again the rosebush stirred and pale yellow eyes glared down at her. But that was all, for just then the water in the air-hole writhed and boiled and rose to break apart—and from it glided the long black form of an otter.

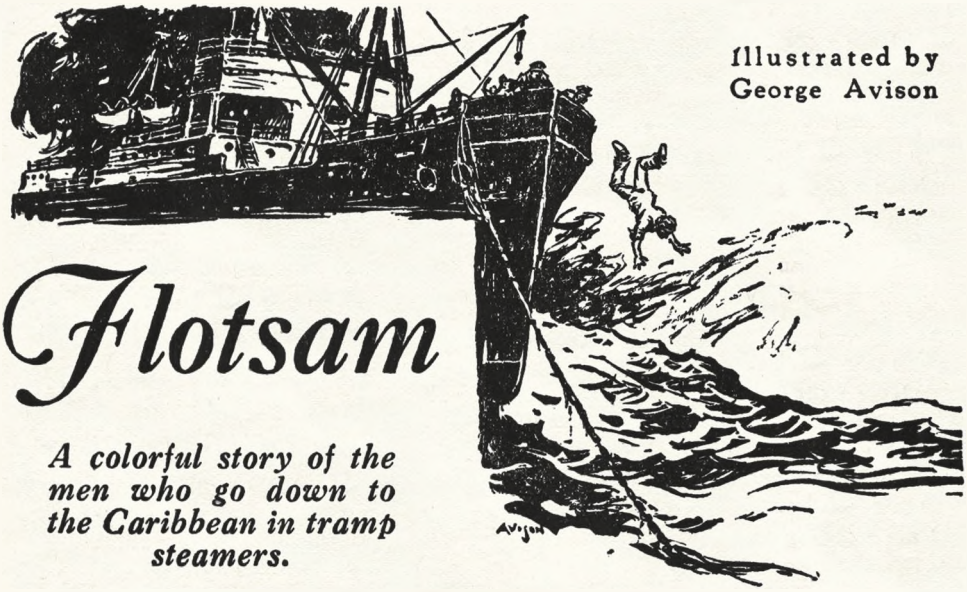
Midapoka had returned, in all the glory of adolescence—four feet long from tip to tip, with the dark brown of his winter coat gleaming like satin in the moonlight. Graceful and quick as a seal, he darted onto the ice; then, seeing the beaver, he turned and raised his head in an attitude of defense, so that the light played softly on the white bands of his face and the gray of his throat. His mouth opened, showing the terrible teeth of the weasel folk, and an almost soundless hiss formed in his chest. It died, however, in the moment of its birth and the glitter faded from his eyes for he had caught the scent of the beaver and a feeble flicker of memory brought back the time when she had proved his friend and his only haven of refuge. At that, his steely muscles relaxed and he too flattened himself against the ice. In place of the deadly glitter that had momentarily blazed in his eyes, he now regarded her with a gaze half of curiosity and half of friendliness.

FOR a time they remained in the same position, the great brown eyes of the beaver reflecting the mild curiosity of the otter. Then something moved in the water; once more the muscles of Midapoka grew taut, and his claws cut cleanly into the ice as he crouched for a spring at the hidden fish. But the fish escaped unscathed, for suddenly, just as had happened long before, a gray bolt shot into the air from the top of the beaver slide, dropping like a plummet toward the back of the defenseless beaver. But once again the killer wolf, clever as he was, had miscalculated. Undoubtedly he had forgotten the baby otter, and he could not be expected to know that the fear and anger generated by that moment so long ago had grown in the breast of the otter even as his body had grown, until it had become a consuming hatred. And as the gray projectile hurtled downward a black one rose to meet it—for Midapoka, crouched as he was to spring at the fish, was fully prepared for the emergency.

They met with a shock directly above the back of the beaver. The fangs of the wolf, timed for a definite object, did no harm to the otter; but the terrible blood-sucking teeth of the super-weasel drove deep into the shaggy throat of his once-dreaded enemy.

They struck as the wolf had intended to strike, directly on the back of the beaver, but aside from fright and perhaps the loss of breath Wah-ra-pa suffered no harm. In an instant she had glided from sight under the water and onward toward her home while the ice was left to the killer of the prairies and the master killer of the stream.

OVER and over they rolled, scratching, clawing and snarling, a jumble of gray and black. A flurry of snow and hair rose from the ice and flecks of blood gleamed like ripe cherries where the moonlight struck the drift. Back and forth across the ice they struggled, the wolf striving to bury his fangs in the snakelike, blubber-armored body of the otter, and Midapoka driving deeper and deeper toward the arteries in the neck of his scraggy foe. In the water the death of the wolf would have been almost certain, but on the ice he was nearer to his own element and the otter was at some disadvantage. Even so, there was a moment when the wolf was nearer to death than he had ever been before or, perhaps, ever would be again, in conflict. Realizing his dire peril, he wrapped his forefeet around the throat of the otter and pulled back with all his strength. At the cost of a jagged hole in his throat he was successful, but with the blood that flowed from his wounds there went the last of his courage. Never again would the gray killer lie in wait for either beaver or otter. Free from that awful blood-sucking grip at his throat, he turned and vanished into the night while Midapoka raised his crimson-flecked head high into the air and emitted a scream of savage triumph. He had conquered the unconquerable; he was the master killer of them all!



Illustrated by George Avison

Flotsam

A colorful story of the men who go down to the Caribbean in tramp steamers.

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

THE mate, Mr. Sunstedt, paused in his task of tallying the sacks of coffee as they were hoisted inboard from the boats alongside the unbeautiful little tramper. He glanced with marked and experienced distrust up at the Caribbean sky. It had been covered only a short time before with a delicate haze. Now it was overcast.

Suddenly he abandoned his general scrutiny to stare toward the northwest. He forgot about the weather and swarmed up the stumpy, blistering foremast of the *Norvale.* Steadily he squinted at that same quarter. After a long minute he hailed the bridge.

"Hello, Skip!" he bawled. "The *J. M. Gans* is comin' over the edge."

Glenn Carmichael, master of the *Norvale,* took his eyes off the barometer. It had been unusually high and now it was pumping uncertainly. He slung over the side a coconut whose milk he had been drinking, and climbing up on top of the tiny chartroom, he gazed at the smudge on the horizon.

"You're right, Sunstedt," he conceded. "That's the *Gans.* Now what in Tophet and points south does that fat old hellion want in here?"

He referred thus disrespectfully not to the vessel, which was a larger, newer and abler craft than the antiquated *Norvale,* but to her owner and skipper, known throughout those blue Caribbean seas only as Hogfat Welt. In other days Welt had been a buccaneer; radio, steam and courts had made him a trader.

"I dunno what's up," Sunstedt shouted as he returned to his supercargo's job. "No good to us, anyhow."

Carmichael turned his back on the approaching cloud of smoke and gazed questioningly across the roadstead to the precipitous, green-clad shore of Louis Quatre. At their busiest centers French West Indies are not worthy to be called hives of industry. Certainly this small outlying island with its formidable coral reefs displayed to Carmichael no visible reason for the visit of a ship as large as the *J. M. Gans.* There was no cargo here for the *Gans;* there was not more than a few tons of general freight, coffee, logwood, sugar and mahogany for Carmichael's own small craft to pick up.

But the *Gans* came on as if a deckload awaited her. She let go her rusty hook farther from shore and in deeper water than the *Norvale* and rapidly lowered a sizable lifeboat.

These signs of life in the roadstead brought most of the crew—ten scrubby, disreputable men—in the *Norvale* to the rail to stare at the other ship. There was no hurry about the coffee; there was never any hurry and smartness in this tramp crew of a tramp ship. They were

The engineer flung himself head-first into the sea.

a motley lot; a company of blighted bodies and damned souls, condemned to the sea by the hostility of the land.

Scarr, the gray-headed engineer, came up, wet, white-faced and exhausted from a bout with the corroded and leaky boiler tubes. He plied his sweat-rag vigorously for a moment and then went to his room for another swig of rum.

Danny, the thin, wizened cook, scrubbing away at a saucepan that certainly needed his attention, lifted a quizzical eye to the bridge.

"Old Hogfat's trailing us round to learn the business from you, Skip," he said. "Wasn't he at Grenada, too?"

Glenn Carmichael grunted. At another time he might either have answered jovially or crowned the cook with his own saucepan for insolence. Just now he was too much absorbed in wary consideration of Hogfat Welt's movements.

The *Gans'* boat headed, with shouts and a snatch of song, toward the only other craft of any size in the roads of Louis Quatre. This was a French light cruiser on station in the Caribbean.

Hogfat Welt was at the tiller. With his glasses Carmichael made out that the man beside the shipmaster in the sternsheets was Welt's son Luke, who was also Hogfat's mate.

Mr. Sunstedt came swinging up to the bridge and joined his master.

"He's got every white man on the *Gans* with him in that boat, Sunstedt," Carmichael muttered. "What do you make of that?"

"Must want to impress the Frenchman," Sunstedt replied.

The boat made fast to the cruiser's boom while Hogfat and his son were escorted below.

Carmichael roused himself from contemplation. He cursed out his crew and the loafing darkies in the boats alongside and drove them back to taking on coffee. But he did not fail to watch the cruiser.

In twenty minutes Hogfat Welt and his son came up from below. Their boat cast off and pulled for the beach. As soon as it grated on the sand the round squat figure of Carmichael's enemy disappeared among the coco palms, red tiles and tin roofs of the settlement.

Fifteen minutes elapsed. Then the cruiser began to heave in her chain cable. She broke out her anchor and headed southward, giving the reefs along the coast of the island a wide clearance.

"Old Hogfat must have brought the cruiser some news," Sunstedt speculated. "They said ashore she'd swing here for two or three days."

"Maybe so," Carmichael answered. "Shall we ask old Hogfat why he went to her? He's putting off from the beach."

The crew of the *Gans'* lifeboat had launched her and now were pulling across the calm water of the roadstead. The brooding leaden sky had robbed the sea of its brilliant hue. They headed directly for the *Norvale*.

WORK on Carmichael's small trader stopped again. Her crew, all white, clustered at the rail unrebuked. Carmichael descended to the deck. There was more than half a frown on his face. That fat man in the stern-sheets of the *Gans'* boat was the wiliest rascal from Tobago to Grand Bahama. And now there was another man beside Hogfat Welt and his son in the stern.

Carmichael recognized this newcomer from the shore. He was a young fellow named Titus, the American vice consul at the near-by island of Martinque.

The boat from the *Gans* was pulled briskly toward the starboard quarter of the *Norvale*. Its swift, threading approach scattered the coffee-laden boats clustered alongside and overturned the canoe of one luckless copper-colored Quatrian. Slowing, it drew up beside the Jacob's ladder.

The men at the oars stared up, some grinning, some with challenging eyes. Carmichael, at the rail, did not stir, but his men bunched behind him, muttering.

"What're they up to?" Mr. Sunstedt asked, growling in his throat.

With a powerful heave he lifted Luke Welt over the rail.

"Wait!" said the skipper.

Luke Welt, as short as his father but by no means as fat, reached for the ladder and swung himself onto the lower rung. Without asking permission he climbed briskly up to the deck. His small round head was completely eclipsed by a large blue watch cap with a flamboyant, gold-lettered "Captain" above the peak. His manner was more than confident; it was condescending.

"You're the captain of this thing, aren't you?" he demanded.

Carmichael took his elbows off the rail. "I'm the master," he answered. "Good-by!"

His arms, long and corded, stretched out suddenly and gripped the young man by the waist. With a powerful heave he lifted Luke Welt over the rail. He held him suspended for an instant; then dropped him back into his boat.

A howl of pain came from the seaman on whom young Welt landed, and a roar of anger from Hogfat. Luke collapsed limply in the bottom.

"You blasted fool!" the elder Welt raged, turning a purple face up at Carmichael. "We've got business with you!"

"Stand by to repel boarders!" Carmichael snapped to his crew. He leaned over the side. "Sheer off, you, or I'll drop something heavier than that lubber through your strakes!"

Without any word of command the men in the lifeboat dropped their oars and groped under the thwarts. A varied assortment of pistols, sheath-knives and marlinspikes appeared in their hands.

John Titus, the consular man in the stern, made the next move. He jumped with swift agility onto a thwart of the boat and then to the empty ladder.

"Hold it!" he shouted. "All of you!"

He was up the rungs and on the deck facing Carmichael in no time at all.

"Cut the rough stuff!" he said urgently under his breath. "You're playing his game for him! Cut it!"

Carmichael had been jolted by the businesslike manner in which the men of the *Gans* had produced weapons. It was unexpected; it presaged big trouble. More than that, it told him that Hogfat Welt had strong hidden cards. He was no fool, Welt; he was not turning pirate.

"What is it?" Carmichael demanded, staring at Titus.

"It's none of my business, officially," the consul answered. "But he's got you at the moment, and if you fight he's got you even tighter."

"Got me! Nobody's got me!" Carmichael retorted, amazement mingling with wrath. "What in blue blazes do you mean? This is my ship; nobody's coming aboard without asking my leave!"

"You have an agent in Porto Rico, haven't you?"

Carmichael blinked.

"Snaith?" he questioned uneasily. "What is all this, Titus? And what's Snaith got to do with it?"

The vice consul did not answer him. He looked down over the rail at the fat man in the stern-sheets of the boat.

"Captain Carmichael will receive you if you observe the plain decencies, Captain Welt!" he said.

"Put 'em up, boys, put 'em up!" Welt roared at the eight men in his crew. "Keep 'em handy, but let them start the monkey business!"

Turning, he looked up at Carmichael's set face and grinned jeeringly.

"With your permission, Captain Carmichael, I will come on board to do a bit of important and confidential business with you," he said smoothly.

The skipper of the *Norvale* hesitated, but Titus' warning eyes were on him.

"Come aboard," he said curtly. "But keep those horse marines of yours at a distance or my men will tear 'em up."

Hogfat Welt made the top of the ladder, handling his fat round body with surprising ease. His son started to follow him but changed his mind as his fingers touched the ladder.

"Stand off and on, boys," old Welt said over his shoulder. "Act nice, but keep handy."

HE was not two feet from the rail when Huggins, a fireman with the shoulders of a gorilla and the temper of Lucifer, swung a shackle at his head. It would have split Welt's round skull like an overripe melon had not Carmichael been watching his crew. The skipper's upraised left arm diverted the blow by six inches. Before Huggins recovered his balance after the tremendous swing Carmichael's right fist came up and lodged with a crack under his chin.

The big man in dungarees toppled over. That huge jaw, as formidable-looking as a battleship's prow, was actually Huggins' weak spot and Carmichael knew it well.

"Come along, Captain," Carmichael said coolly to the paling Hogfat Welt. "He was just trying to brush a fly off the brim of your hat. This way."

There was no more trouble from the crew of the *Norvale* as Carmichael led his visitor to the cramped and unpleasing saloon.

"That man will regret his attempt at murder," Hogfat growled. From the pocket of his dirty linen coat he pulled a roll of paper viciously, like a man drawing a gun. . . .

Ten minutes later Carmichael left Welt leaning back in his chair blandly lighting a malodorous pipe. He led Titus into his stuffy little cabin, shut the door carefully and faced the American vice consul.

"What about this, Titus?" he demanded incredulously. "Do you mean to tell me that fat ape can take my ship away from me?"

"He's got enough French, English and American law there in that roll of documents to take the ark away from Noah," Titus answered crisply. "With that wad of language he could kick an admiral off his flagship. He's got you libeled, stopped and liened to a fare-you-well. That's what comes of giving a power of attorney to a treacherous agent."

"Snaith did all the shore business for me," Carmichael protested. "With me down among the islands and him way up in Porto Rico he had to have a power of—"

"So he had," Titus interrupted. "Why is a sailor always a sucker? He sold you out; that's what."

"When I get my hands on him—" Carmichael began, staring at his hard and competent fists.

"My bet is that you won't," Titus said crisply. "There's an excellent line running to New York from Porto Rico and he's probably taken it long ago. Maybe Snaith and Welt have cooked this up between them; maybe you can prove conspiracy. But if you do anything foolish like fighting—"

"Are you threatening me?" Carmichael demanded.

John Titus lit a cigarette. "Me?" he asked. "What for? Do you think I get a rake-off for coming aboard with Welt and scaring you off?"

CARMICHAEL stood still. He was itching to fight, to tear away this flimsy web in which he was enmeshed. But doggedly he subdued the impulse. "I think you're straight, Titus," he said at last. "And I'm obliged to you."

"That's handsome—considering the bad news I've brought," Titus said. "Now let me whisper in your ear: It looks to me as if this stout lad Welt was trying to stir you up to scrapping. Resistance would make every whisker in a judge's head palpitate with wrath. They're that way, judges are, in any country. It would ruin any case you've got, and bolster up Welt's."

Carmichael nodded reluctantly. "I see that," he conceded. "But—"

"Another thing," Titus put in briskly. "This Welt—Hogfat's what he's called, isn't it?—paid a call on the captain of that French cruiser. Well, he did that to ask for assistance in case you got uppity. There's nothing ashore that would help him. And then the cruiser blows, doesn't she?"

"That doesn't look as if the cruiser was interested," Carmichael said.

Titus laughed. "I've met that French captain. In the interests of international amity I got slightly intoxicated with him

when he came ashore last night. All he would talk about is some new gun he's got on board that he wants to try out. You know these naval men—good scouts, but bloodthirsty."

Carmichael jerked his head in assent. He did not love gold braid.

"Nothing would please him better than something to shoot at—even if he had to shoot across her bow first," Titus went on. "Maybe that's why he's gone out. He sees a chance to give himself and his crew a real thrill—a chase and capture at sea."

He paused and winked shrewdly. "That's in case you're planning on trying a run for it to some American port where you think you'd have a better show."

Carmichael's brown face deepened in color. "So I can't even run!" he said bitterly. "I've got to surrender my ship to a gorilla like Welt and slink ashore."

Titus nodded. "That's what comes of signing papers," he said. "Your friend Hogfat's got it all worked out. He's going to put that cub of his on board this ship as captain and use her to pick up the stuff in the smaller islands, where it wouldn't pay to use the *J. M. Gans,* and transship it."

"And my crew?" Carmichael asked anxiously.

"He don't think much of your crew—but he'll keep a few of 'em till he can get some others. The new ones will be boys of color, like most of the *Gans'* crew. They come cheaper than white men."

"I'll fight!" flared Carmichael. "Damn me, these poor devils of mine aren't to blame for my blasted foolishness! And if once they get on the beach—you know what will happen to 'em! They'll rot there. No, by God, I'll fight!"

TITUS crushed out his cigarette and rose. "If you're fighting, I'll be going ashore," he said. "I hate to see a man in a bad hole make a grave out of it."

He paused with a hand on the doorknob. "A grave for himself and his crew," he added.

The vice consul's cold logic acted as a douche to Carmichael's flaming rage.

"Wait!" he said. "We could clean Welt and that piebald crew of his—but we can't beat a battleship. I'll go ashore." And he returned to the saloon.

"Your papers win—for the moment," he said to the bland fat man in the chair. "I'm going ashore." And he strode past Welt to the door. Down on deck he called his crew together.

"Welt's got this ship by law," he said curtly. "I'm for the beach. I'll see that those of you who want discharges get their pay ashore. I understand that he'll keep some or all of you on if you want to stay."

Leisurely, with contemptuous eyes, Welt looked over the *Norvale's* crew.

"I'll keep five men, including the mate and engineer," he said. "My son here"—he waved a hand to indicate the astute officer still in the boat alongside—"will be master. The rest of you are through."

"I'd sell matches in hell for a living before I'd work for you or the spawn of you!" Sunstedt blazed savagely. He shook his fist in Hogfat's face. Then men closed up instantly behind them. This was talk they understood.

CARMICHAEL pushed in alertly between Welt and the angry mate.

"Belay that!" he commanded. "Anybody that wants to fight will have me on his chest! This lump of fat wants to put me in wrong by stirring up violence. Back, I said!"

Sunstedt gave way reluctantly and the men paused. Carmichael eyed Huggins challengingly but the turbulent fireman, holding his chin in one hand, glared past him at Hogfat.

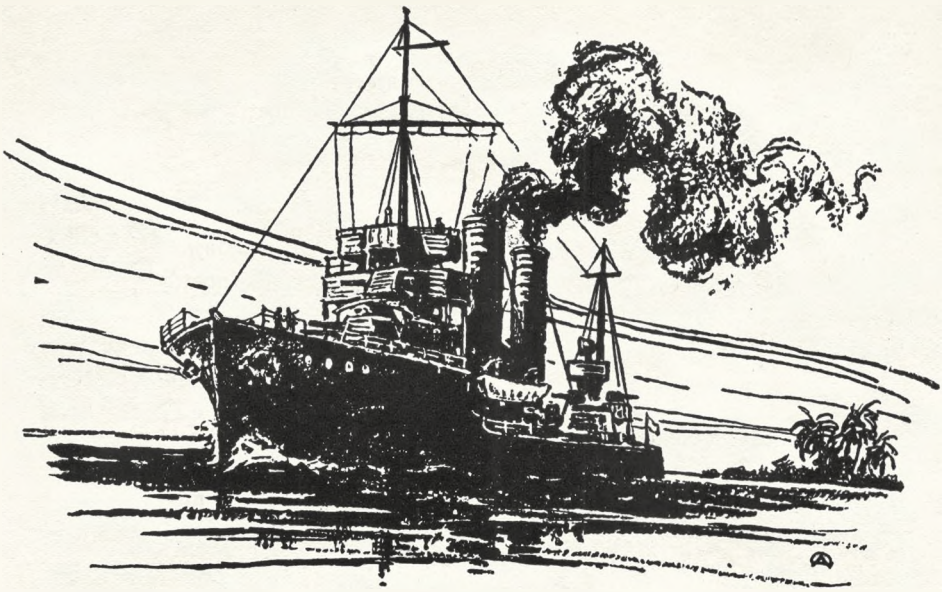
"Those for the shore get your duffle and stand by the port boat," Carmichael said.

Sullenly the men began to shuffle toward the forecastle and Sunstedt and Scarr vanished into the deckhouse. Only one man, the lean little cook, Danny, remained. And Danny shoved his thin wrinkled face up at Carmichael.

"Well, thin!" he said explosively. "So I'm goin' to have a real shipmaster for me boss at last! And you, you long omadhaun that doesn't know a sea-cook from a supercargo, you're going ashore where you belong! If you ever go to sea again I'm bettin' 'twill be as dishwasher on a mail boat. *Agh!* Too long I've taken it from the likes of you, ye—"

His words seemed to lash him into fury; he danced on the hot deck in front of Carmichael and flourished both fists above his head in a pantomime of rage. Only his left eye, winking surreptitiously but earnestly at Carmichael, took no part in that paroxysm of denunciation.

"Sure if it wasn't for the respict I have for Captain Welt and his son I'd—I'd wipe his deck with ye!" Danny shrieked.



The cruiser broke out her anchor and headed southward, giving the reefs along the coast a wide clearance.

"Big as ye are, I'd do it—ye measly, flat-faced, bullying barracuda, you!"

Carmichael hit out, gently, but with a show of force. Danny took the blow on the side of the neck and promptly fell to the deck. As he scrambled up again, full of fight, Hogfat Welt, grinning at the late master of the *Norvale*, caught the cook by his shirt collar.

"That's enough!" he commanded. "I'll keep you. You seem to be a man of sense."

Luke Welt guffawed. "I hope he cooks like he sizes men up," he said.

Danny was the only man of the crew that declared allegiance to the new master. With smoldering eyes and muttered threats the men climbed into their boat and cast off the falls at Carmichael's command. Titus joined the *Norvale's* ex-master in the stern.

Hogfat and his son with Danny and the armed men of the *J. M. Gans* lined the rail to jeer at the ruffled shoregoers.

"Leave the boat on the beach," old Welt shouted to Carmichael. "I'll send a couple of men to get it."

"Sure, that's more than is in it now!" Danny, standing beside him, shrieked. Hogfat's crew, unrebuked, yelled derisively as the boat pulled away.

Carmichael, glum and anxious, said no word as the boat crossed the dull dark water of the roadstead. The haze which had blurred the sun was becoming denser; the sky had the dead, leaden hue seen more frequently in higher latitudes than in the glittering tropics. Here in the lee of the island there was neither wave nor swell, though the roadstead was no more than a shallow, unprotected depression in the coast. The sea was flat, lifeless.

"What are you going to do with 'em?" Titus asked with a doubtful glance at the men as they hauled the boat up on the sand, out of reach of the shallow tide.

Carmichael halted a few paces away and stared hopelessly at the rabble of disgruntled, slack-jawed seamen who had followed him ashore so unquestioningly.

"That's it," he said. "What do I do with 'em? There isn't one in the lot with a chance to get a ship down here. They're a mangy lot, Titus, in the eyes of any man but myself. They'll go to hell in a hurry, every last one."

His bitter blue eyes ran over them. "The mate, Sunstedt, is a competent seaman who lost his ship and his chance in life in the ice in the Strait of Belle Isle. It was his first voyage as a master. He can stand anything but discipline. Scarr, the engineer, is a good man when he's half drunk, but a timid, doddering old fool with fear emasculating him when he's sober. A burst steampipe nearly did for him fifteen years ago and it takes cane-juice to keep him going.

"And the rest—there's Olaf, the bo's'n, throws fits once in a while and has to be nursed like a baby; there's Forrest, a mild gentleman with a dread for the

shore and the company of landsmen; Bates, Shelby and Gunner, hard cases who are more than the average mate and skipper care to handle; Pendeen, that squat, powerful fellow, a Cornishman from Nevada; a good man even if he is lame and half blind. And of course, there's Huggins—where's Huggins?—a thorough thug with a fiendish temper and all the loyalty in the world. If he gets mad enough he'll kill somebody. Maybe he has killed before. He has a glass jaw and can be kept to the mark if hit hard and soon enough. He comes to, as mild as a milkmaid."

"And Danny, the man that didn't seem to think much of you?" Titus put in ironically as Carmichael's eye roved over the crew in vague uneasiness. "Are you worried about him, too?"

The *Norvale's* ex-master could not restrain a grin. "Danny will be ashore before the *Norvale* puts to sea," he said confidently. "He's a damned, impudent, ungovernable scut, but he'd never desert me. I'd like to know his game with Welt."

"You think he's going to make trouble?" Titus asked, glancing doubtfully across the sullen sea toward the *Norvale*.

"Danny won't blow her up, if that's what's worrying you," Carmichael said. "He's harmless—within limits—but Hogfat's son will get no fatter for having that sea-cook aboard! No, Danny's the fly in the ointment, blast them both."

A perplexed frown gathered on his forehead as he looked again toward the group on the beach. The men had heaved their seabags up onto their shoulders and were standing uncertainly by the boat, waiting. They were as unpromising-looking a lot of *canaille* as ever came out of the dives of Marseilles.

"What do I do with 'em?" Carmichael muttered. "No decent ship would have one of them. I'll hold in as long as I can. But on the beach they're doomed, dished, sunk. You know the tropics. They're men on a ship and can be handled, but after a few days ashore—God held the lot!"

"Quit worrying about them," Titus advised. "You're running no home for incompetent seamen, are you? Pay 'em off; it's all you can do."

ON the *Norvale* Danny had gone into his galley and got his cap and now was standing before Hogfat Welt and his son with the cap in his hand by way of indicating his humility. He had intercepted Hogfat on his way to his own boat.

"Heaven forgive me, sir, but I've made a mistake, staying here with ye," Danny said loudly. His small body writhed uneasily. "I'll not deceive ye—I'm a bad cook and dirty, and no more use on deck than I am in the galley. I'll be goin' ashore, and that soon, sir, with your permission."

HOGFAT snarled at the cook, but there was suspicion in his anger.

"What's changed your mind?" he demanded.

"He's a terrible man, sir, that same Carmichael," Danny said in his high voice. He shivered and one wary eye flicked toward listening members of Welt's crew. "A black devil of a man, sir, and I've been thinkin' I'd be saf—happier, I mean, sir—on the beach."

"Safer, you meant!" old Welt charged. "What d'ye mean by that? Speak up! What d'ye mean?"

"It's crossed my mind—that—that 'tis not in reason that a raging God-awful terror of a man like him would be surrenderin' his ship so amiable and pleasant without—well, the truth of it is, sir, I'd like to be goin' ashore in a hurry."

"You think he's putting something over, hey?"

"The searing curse of him will follow this ship," Danny said solemnly. He shivered again and looked around apprehensively. "I can feel it—and worse! Who can tell when it will strike—an' how many it will blast? No, I'll be going ashore. I have Captain Carmichael's pardon to beg, anyhow."

Hogfat Welt planted the palm of his pudgy hand on the thin wrinkled face of the cook and pushed. Danny went backward across the deck, hooked his fleshless shank in the corner of a hatch cover and fell backward, sprawling.

"You yellow cringing pup!" the shipmaster blazed. "So you think your tough skipper has fixed this ship to sink or blow up, do you? Afraid to say so, aint you? Well, he hasn't done any tinkering with her—because he thinks he can get her back!"

Danny scrambled up with apprehension still on his face.

"Take me ashore! Take me ashore!" he wailed, raising his hand in appeal.

Hogfat rounded on his son, who had been listening uneasily to Danny's black predictions. "Here—Captain!" he snarled, with withering emphasis. "Can't

you handle your own crew? Part his hair with a spike if he gives any more trouble!"

He moved toward his boat. Danny would have followed, but Luke Welt caught him by the collar and propelled him forward.

"If you think Carmichael's done anything to this ship you'd better find out what it is," the new master of the *Norvale* said. "Get below and take a look around."

The senior Welt paused on deck long enough to instruct five of the ten white men who had manned his boat to remain aboard the *Norvale*.

"You're a prize crew—until I can ship enough darkies to handle this craft," he said. "You"—his hand stabbed at the narrow chest of the *J. M. Gans*' flat-faced engineer—"go below and see what you can make out of her mill."

The rest of his crew followed him into the lifeboat and at Hogfat's command pushed off toward the *J. M. Gans*. There the master was welcomed effusively by eight uneasy West Indian sailors and firemen and the mulatto second mate.

"It looks bad, suh—clouding up, sort of," the coffee-colored officer said, with an apprehensive glance at the sky. "It looks powerful like—"

He paused, afraid to give voice to the dread name of hurricane, the scourge of the islands.

Hogfat Welt laughed harshly. "There was a center of cyclonic disturbance about twenty miles east northeast of Louis Quatre an hour ago," he said. "Sparks got the warning. It was heading northwest—northwest, do you hear? We may get a breeze out of it. If we do—veer out more cable."

"Yes, *suh!*" said the second mate, applying a bandana to his forehead and grinning suddenly. "Headin' northwest, suh? That's one that will miss us. I wasn't alarmed in the least, suh, you understand, but the men—"

"You were scared canary yellow!" Hogfat snarled. "Get up the anchor! We're going to lie closer to the *Norvale* till I ship a crew."

He pushed past the mate into his cabin.

AFTER a visit to the radio station and a tour of the town to get quarters for his crew, Carmichael returned with Titus to the beach. The men were still grouped forlornly by the boat, the only link between them and the sea.

A warm drizzle had set in out of the thickening clouds and all the tropical brilliance of Louis Quatre had been dimmed to a monotone of gray.

Carmichael ran his eye over them, counting aloud.

"Huggins is gone," he said to Titus. "He's the first. I'll never be able to keep 'em together."

He turned to Sunstedt. "Where's Huggins?" he asked.

The mate's blue eyes widened in surprise. "Huggins?" he repeated. "Huggins didn't come ashore with us, Skip. He stayed with Danny on the *Norvale*."

"What!" snapped Carmichael. "Huggins stayed—and I never noticed it!"

FOR a moment he was stricken motionless, dumb. Then he lifted quick eyes to the *Norvale* and spat out bitter words of self-censure. "That crazy loyal coot will wreck her! He'll run wild! What a blasted fool I am! Huggins! My God, he'll think he's doing me a favor to crack Welt's skull!"

Sunstedt's jaw sagged. "You're right!" he muttered. "Of course! He stayed to square off Welt. I—I was so upset, Skip, that—"

From far across the water there came a yell, a yell that carried a man's uttermost terror to the beach of Louis Quatre. And it came from the *Norvale*.

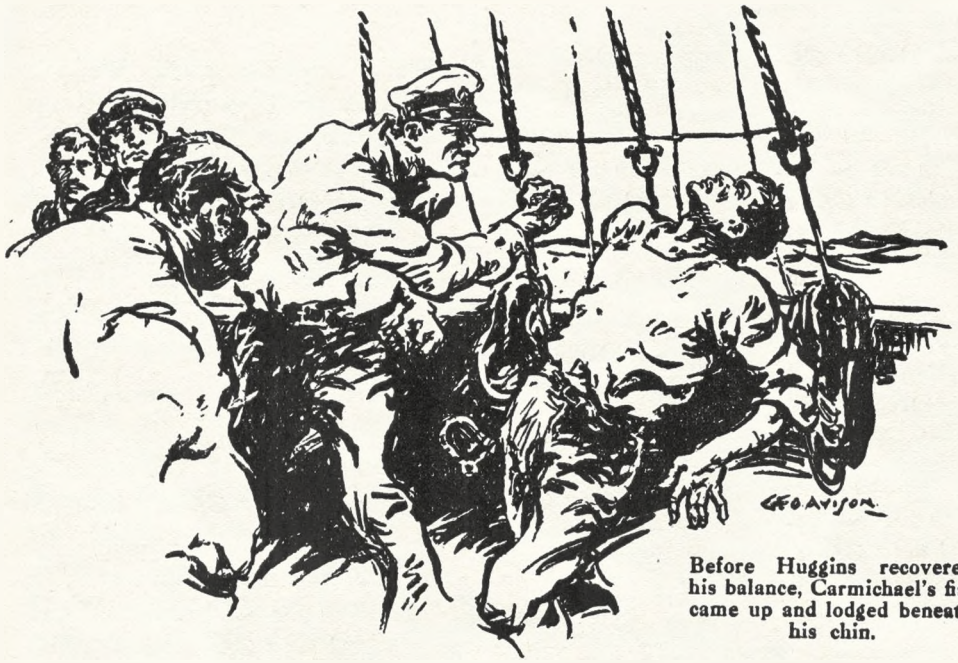
They stared that way, but could make out nothing in the murky atmosphere but confused movement on the cargo ship's deck.

"Get that boat into the water!" Carmichael thundered. "All of you! Jump!"

Olaf led the rush to the boat but he was not ten feet ahead of the slowest man. They laid hold of her gunwales and ran her down into the sea. There were no breakers, not the slightest symptom of a swell, and the men launched her with a rush and scrambled in port and starboard, bow and stern. Carmichael was at the tiller before one of them had his oar in the tholepins. Titus scrambled in beside him.

"Give way!" Carmichael shouted. "Bend your backs—break 'em! He may be out to clean them up. And they'll shoot him down like— Make her walk, damn you!"

The men drove her with straining blades. She sliced through the quiet water with increasing speed. And suddenly, not two hundred yards from the shore, a wind came out of the northward. It wrinkled the sea in an instant and



Before Huggins recovered his balance, Carmichael's fist came up and lodged beneath his chin.

made tiny curling wavelets hiss softly the next.

"Stiff!" muttered Carmichael to himself. "This is no squall! That hurricane's raising some hell to north'ard, or I'm a duke!"

But he had no time for hurricanes now. The savage face of Huggins was stamped on his brain. A human hurricane was loose on the *Norvale* and bent on striking ship or crew. Only he, Carmichael knew, could tame that ferocious, loyal, murderous fireman.

The surging boat was still many lengths from the *Norvale.* Welt's men were running this way and that on her unfamiliar deck and bawling commands and questions at each other.

All at once a shriek that rose high above the clamorous voices on the vessel rang out over the water. Simultaneously Welt's thin, narrow-chested engineer shot out of the engine-room companion. Head turned backward, he raced to the side and flung himself into the sea. He struck the water head-first, disappeared and emerged again instantly. Still yelling, but with the edge of his terror blunted, he swam to the *Norvale's* ladder and started clambering to the deck again.

On the bridge of the *Norvale* "Captain" Luke Welt was hailing his father's ship hysterically through a megaphone. "Mutiny! Murder!" he shrieked.

On the *J. M. Gans* old Hogfat himself was already leading a scramble down into the lifeboat alongside.

"Keep 'em off, Luke!" Hogfat roared across the water to his son as he landed in the stern-sheets and grabbed the tiller. He flung a fat arm to indicate Carmichael's approaching lifeboat. "Keep 'em off!" Then he turned his round face up toward the deck he had just left.

"Veer out cable, you blasted saffron monkey!" he blared at his gesticulating mate. "Watch this wind! Give her scope!"

Several darkies leaped in frantic haste to the forecastle head. The gale roared at them as if trying to keep them from the windlass.

Hogfat's boat shoved away from the side of the *J. M. Gans* and moved with growing speed across the short watery gap toward the *Norvale.* The increasing, weighty wind was blowing hard enough now to give the men in both the rowing boats trouble with their oar-blades and the boats themselves were making leeway.

Carmichael's boat was winning the race. Luke Welt, watching it with fearful eyes, dropped his megaphone and ran to the wing of the bridge nearest to it.

"Keep 'em off!" he screamed to his demoralized crew. Forthwith he jerked a revolver out of his pocket and leveled it at the boat drawing alongside. Carmichael's hail was interrupted by the crack of the weapon. As fast as his finger would work, the excited youth poured bullets at the boat, shouting orders as he fired.

In the stern-sheets Titus uttered a cry and clutched at his thigh.

"He hit me!" the consular man gasped. "He's crazy—mad with fear! Look out for him!"

From the decks of the *Norvale* two other revolvers in the hands of a couple of the *J. M. Gans'* crew seconded the fire of their master. Their aim was uncertain but the range was short. Bullets spat into the water close to the boat.

"Give way!" Carmichael ordered, swinging the tiller. "Pull around her stern!"

He looked anxiously at Titus, but the wounded man was sitting rigidly upright, staring with blazing eyes and tightened lips at the new master of the *Norvale*.

"I'm all right!" he answered Carmichael brusquely. "But I want to get within reach of that blasted half-baked sap!"

"I'll oblige you!" Carmichael said grimly.

The *Norvale* was tugging at her anchor chain now as the sudden north wind attacked her.

Carmichael's lifeboat drew rapidly sternward under the combined urge of oars and gale.

In another instant Carmichael snapped out an order and ported his tiller. The lifeboat swung in under the shelter of the ship's rounded stern and headed into the wind on the port side of the boat.

"Now, pull!" Carmichael commanded. "We'll board her from this side! They'll be out of ammunition soon!"

Farther forward Hogfat's boat had come alongside the *Norvale,* and Hogfat and his men were already boarding her. From these reinforcements came a scattering, ineffective fire.

Carmichael stood up to hail old Welt, but it was Hogfat who spoke first.

"Sheer off, Carmichael! Sheer off, you bloody pirate!" the old shipmaster bellowed. "Sheer—or I'll sink ye!"

Simultaneously another hail came from farther aft, on the *Norvale's* poop.

"Skipper! Skipper!"

IT was Danny's voice, imploring, cracking with excitement.

Carmichael swung around.

The cook of the *Norvale* was struggling toward the rail of the ship. He was dragging behind him a prostrate, inanimate body and in his free hand he brandished the galley coal-shovel in urgent appeal.

"Skipper! Wait!" Danny wailed. "I've got him! Will ye help? Quick!"

He did not pause for an answer from Carmichael but with frantic strength heaved up onto the rail the head and shoulders of his burden—the heavy head and shoulders of the unconscious Huggins. And then, with no ceremony but much speed, Danny gripped the fireman by the feet and shoved him overboard.

The thud of climbing feet on the poop ladder speeded Danny even faster as he followed Huggins over into the sea.

The men in the lifeboat, with Carmichael ruddering alertly, shoved their craft toward the double splash. Danny came up first, and in an instant later managed to get hold of Huggins' shirt. He was still hanging on when strong hands dragged him and the unconscious fireman aboard the boat.

"I had to tap him on the chin with me shovel!" Danny wailed. "He laid out a fireman, chased the chief out o' the engine-room and started to shovel live coals into the port bunker! I had to tap him!"

"Good for you!" Carmichael grated.

"I just stayed aboard, Skip, to put the fear of God and yourself into that rubber-spined Luke," Danny babbled on, but Carmichael paid no heed. "Sheer off now!" he commanded. "We'll—"

HE stopped so suddenly that even Titus took his eyes off the *Norvale* to look at him.

"Great Peter's key!" Carmichael was staring with protruding eyes toward the *J. M. Gans,* his own ship forgotten. Every man in the lifeboat turned to stare with him.

"She's dragging!" Titus exclaimed.

The copper-colored second mate and dark West Indians on the forecastle head of the *J. M. Gans* were doing a dance of despair. And even as they danced the last link of the chain cable of Welt's anchor trickled out of her hawsepipe and thudded into the sea. Instantly the rising wind took the ship backward. She was not dragging; she was clear of her anchor.

"They—didn't—shackle on—that shot of cable—when—they paid it out!" Carmichael said with slow intensity. "Great Peter! She's free—she's lost!"

The seamen in the lifeboat turned their eyes downwind where the coral reefs of Henri Quatre stretched out under the hissing, growing waves. And then the thundering of the gale in their eyes

was diminished by the blasting, harsh command of their skipper.

"Give way, you sons! Jump her! Row!"

ROW? They *had* rowed, those tatterdemalions, toward the *Norvale*—had rowed themselves breathless and dry-throated, to rescue their mate Huggins from the crime of murder. But now they flung themselves on the oars and strained their arms and backbones till they cracked. They rowed like fiends escaping from hell across a fiery lake. And they rowed downwind, with the roaring gale pushing both the iron ship and the wooden lifeboat—toward the reefs where sharp teeth and a short shrift awaited them, they rowed as if they rowed to eternal glory.

On board the drifting, uncontrolled *J. M. Gans* panic-stricken men were making a half-hearted attempt to let go the other bower anchor. They fumbled about as if the releasing gear were fouled. Suddenly, in the midst of this flurried effort, one of the sailors made a break for the lifeboat on the port quarter. In an instant, with the second mate well in the van, the other West Indians piled aft. Panic was in command. They swung out the boat on the davits, scrambled in and lowered away.

Farther north, they knew a writhing, tearing fury was loose upon the earth, free to wreak fury upon sea and islands alike. The fear of that whirling, annihilating and ruthless force was inbred in their bones; it was a terror imbibed with their mother's milk. And to them the roaring, hard-hitting gale that now enveloped them could only be the prelude to that other wind, the wind of death. Their bones turned to water in their bodies and their eyes yearned toward the land. They let go the falls and made for the beach.

The *J. M. Gans,* deserted, was swept on to leeward, where the seas were creaming on the reefs.

But faster than the steamer could drift Carmichael's crew drove the lifeboat. Even as the darky sailors left her the *Norvale's* boat crept up to her bow.

A slant of wind, hauling to westward of north, struck the ship on the port bow. Her head paid off sluggishly; she drifted now broadside to the gale and she drifted faster. The iron wall of her plates opposed itself to the seas and the lifeboat, on this sudden lee shore, was flung about and slashed with spray.

Huggins sat up suddenly in the midst of that deluge, blinking, bewildered, half choked. No one gave him a glance.

Carmichael headed grimly through the welter of water alongside toward the tackles that the panic-stricken deserters had left trailing from the davits on the port quarter.

Sunstedt, crouching in the bow, suddenly flung himself half over the gunwale. His straining, hooklike hand seized one of the swinging blocks. Nimbly he hooked it in. The lifeboat was whipped around by the sudden strain of the tackle on her bow. Its fragile side struck the iron plates of the *J. M. Gans* and caved in like an eggshell. The boat filled fast but already Carmichael, in the stern, had grabbed the other tackle and hooked on.

"Come on!" he shouted and laying hold of Scarr, he half urged, half hoisted, the old engineer up the taut ropes, swarming up close behind him. Sunstedt was already on his way up the forward tackle and men followed both officers with agile eagerness.

Scarr gained the deck. He needed no shove from Carmichael to send him pelting for the engine-room companion. After him bounded the reviving Huggins and another fireman.

"If there's steam—give me all you've got!" Carmichael shouted after the old engineer. "Sunstedt—the rest of you—clear that anchor and let go!"

He sprinted toward the bridge ladder, shoved the telegraph to full speed ahead and put the wheel hard aport. Then he waited with hands gripping the bridge rail and lips tightly shut. The issue was with his crew.

STEADILY the *J. M. Gans* drifted toward the reefs. Every instant her keel drew closer to the coral. Was it feet from her bottom, or only inches? Let her touch coral, with that increasing gale scourging the seas, and she was lost—piled up forever. And they would be lost with her—but that was no matter to the toiling crew. It was the job on hand that filled their minds, lent speed and strength to their arms.

On the forecastle Sunstedt raised a carpenter's mallet, with a yell of warning to his mates. The mallet came down with a crash. Instantly, with a thunder of iron links battering at the hawsepipe the second anchor plunged into the sea. A cloud of red rust rose up over the yelling men on the forecastle head and was instantly whisked away.

Sunstedt veered out chain, but a wave of Carmichael's hand stopped him.

"Hold it!" Carmichael roared. "Keep it short! Watch yourself when she strikes!"

Not a word of this reached Sunstedt's ears against the rush and roar of the gale, but a glance over the side told him what threatened. There was not enough distance between the stern of the ship and the reef to give her any scope of cable. The anchor on the bottom failed to bury its flukes; the weight of it slowed her drift a trifle; that was all.

Carmichael, at the wing of the bridge, glanced aft. The stern was plunging inexorably into the welter of foam and spray that marked the first reaching fang of the reef. He saw a sudden gush of leaping white water at her very rudder.

THE ship was trembling as if in human fear of the crushing smash that impended. Carmichael braced himself. And then, instantaneously, he realized what that trembling, that quick spurt of foam, meant. Scarr and Huggins had been fast—incredibly fast—down in that menaced, unfamiliar engine-room.

He leaped toward the wheelhouse.

A man was already at the wheel—Forrest, the secretive ex-gentleman. His face was drawn up into a tense mask of expectation, but his hands were quick and sure as he straightened her out.

Time ceased. The engines of the *J. M. Gans* fought a savage fight; her screw lashed at the shallows while the ship shuddered. Steam and steel against wind, wave and coral, man and his tools fought the old fight for his life against Nature and her elements. But these men, outcasts of the land, flotsam of the sea, fought harder than most, for they had fought before this the fierce, desperate fight of the underdog.

The ship hung motionless, fronting the gale, with reaching teeth and leaping water at her stern. Almost imperceptibly the straight line of her chain straining against the drag of the anchor, softened to a curve. Sluggishly the *J. M. Gans* surged ahead a foot—six feet—on until the anchor chain dangled up and down her stem. Her screw kicked her on—sent a flood of water gushing at the reef.

Sunstedt, on the forecastle head, dared not demand steam for the windlass, but in that moment of slack chain the capstan bars were fitted and the crew slung themselves at the job. Gasping, with breaking backs, they heaved the anchor up off the coral.

The *J. M. Gans* butted into the wind. Ahead of her waves leaped like white wolves up at the men on the forecastle head; astern of her waves burst in thunderous wrath upon the reef. But the ship moved on, heading seaward. She steamed out into deep water where the pounding draft of the distant hurricane could find no coral reef for an anvil. . . .

John Titus was speaking to Hogfat Welt. His head was quite close to the shipmaster's purple countenance, but his fist was even closer.

"It's salvage, an abandoned ship saved from certain destruction at extreme peril of life," Titus said with absolute conviction. "And Carmichael has me as a witness, too—since your half-baked son missed my head and only put a bullet through my thigh."

"Luke thought—" Welt began apologetically.

"Luke never thought in his life," Titus retorted. "But he—and probably you, too—will have a good long opportunity to think, shortly!"

"Wait, now!" Hogfat implored. He turned to Carmichael.

"Isn't there some way this thing could be settled?" he asked.

"Sure!" said Carmichael briskly. "We want the *Norvale*—free and clear of all your claims and mumbo-jumbo. If we don't get her I'll tie this banana-basket of yours up at a pier for nine months, anyhow."

"The *Norvale's* yours," Hogfat Welt said with undignified haste. "You heard, Mr. Titus. It's a contract! Now, Mr. Titus, about this unfortunate accident to your leg—"

MR. SUNSTEDT paused in his task of tallying sacks of coffee as they were hoisted inboard from the boats alongside the unbeautiful little tramper. He swarmed up the blistering foremast of the *Norvale*. Steadily he squinted at the shining sea to northwestward and after a short interval hailed the bridge.

"Hello, Skip!" he bawled. "The *J. M. Gans* is goin' over the edge."

Glenn Carmichael, master of the *Norvale*, grinned complacently down at the scene of subdued activity on the deck of his disreputable little craft. In satisfaction he ran his eye over such deplorable specimens of men as were in sight.

"Let her go, Mr. Sunstedt; let her go," he answered.

Mr. Whimple Rebels

A plain citizen turns homicidal—to the sorrow of Blood the Bump and his fellow-gangsters.

By WILLIAM C. FORD

IN the city where Mr. Whimple lived, it cost four hundred dollars to have a guy bumped off. That would be considered high in some towns, and in a good many it would be called quite reasonable. Anyway, that was the price.

All you had to do was see the right party and pay two hundred down. You paid the rest after the goods were delivered, and if you didn't, you got bumped off yourself free of charge.

The plan really was quite simple and worked very satisfactorily. True, there was one business man, named Smith, I think, who developed a pretty good way to beat it. He paid down his first installment, and he gave the name and address of the victim, who was a competitor of his who had it coming to him. Then when the gang asked Mr. Smith his own name so they could charge him in the ledger for the balance, he said he was Patrick J. Flaherty, and he gave a street and number in the East End. He wasn't really Patrick J. Flaherty, but Mr. Flaherty had given him a particularly swift punch in the eye two weeks before, for pushing ahead of him in a line at a ticket window.

So Mr. Smith had gone away and thought no more of the matter, and when the gangsters didn't get their second installment they bumped off Mr. Flaherty also, and Mr. Smith thereby got two jobs for half the price of one, at a saving of six hundred dollars, which is quite a lot of money these days. Mr. Smith got more than that too, because it had worked so well the first time that he tried to do it again a little later, and they recognized him and gave him the works without any additional charge. He really got more than he figured on.

At any rate, the knocking-off industry in Mr. Whimple's city was on a business basis, and when Mr. Whimple was so unfortunate as to be in the subway when one of these little jobs was being done, it gave him plenty of pause, because he saw the whole thing.

Now there is an etiquette expected of the general public in these matters. It is considered none of their business; and if there is anything that makes a gangster killing mad,—and there is,—it is to have one of the general public come down to the police station, and when a pal is placed in line with a lot of plain-clothes men and flat-feet, to have that witness stick his hand out and point his finger at their pal and say: "That's the feller I saw, right there! He shot him right in the stomach six times and walked up the stairs! I know him by the wart on his nose, and the scar across his cheek, and the black-and-white check suit, and the way he keeps scowling. That's the man, Officers. I seen him do it!"

And, you know, that's just about the most foolish thing a witness can do. It's as bad as blowing into a shotgun to see if it's loaded, or jumping out of an airplane because somebody hollers fire, or telling the traffic officer: "You're a liar! I warn't speeding." Because it means the end of you, that's all. Because you know yourself, it stands to reason the boys aren't going to let you live long enough actually to come into court and tell the jury such a story, and cause all that trouble for poor Corkscrew the Trimmer, or whatever his name is, who only did it anyway in the course of the day's work, and didn't mean any harm by it, and never beat his mother up, but always ate the nice breakfast she cooked for him every afternoon.

No, friend. The safest way is to say the shots were fired by a Chinaman, seven feet tall, weighing one hundred and twenty pounds, with a long white beard —or possibly one hundred and nineteen without the beard. Then you've got a chance.

Of course the boys may decide to bump you off anyway, on the theory that you know too much, and may change your mind, and the safest way is to kill you. But if that happens, you really can't blame them, because that is the

safest thing they can do, and you've got to admit it.

Well, Mr. Whimple picked the lad who did the shooting out of the line-up, and identified him, and told all about it, and had his name taken down, and started to be put in jail to be held as a material witness till the next fall, when the trial might come off.

Mr. Whimple didn't like that very much, because he had some things to do; so he got busy with the telephone and a lawyer and a cash bond, and such like, and finally they said they'd let him go.

When they said that, they looked kind of funny, or at least funnier than usual, and Mr. Whimple, not being what you would call a fool exactly, wanted to know how about it, and why they looked at him like that.

Well, it developed they were sort of worried about Mr. Whimple. Perhaps not worried exactly, but still if you're the prosecuting officer and haven't any evidence at the trial when the District Attorney calls for it, it's a little embarrassing. They had a feeling Mr. Whimple might not be around next fall when the case came up, and that'd be awkward.

But it was Mr. Whimple himself who did the constructive things. He studied pictures of all of Blood the Bump's gang. That was the name of the organization that was now at war with Mr. Whimple. That is, that was its real name. Its other name was "The Amalgamated Brotherhood of Ice-cream Soda Men's Protective Association," and it protected ice-cream soda men from being blown up, for a regular weekly salary.

That idea possibly may be a little involved. The ice-cream soda men were not blown up for a regular weekly salary, but for not paying Bump the Blood a regular weekly salary. It was really very simple, and quite satisfactory to all but the ice-cream soda men.

Mr. Whimple arranged right off to be licensed to carry a revolver and a sawed off shotgun. The Law was a little nervous about this at first, as it doesn't like to have the ordinary citizen carry arms, because somebody might get hurt. The Law feels that if the police and the gangsters are armed that ought to be enough, and that you've got to draw the line somewhere. However, Mr. Whimple convinced them at last that as a material witness he ought to have protection at least till after the trial, and they gave him the license, with instructions that he must not shoot first. Which was just the same as saying that he must not shoot at all, because the man who plans to shoot second, will do his shooting in another world.

Mr. Whimple also got the police to agree to shadow and protect him, though to do him justice he didn't depend much on that.

Further, and most important of all, he arranged to get out by the cellar door, as it was some little time since he had

"That's the feller! I know him by the wart on his nose and the scar across his cheek!"

identified Corkscrew, and there were quite a number of strangers with cars and taxies and machine-guns, waiting round the front and rear doors of the police station or lock-up.

Incredibly enough, he got home safely.

But he was angry. He had intended to turn in to his garage and put up the car as usual, but as he came to his driveway he had seen the gleam of a flashlight in the bushes around the garage door: and he had caught a glimpse of Bugs Murray, a member of the gang, with an unidentified friend, who happened to be lighting his cigar as they waited by the garage. So he drove up to his front door instead, and left the car and hurried in, and got his shotgun, and went out to the kitchen and turned on the garage light, which illuminated the entire back yard, and, while he didn't capture any of the gang, he did succeed in putting the greater part of the load of the shotgun into Mr. Murray's trousers, as he went over the back fence. Aside from that, the evening was a stalemate.

The second day, Mr. Whimple stayed in the house. He noticed an automobile with four men in it, passing to and fro along his street, and he stayed in the house. The men looked out the car windows, and they had something in their hands. The car parked from time to time, within a hundred feet of Mr. Whimple's front door, and its occupants poked their heads out hopefully. Mr. Whimple did not go out all day. He did talk to the police on the telephone, and they told him they were looking out for him. What they had done was to order the regular patrolman to keep an eye on the house. They were pretty hopeless about it. There wasn't much more that they could do, anyway. And there wasn't much more that Mr. Whimple could have asked them to do, because right after that, some one cut his telephone wires.

MR. WHIMPLE didn't stay home that night. He went out the back way, and registered at a hotel under another name. In the morning he called at a theatrical costumer's place of business, because he wanted to go to his office and he didn't dare to go without having his appearance changed, and he preferred doing it himself to letting Bump and his associates change it for him. He got a false beard and a wig that altered his looks considerably; and he stood round in the doorway of the building where his office was, till he spotted the two members of the gang who were there to attend to him as he came in.

He recognized them by their pictures at the police station, and the way they held their guns in the right-hand pockets of their coats.

He had a silencer on his gun, so he shot them both from a telephone-booth, and then took the elevator that went up to his office and removed the beard and wig in the corridor, before the crowd downstairs found out why the two nice-looking young gentlemen were lying on the floor in the vestibule. So far, so good.

Mr. Whimple threw the beard out the back window, and put on a mustache and goatee. He loaded up the gun again, and slipped down a couple of flights of stairs before he took the elevator to the street floor.

IT was lucky Mr. Whimple went out of the office, for Blood the Bump came in right after that, disguised as himself, and asked for Mr. Whimple; and he had a gun wrapped up in a book agent's outfit, that would have blown Mr. Whimple through the partition, and would have taken care of anyone else in the office who interfered. So it was just as well Mr. Whimple wasn't there.

And it was just as well that he wasn't at his home that day, also, because the front of his house was blown out about that time. Mr. Whimple had told the help to leave, so there was no one there but the cook, who had planned to have company that afternoon, and who was blown clear out of the wine cellar through the basement window. She wasn't hurt much, but it was lucky Mr. Whimple wasn't home, for he was very fond of going to the wine cellar, and as likely as not he would have been there too.

When he had left his office he hadn't any definite plan in mind, except to keep moving. Although by no means a timid man, he was unwilling to go back to the hotel, and he was wise enough to have a feeling that home was not the place for him.

Mr. Whimple finally went into the public library to think things over. He thought he'd be fairly safe there because gangsters don't read very much. And besides he felt that the gang would need to take a little time out sooner or later to attend to their bootlegging activities, which of course were really the backbone of their existence. By and by he went

to a booth and telephoned his office, and asked his stenographer if anyone had called.

She said: "Yes, two book-agents and a bill-collector, and a strange gentleman who wanted to pay Mr. Whimple something, and had been in twice." She said the gentleman was very anxious to see Mr. Whimple, or know where he was, and would be back again. She said he seemed quite annoyed, and when asked if he wouldn't like to leave the money with her, he said no, that what he had for Mr. Whimple he wanted to give him himself. She said she thought Mr. Whimple would better come right down to the office; but Mr. Whimple didn't think so.

He told her to tell the gentleman when he returned that he had not come back, but that she remembered hearing him say to some one on the telephone that he would be at the Jackson Square Hospital at four o'clock.

Mr. Whimple then stole a car and equipped it with a machine-gun. How he did it is his own secret; but such things are not impossible in our day and generation. And he drove around till ten minutes to four, when he parked close to the curb, fifty feet from the entrance to the Jackson Square Hospital. He didn't park near a fire hydrant, so he felt perfectly safe from arrest. He put his machine-gun where it would be handy and adjusted his mustache and goatee, and sure enough, at five minutes to four up drove Blood, the leader of the gang, also in a stolen car, and with the remaining three of his faithful followers with him.

ORIGINALLY there were eight in the Amalgamated Brotherhood, but due to Mr. Whimple's efforts, one was in jail now, one was in a hospital and two were in the morgue—and that left only their gallant leader and his three brave companions. They were waiting for Mr. Whimple to make his call at the hospital. And to be perfectly frank, they were planning to do such a perfect job on him that the hospital wouldn't take him. The odds of four to one were just about their idea of how these desperate meetings should be arranged, and what the odds should be. They felt that they were taking no more chances than the value of their precious skins warranted.

But they little knew Mr. Whimple. At four o'clock, when their eyes were searching the sidewalk to catch a glimpse of their quarry, Mr. Whimple started his car and slipped up beside them. He raked them fore and aft and sideways with the machine-gun, making a perfect score, and getting them all. There was no one left to take a parting shot at him as he drove away around the corner. He went along another block, and turned again.

THEN he got out and walked through an alley, where some men were delivering a load of alky. He said: "Good afternoon." They looked him over, and answered: "Yeah?" With his mustache and goatee he looked like a comrade in the Cuban branch of the trade, so he got by. At the other end of the alley he met a police officer looking up and down the street, as if he was on guard protecting something. Mr. Whimple said, "Good afternoon," and the officer said: "Move on there!"

Mr. Whimple took a street-car. He had now, so far as he knew, disposed of the entire gang, with the exception of Corkscrew, who was in jail, and whom Mr. Whimple now felt inclined to leave to his fate. Mr. Whimple felt that he had done enough. If the Government couldn't convict Corkscrew the Trimmer without his help, Mr. Whimple felt that that was just too bad, because to avoid any little odds and ends of unpleasantness he had decided to go to sea. His business was such that it could be left by its owner indefinitely without serious loss. Many businesses are like that now. So he went down to the docks and signed on for a three-year whaling voyage to the South Pole.

On the trip Mr. Whimple intends to grow a beard, and hopes that his appearance will alter greatly in the course of the voyage, and that no one will recognize him on his return. He has been troubled a bit by seasickness, so he hopes to become a better sailor.

The mate has the same hopes for Mr. Whimple. He feels that possibly he can improve him as a sailor, and he is absolutely sure that he can alter Mr. Whimple's appearance. The mate is really an excellent fellow on shore, and is quite good to his mother. If he lives, he will be a captain very soon. It would be fine, therefore, if some one would whisper a friendly warning to him, and advise him to go a little slowly in this particular instance.

For Mr. Whimple, while gentle as a lamb under ordinary circumstances, is bad medicine to fool with.

The Passing

A detective story by the author of the Free Lances in Diplomacy.

OUTSIDE, the gray afternoon had left a legacy of fine misty rain which fell with steady persistency while Inspector Beresford played game after game of chess with his American friend, Dr. Samuel Adams, in the Inspector's comfortable Mount Street apartment. The fire of cannel coal in the living-room grate served to banish the dampness and chill. Presently, when a seemingly unimportant knight of the Doctor's had plugged the final hole in the Inspector's plodding campaign with an undeniable "mate," they leaned back in their chairs to refill pipes and rest a bit. Into the soothing stillness shrilled a sharp *"b-r-r-r"* of the telephone-bell.

Beresford reached for the instrument.

"Aye—Inspector Beresford speaking. . . . Who? . . . Oh, aye! Parkinson—yes, Mr. Goldman's butler—in Montagu Square. Very good! Carry on, Parkinson! . . . What's that? You'd like to have me come around there as soon as convenient? Are you speaking for Mr. Goldman? No? Hmph! Is Mr. Goldman in the house now? . . . At home, but 'indisposed,' eh? I say! . . . Look here, Parkinson! Is it anything serious? . . . Oh—you fancy it'll be quite so, eh? Very good! I'll be there inside of half an hour."

For a moment or two, the Inspector sat there pulling at his pipe—mentally reviewing what he knew about Joseph Goldman.

"What's up?" Adams asked. "Sounded rather mysterious. Burglary?"

"Butler says it's a bit more serious than that."

"Name's familiar. Who is Goldman?"

"In the States, I fancy you'd call him an 'angel'—the sort of chap who backs various shows when they need financin'. When he guesses right, he makes a small fortune on each one; when he's coaxed into something which doesn't prove to have the proper kick, he loses out—though he usually pulls a minimum loss. Mostly, he's successful—chaps in the city rate him as worth over half a million, sterling, today."

"Know him very well?"

"Better than I like to. He's called us in a few times to hound men and women whom I believed absolutely innocent of wrongdoing—I was convinced they had been 'framed.' But he produced evidence enough for an arrest, so we had to go on. The juries convicted but one of them. Chap has a pleasant, ingratiating manner, an' a lot of influence one way or another—but personally I've never liked him; always felt he's a rotter underneath. Come along! . . . We've to find out what is making him 'indisposed' this evening."

THE house in Montagu Square was a large double one with a narrow strip of ground on either side and a tall box hedge along the street-line. The butler Parkinson admitted them, took their hats and sticks, and led them up to the second floor over deep-piled carpets. On the half-landing of the foyer stairs, there was a tall clock in a rosewood case. Adams saw with surprise that the hands pointed to one-thirty A.M., and looked at his watch to make sure that the clock wasn't a couple of hours fast. Evidently he had lost all sense of time while playing that game of chess.

Entering a large front room at the right of the hall, the butler quietly beckoned them to the side of a handsome Florentine bed with posts and an overhead canopy. In it, partly covered by the bedclothes, Goldman was lying motionless, his eyes open, with an expression of fright and horror in them. His mouth was sagging, the tongue bunched back in the throat, and the lips distinctly bluish. Apparently, the man had

of an Angel

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

made an attempt to throw back the clothes and spring out of bed, but had been unable to do so.

Parkinson looked from the Inspector to the figure on the bed, and back again.

"I fancy there'll not be much doubt, sir? He was warm when I first came in —and—and touched him, like. But 'is 'and is much colder, now. At first, I thought it might be a fit, sir—but I soon decided 'e was gone, sir. It occurred to me that I should call in 'is physician, Sir Bemish Traymore. But there was something about the look of 'im which made me fancy it might be a case for the police—an' you bein' in a manner of speaking a friend of the master's, I fancied you'd best drop in quietly by yourself an' 'ave a look at 'im before I took any further h'action, sir."

"You were quite right in that, Parkinson. The expression on his face isn't like that of natural death. What do you think, Doctor?"

Doctor Adams stepped closer and bent over the dead man's face—examined the expression—the blue lips—the rigid position of the figure.

"Prussic acid," he said promptly. "You get a faint scent as of crushed peach-leaves, or bitter almonds, if you bend over his face. The blue lips and rigidity are other symptoms. Did he have anything to eat or drink after he came up to this room, Parkinson?"

"Not unless 'e 'elped 'imself from the tantalus over there by the cabinet, sir. But there'd be an empty glass left h'out for washin', h'if 'e 'ad, sir. The master was not in the 'abit of eatin' or drinkin' after 'e came up to retire, sir. Whatever 'e 'ad, 'e'd be 'avin' below—before 'e came h'up, sir."

The Inspector nodded.

"H-m-m—prussic acid is pretty quick stuff, to the best of my recollection—a matter of ten or fifteen seconds at the outside. So if he took it himself in anything, there would be an empty plate or glass or bottle somewhere around in plain sight—prob'ly on the floor. It wasn't injected with a hypodermic, or the scent wouldn't be so noticeable around his face—"

Adams broke in with the question:

"Was he in the habit of snoring while asleep, Parkinson?"

"Yes sir; quite loudly, sir."

"And a person can't snore loudly, with a closed mouth! Simple enough proposition. Somebody got into this room while he was snoring—and tipped a paper of cyanide crystals into his open mouth! He'd cough, as the powder got into his throat—struggle up on his elbow, suddenly awake—realize that his heart and respiration had stopped short—gasp a couple of times, and pass out. —You can get the Yard surgeon around before breakfast for an autopsy, Beresford—just to check up that impression. But the murderer hasn't been gone, probably, more than an hour. Time to get busy on him is right now, while any traces there may be are fresh. You have your regular routine way of going at that sort of thing. My hunch is that you won't find a thing in the way of a clue—but I may be wrong in that."

BERESFORD nodded, looking speculatively at his friend.

"And what'll *you* be doing, Doc?"

"Trying to approach the proposition from another angle—we'll compare notes after an hour or two. Parkinson, let's sit down over here in the corner while the Inspector is busy. I'd like to have you tell me everything you can about Goldman. Not married, was he?"

"No sir—not yet. But 'e was by way of bein' h'engaged to the Honorable Florence Kingsly—second daughter of Lord Montavane. The marriage was arranged

for the fifth of next month, sir—the 'ouse avin' been done over complete during the last six weeks, sir."

"Had Goldman any family living in the house?"

"Nobody but 'is secretary, sir. Sometimes 'is typist would stay the night if she'd been workin' late. Servants, to be sure—the cook, footman, two maids, valet, chauffeur, gardener, an' myself,—the butler,—sir. You see, the master was in the 'abit of h'entertainin' 'ere, quite frequ'ntly—theatrical folk comin' an' goin' h'every few days."

"How old a man was he?"

"Well, I did 'ear a city man say he'd known 'im over twenty years gone. H'about forty-five, I'd say."

"And his fiancée?"

"Not over twenty, sir—beautiful gel."

"Not exactly a love-match—eh?"

"Oh, no, sir—money an' position. 'E'd 'ave purchased a peerage very shortly, I understand—an' 'is lady bein' a peer's daughter would 'ave 'elped a bit in that. I did 'ear that Lord Montavane was 'ard-up an' that Goldman was to pay h'off some mortgages on 'is property h'if the Honorable Florence would 'ave 'im, sir. Very likely there was something of the sort. It's said she was as good as h'engaged to a Leftenant in the navy, sir—but of course this would 'ave broken it h'off."

"You say he never has been married?"

"Not since I came to 'im, sir. It's a bit 'ard to say what might 'ave 'appened before that—'im bein' a ladies'-man if ever there was one! 'Is study, h'across the 'all ere, is filled with photographs stuck h'about h'everywhere—all of 'em h'autographed—some of 'em quite ready for their bawth or a painter's brush, sir."

"Have you happened to hear the name of the navy man whom the Honorable Florence liked so well?"

"Leftenant John Fleming, sir—on 'Is Majesty's battleship *Hood,* at last h'accounts."

"ARE any of Goldman's shows running just now?"

"Aye, sir—there'll be two h'on the boards h'at present—the 'Jolly Buccaneers' an' the 'Widowed Bride'."

"I suppose the members of the casts are here quite frequently?"

"Some of 'em, sir—not so many. 'E was a bit particular who 'e h'allowed to come 'ere. 'E just couldn't h'abide 'gold-diggers'. An' of course their berths depended upon their respectin' 'is wishes."

"Ever hear any high words or quarreling between Goldman and any of the men or women who came here?"

"Never, sir! Not h'even when they were balmy. 'E was a diffic'lt man to quarrel with, Goldman was—h'always kept 'is temper, drunk or sober."

"Ever hear of anybody threatening him for some fancied injury—possibly from losing money to him or through him?"

"No sir—I can't say that I 'ave. Of course h'any man of wealth 'as those who dislike 'im for 'avin' it—beggars 'e's refused money to. But that sort doesn't commit murder h'as a rule. 'E's prosecuted a few for breach of contract an' even for h'outright stealin'—sometimes I've fancied 'e was just 'atchin' up a charge against 'em to get 'em h'out of 'is way. Well, they'd naturally bear ill-feelin', d'ye see—couldn't 'elp it. But they'd not risk doin' 'im in and gettin' 'anged for it, sir. No fear!"

"HOW many of you had keys to the house?" Doctor Adams asked.

"Goldman 'ad two—one on a key-ring in 'is pocket, an' the other kept in a drawer of 'is desk h'across the 'all. And I 'ad one—which three would be all for the front door. Then I 'ave one—cook an' chauffeur each 'as one—for the back door leadin' from the garden, in rear."

"Are you quite sure that none of his friends—particularly women—have duplicate keys to the front door?"

"Not unless they got an impression some'ow an' 'ad one made, sir. 'E was nervous h'about anyone gettin' in when 'e didn't wish for them, sir—breakin' in upon 'im unbeknownst-like."

"H-m-m—he naturally would have a good bit of legal work in connection with his shows. Do you happen to know who his attorneys are?"

"'Is solicitors? Oh, aye, sir! Messrs. Holden, Frayne an' Burbish, of Gray's Inn. Mr. Frayne is a K. C.—'andles practically all of the master's h'affairs. Lives down in Surrey, below Sydenham. They were frequ'ntly through on the telephone durin' the evening when the master was in a 'urry, like, to put something h'into Mr. Frayne's 'ands."

"How did Goldman get along with the household staff? Was he easy to work for—or arbitrary and difficult to please?"

"'E liked to 'ave 'is h'orders carried h'out, sir—just as an' 'ow 'e gave them. But I'd say he was considerate, sir. Paid good wages. 'Ad in a medico if anybody

was ill—first-class food for the servants' table—decent quarters for 'em, an' quite reasonable hours. Personally, 'e was a bit cold, in a manner of speaking—not like our country gentry. You h'understand, sir, 'e 'ad what might be called 'foreign blood'—though there'll be many of 'is sort in the peerage. But 'e was always satisfactory in 'is relations with the 'ousehold—never lost 'is temper with them or used language. Not the sort one might care to serve with little or no pay, sir, if you get what I mean—an' yet what one might call a satisfactory h'employer."

"I think I catch the distinction, Parkinson. Was his fiancée in the house often—or her father, Lord Montavane?"

"'Is Lordship but the once, sir—at the dinner when the marriage-h'arrangem'nt was h'announced. The Honorable Florence not h'over twice altogether, I fancy—both times with an older woman as chaperon. I'd say, in a manner of speakin', sir, that she couldn't bring 'erself to be alone with the master, as yet."

"Was there any one particular woman whom Goldman had here more frequently than the others,—one who seemed free of the house,—eh?"

"Not for a year or more, sir. Before that, I fancy a Mrs. Gordon would be of that description. She always 'ad a leading part in one or another of 'is shows—that is, for a year and a half, she did. Came 'ere to the 'ouse in 'is h'absence, occasionally, an' made 'erself h'at 'ome until 'e came in. Sometimes she'd h'order an' h'eat 'er dinner 'ere when 'e was h'out of town, though she never stayed the night to my knowledge, except when others were stayin' h'also. Something h'over a year ago, she went to h'America with one of 'is shows—an' we 'eard in a roundabout way that she was taken ill an' died in New York or some such place. I fancy she was 'is particular type—because, d'ye see, the Honorable Florence is much the same. Of course one wouldn't say they were twins in h'appearance or anything like that—but in a general way there was a typical resemblance—same build an' manner of carryin' themselves."

Inspector Beresford returned at this moment from his investigations of the lower floor. He said briskly:

"Now, Parkinson, I fancy we'd best have a look at the study you mentioned, across the hall—his desk and papers will be in there, of course. There's not the least doubt as to Goldman's having been murdered—so you may consider the

house in possession of the police, and do nothing without their permission. We'll take his keys and go through that desk—may be some letter or paper in it which will put us on the right track."

In the study—a large room with its walls covered by pictures, bookcases and photographs—the Inspector went through the dead man's desk, rapidly but thoroughly, in about half an hour.

DOCTOR Adams, as he filled and lighted his pipe, said quietly:

"Parkinson, I'd like to have you look about this room very carefully, and see if you notice that anything is missing."

The butler did this, methodically.

"Aye, sir. The picture in the silver frame on top of the desk is not the one as was in it when the Master retired. Since the marriage-arrangem'nt was h'announced, 'is fiancée's picture 'as been in that frame which 'e 'ad made special for it, of solid silver, sir. The lady in it h'at this moment will be a Miss Gerraghty, now h'actin' in the 'Widowed Bride,' sir—she 'as been with a pile of blondes in the lower drawer of that book-cabinet on the front wall, sir—not recently h'in favor, as you might say. Also—a large picture of the Mrs. Gordon I mentioned to you, sir, is missing from the wall at the side of the goldfish window."

"Hmph! . . . The Honorable Florence and Mrs. Gordon both gone, are they! I wonder if he had any other pictures of them?"

"I fancy 'e would, sir. The lower shelf of the cupboard in that Chippendale 'ighboy, opposite, was by way of bein' a sort of receptacle for portraits of ladies who 'ad taken 'is fancy most particular, h'at one time or h'another, an' 'ad gone into the discard, so to speak, when 'e procured what 'e considered better ones. With your permission, sirs, I'll just run through them—bein' familiar with the h'appearance of the ladies mentioned."

In three or four minutes, the butler had laid upon the desk two large photographs—neither of them autographed.

"Mrs. Gordon was never in the 'abit of signing her name on pictures, sir—an' of course Goldman must 'ave procured this one of the Honorable Florence from a photographer when the engagem'nt was h'announced. You'll notice there's a bit of resemblance, sir—as I was remarkin'."

"Well," Adams nodded, "it's not a very striking one, but it's there when you look for it. The fact that both of the other pictures have been removed from this room since dinner suggests a connection somewhere between the two. —What's the newspaper-clipping, Beresford? Where did you find it?"

"On the blotter of this desk when we came into the room—from the society items of some news-sheet—evidently copied from one of the London gazettes—announcement of a marriage having been arranged between Goldman and the Honorable Florence, with some description of who the parties are and the houses in which they will live when married."

ADAMS took the clipping and carefully scrutinized the type-faces, with the paper on which they were printed.

"One of the American newspapers—Sunday supplement of a New York City paper, I'd say at a guess. The date penciled at the top is that of Sunday, two weeks ago. H-m-m—let me keep this with my memoranda and these two photographs for a few days, will you, old chap? Seems to me they may help."

At Adams' suggestion, the Inspector had telephoned Mr. Robert Frayne, K. C., at his Surrey home, requesting him to come up at once if possible, and the solicitor had evidently arrived in his car, for at this moment the doorbell rang.

Parkinson ran down to admit Frayne and fetched him up to the study, where Beresford rapidly sketched what had happened to Goldman, and mentioned two or three of the points turned up since they had entered the house.

"You understand, Mr. Frayne, that this is unquestionably a police case—that we are quite within our rights in going through Goldman's personal effects and asking you for whatever information seems necess'ry. As a solicitor, this will be obvious to you. I fancy our immediate requests in that line would be whether Goldman recently has executed a will or has an older one still effective—and its provisions—also whether he had completed any prenuptial settlements upon his fiancée and her father, and whether he had entered into any contracts which are binding upon his estate. In short, who benefits by his death—and to what extent?"

FRAYNE considered these questions a moment or two before replying.

"If you are positive Mr. Goldman really was murdered, Inspector—and the evidence you have would appear to settle that—I fancy your questions are entirely permissible. Very good! Three weeks ago, my client handed over to Lord Montavane bearer-securities amounting to twenty thousand pounds as a part of his marriage-settlem'nts upon the Honorable Florence Kingsly—the sum being for the purpose of enabling His Lordship to clear off three mortgages upon the family estates. Fifty thousand more was placed in a trust for the lady and her children, she to have but the interest during Mr. Goldman's lifetime. In a will executed at the same time, there were some forty bequests running from one hundred pounds to five thousand—to servants, friends and family connections—none of them nearer than first cousins. There is one bequest of ten thousand to a certain woman, if living—or to her children, if she died and left any. All the rest and residue, amounting to upward of two hundred and fifty thousand, is left to his children, if there are any—if not, as endowment of a first-class club to be established for actors and actresses. There are no restrictions upon the wife's—that is, the Honorable Florence's—trust of fifty thousand—which becomes altogether hers if he dies without heirs—or upon the mortgage-money."

The Inspector and Doctor Adams absorbed all this with gradually deepening expressions of doubt.

"How many persons may possibly know of these provisions in the marriage-settlements and the will, Mr. Frayne?"

"As to the marriage-settlem'nts, only Lord Montavane and his daughter. They're quite certain to keep close mouths upon the matter because it does suggest to outsiders the purchase and sale of a bride. As to the will—not a soul in the world besides myself. I typed the original drafts and the copies of all the documents—placed them in our Chancery Lane safe-deposit trunk as soon as executed, as stipulated by Goldman. To be sure, he may have mentioned to three or four of the legatees

that they were down for a comfortable bit in his will—but knowing the man's natural secretiveness as well as I do, I doubt that."

"Then, considering all the leaks of knowledge which you admit as possible, there would be at least these persons who benefit to a greater or less extent by his death: His fiancée and her father—the navy man to whom she was supposed to have been engaged—any or all of the servants in this house—the woman who gets the ten thousand—the person who stole two photographs from this room and a key which is missing from a drawer of this desk, at some time since Goldman retired, tonight—the person who read this newspaper clipping, presumably in New York, and took the first available steamer to come over here. Sixteen persons, men and women, who stood to gain something in one way or another by his death—though three of the sixteen may have been actually the same person.

"Only seven fingerprints have been found upon the ground and second floors of this house, and Parkinson is of the opinion that half of those may be his own. Not a window or door has been forced. There is no blood, no trace of poison anywhere except what must be in Goldman's body, no evidence whatever except the news-clipping, the missing key and the photographs. Sixteen persons are equally under suspicion—or more, if they happened to get a hint of what was in the papers you drew up! Look around this room, Frayne—and tell me frankly your conclusions as to the sort of man Goldman was. Eh? We both knew him! Come now—what would you say?"

"WELL, I've never been able to understand the fascination this type of man has for so many women," Frayne said reluctantly. "The 'gold-diggers', of course—we may discount them. But the average decent, cultivated woman—could one of them look at the pictures around this room and even imagine such a man bein' faithful to any one woman? Yet they seem to fancy theirs is the exceptional case, an' that they can hold him."

"What gets me," Beresford burst out, "is what in the name of common-sense the British public can expect Scotland Yard to do in running down the person who put this fellow out? Individually, I'd say that he or she was rather a public benefactor—but naturally one can't take that ground. We simply can't wink at deliberate murder!"

"Wait a bit, now, Inspector! . . . Suppose we check up your list of suspects and see if we can't get some eliminations? Lord Montavane and his daughter, for example. The Kingslys are of our oldest an' best stock—do you seriously think for one moment that either the father or daughter would kill the man she was engaged to? He already has his mortgage-money—nothing could get that away from him, whether Goldman lived or died. Neither can anybody get the girl's fifty thousand. Would she kill him on the chance of contesting his will for the bulk of his estate as her dower-right—which she couldn't do if she married again, as she certainly will?"

BERESFORD theorized aloud: "As nearly as I can size up the situation, His Lordship forced her into this marriage by some pressure which she couldn't resist, when she was very much in love with Leftenant Fleming—it's prob'ly almost breaking her heart—she must fairly loathe Goldman! Well, then—having got what he was after for himself and her, what more natural than for the father to eliminate the blackmailer permanently? Take the girl herself—presumably she sees no way out but suicide—simply can't an' won't live with Goldman. But—if he were to sicken and die suddenly— Lord, what a relief! Well, why shouldn't he die suddenly? Take Leftenant Fleming—navy man—not the sort to accept calmly the loss of everything he holds dear. What can he do? Remove the cause of all the trouble an' get the girl? Sounds simple enough! Eh? Either one of the three may have stolen the key or those two pictures. I'll admit I can see no connection between the pictures, as yet.

"In a lesser degree, thirteen other persons stood to benefit by the man's death—mostly in the way of money—and who knows the compelling amount? With one type of man, a hundred pounds. With another, ten thousand!"

Adams had been prowling about the room, examining every corner of it. Presently a point struck him which had been overlooked.

"Er—Parkinson—the men in Goldman's shows must have given him autographed photos from time to time. What became of those?"

"'E kept 'em in one of the bookcase drawers, sir—h'over in that corner."

The American pulled open the drawer and rapidly skimmed through sixty or more pictures of men—some were in costume, as they appeared on the boards—some, in evening kit or morning suits. At the bottom of the pile he came upon a smooth-faced attractive man in clerical rig—an actor who evidently made up to look twenty-five or fifty as the case might require—a typical "churchman's face." Holding it up for the butler to see, he looked a question.

"That would be Mr. Snaith, sir—James Borrowdale Snaith, as 'e is billed—now playing in the 'Widowed Bride.' 'E makes up as a curate, a rector or a bishop—h'according as might be required. Considered one of the best h'on the boards, sir—in such characters."

"Do you remember whether his picture ever has been hanging on these walls since you came?"

"It never 'as, sir. In fact h'I was not aware that the master 'ad a picture of 'im. I've 'eard they were quite thick, some years ago—when they were younger—but I've not 'eard of Mr. Snaith an' the master bein' together of an evening for some time."

"He's not by any chance an ordained churchman? Eh?"

"Oh, no, sir! Quite h'otherwise, I fancy!"

"I suppose you wouldn't recall whether he was well acquainted with—say—Mrs. Gordon, for example?"

"I 'ave no recollection of their h'ever being in the same comp'ny, sir. The theater is one of my favorite recreations, sir. I do not remember their names as bein' in h'any cast at the same time—anywhere."

"You say he's now playing in the 'Widowed Bride'? Any idea where his diggings would be?"

"Very likely you would find 'im at the 'Otel h'Irving, sir—just h'off Shaftesbury Avenue. It'll be an 'ouse patronized by the profession h'almost exclusively."

INSPECTOR BERESFORD took Parkinson and Frayne upon another examination of the house—leaving Adams in the study. In a moment or two, he got out of his chair and looked along the bookshelves for a Burke's Peerage, which he soon located—turning up the Kingsly family in all its ramifications and jotting down a few lines of memoranda. Then he picked up the telephone and asked the operator to put him through to a number in the same exchange. After a wait of several minutes, a sleepy butler answered the phone and was requested to ask Lady Sarah Edgerton if she would speak to Dr. Samuel Adams upon a matter of the utmost importance, through the branch phone at her bedside. It was evident that the butler considered this a most outrageous request at that time of night—but he knew the American to be a particular friend of Her Ladyship, and roused one of the maids to go in with the message.

LADY SARAH was irritated at being roused from her sleep, but her curiosity was piqued. She was a neighbor of Lord Montavane down in Cornwall—the families having been intimate for several generations—and somewhat sleepily gave Adams exactly the information he'd been fairly certain she could supply. She considered the engagement between the Honorable Florence and Goldman little short of a crime—though she said the girl was a good-enough sport to go through with it after having given her promise. The County families knew that the Kingslys were somewhat hipped for money to keep up the estate, which was being eaten into by the taxes—but nobody seemed to know just what pressure had induced the girl to break off with Fleming—who would not be in position to marry for a few years—and promise herself to the theatrical "angel." Lady Sarah considered herself amply repaid for being awakened when Adams assured her the marriage would never take place. Then he replaced the receiver on its forks. He had supplemented the data already dug up with inside information which almost enabled him to reconstruct the tragedy of that night—almost—but not sufficiently for a conviction.

For over an hour he sat there alone in that betraying study—pulling occasionally at his pipe and drawing geometric designs upon a sheet of paper. His face bore the same intent look which appeared when he wrested a game of chess from the Inspector, after a hard-fought battle of wits. Arranging the names of the possible suspects in a column, he selected one combination after another, and tried fitting them to the known circumstances. Four times out of every five, the final eliminations logically worked down to the same individual—concerning whom there had not been the slightest trace of real evidence in anything connected with the murder. . . . As daybreak lightened the streets, the grounds, and the rooms

within the house, Adams decided that whether he found himself up a blind alley or not he would concentrate for a few days at least upon the one person who logically must be the criminal.

Parkinson served them an appetizing breakfast at seven—after which Adams took a taxi east to the Shaftesbury Avenue neighborhood and inquired for Mr. Borrowdale Snaith at the Hotel Irving. The man wasn't stopping there, but was sufficiently well known for the manager to locate him within a few minutes at a near-by professional boarding-house—and the American found him at breakfast in his two-room suite. At first, he indignantly refused to make any such admission as Adams suggested—but the visitor displayed such uncanny knowledge of his affairs in general (mainly from shrewd guesses) that he finally exploded:

"But—but—my God, sir! . . . You're trying to pin me down to an admission that I once committed an exceedingly illegal act for which I presume I could be sent to Dartmoor or some such place, even now!"

"Well, I've not gone into the law exhaustively, but I rather doubt that. Suppose two Oxford undergraduates chaff their companions into staging a mock marriage—presumably, just as a lark? Could you arrest and imprison the student who impersonated the rector?"

"If the bride and groom went off to live with each other afterward, I fancy there'd be no doubt of it! A mock ceremony as a joke is one thing—actually impersonating a clergyman and performing what appears to be a *bona-fide* ceremony is quite diff'rent, d'ye see!"

"Suppose we consider it merely a practical joke among a lot of students, and keep it on that basis? Did you ever see the supposed bride, afterward?"

The question came with such apparent carelessness that Snaith unconsciously made the admission before he realized it:

"Oddly enough, we never got a glimpse of each other until some five years afterward—when we met, playing in the same show. I fancy she never was quite sure of me, but one day she casually asked if ever I had been ordained—said my clerical impersonation was otherwise too good to be true. Of course I said that I hadn't—and kept up the assumption that we never had met before."

"Have you run across her recently—seen her name billed anywhere?"

"Haven't seen or heard of her these last two or three years."

"And you really were not at Oxford when that mock marriage was staged—you and the bride were playing in one of Goldman's shows down in Plymouth, weren't you?"

"I was, myself—under the stage name of Percival Williams. That was two years before I started doing clergymen. The bride wasn't on the boards at all, but of County aristocracy—living at home with a titled father and mother. It never struck me until long afterward that the mock marriage was anything but a professional rag ribbed up by Goldman—who was a pretty unscrupulous practical joker when he was in the mood. Of course none of the cast was in position to refuse him anything in reason—he was backing the show, d'ye see."

THE news-clipping Inspector Beresford had found on Goldman's desk was dated Sunday, the 27th of the month. On Wednesday the 30th, the *Mauretania*, the *President Roosevelt* and the *Albert Ballin* had left New York for Southampton and Cherbourg. On the chance that an English person would naturally pick an English boat for the crossing, Adams was among the first to enter the West End Cunard office when the doors were open—inquiring where he could locate the purser of their last boat from New York. As she was leaving on her return trip next day, it chanced that the officer was on the premises at that moment. At first glance, he identified the photograph shown him—saying that the person depicted had recently crossed with them from New York and had left Southampton on the London Express.

From that time until four in the afternoon, Adams made a round of the West End hotels devoted to theatrical patronage, showing the photograph he had to the managers with a caution that it was a Scotland Yard inquiry—that they were not to mention him or the picture to any-

body. At last one of the hotel men scribbled a name and address upon a slip of paper and handed it to him. The place proved to be an apartment in a new block of moderate-priced flats occupied by the families of city men, with a scattering of artists and musicians not closely affiliated with the theatrical profession —a neighborhood where one might come upon illustrators or successful opera-singers, but rarely actors or actresses.

Doctor Adams found the apartment on the third floor—handed the maid a card which merely bore his name and that of his New York club. As he had figured, the lady supposed him to be some one she had met in New York, and came to him in the little drawing-room. He smilingly said that she probably wouldn't recall him—but his manner was so pleasant that she did think they had probably met somewhere. He noticed evidences of packing, and asked if she were leaving town.

"Yes—I only came over here between shows on a matter of business. Going back on the same boat, tomorrow."

SHE was astounded by his next apparently casual remark.

"Mrs. Gordon, can you remember just when you first met Borrowdale Snaith—who began playing under the name Percival Williams?"

"Why—how—I don't understand! Oh, you've run across him here in London—I remember, now, he's billed in the 'Widowed Bride.' How did he happen to say he knew me?"

"He didn't—until he found I knew too much for him to lie out of it. His specialty is impersonating the clergy, as you doubtless know. And his first attempt at anything of that sort was years ago in Plymouth, when he was hounded by the man to whom he owed his job, to impersonate a young rector and officiate at a marriage which the other man preferred not having too legal. The bride, when her father dies, will be a Baroness in her own right. She thought, and her family thought, that she was legally married to that other man and had eloped with him. They considered the elopement a disgrace to the family, and never knew who the man was—never attempted to find her. She naturally supposed she was a legally wedded wife until she found herself in the same cast with an actor whom she recognized at once—though he thought, and still hopes, that she didn't. This prospective Baroness has a lovely younger sister, recently engaged to a navy man who probably can't marry for a few years at least. The sisters were devoted to each other. The man who went through that mock marriage with the elder sister had a report circulated that she—under the stage-name she'd adopted—had died in New York, and he privately sent her a check for ten thousand pounds, which she returned to him, torn to pieces. On the 27th of last month she read in a New York paper the reprinted announcement of her younger sister's approaching marriage with the man who had tricked her and ruined her own life, and she felt sure that the girl had been somehow forced into it by some sort of blackmailing pressure on her father. Of course there was no chance here for another trick marriage; but she knew the man for an absolute rotter—knew he would throw her sister aside like an old glove as soon as he tired of her—ruin her life just as completely in other ways. So this prospective Baroness—this loving elder sister—took the first boat across to see what could be done about the situation. Well, the problem has been solved—and the sister extricated. Point is, what's going to happen next?"

"Are you by any chance connected with the police, Dr. Adams?"

"Merely to the extent of investigating crime problems as a side interest."

"And your object in telling me this story? Have you any evidence that I am implicated in the matter?"

"Knowledge, Mrs. Gordon—not evidence. Frankly, I doubt if there's even enough circumstantial evidence to implicate you."

"Do you imagine that any attempt will be made to prevent my sailing tomorrow as I've planned to do?"

"No. In any case, I should not give Scotland Yard what data I have until you're at sea."

"Aren't you forgetting the wireless?"

"I doubt very much if enough evidence turns up to hold you on the boat."

"You'll notice I make no admission whatever that there is the slightest truth in what you have inferred, Dr. Adams. Tell me what it really was that induced you to come to me with it."

"BECAUSE I think, upon reflection, you will get a good deal the same slant on the affair that I do. Some day —years from now, possibly—the little kaleidoscopic bits of this Chinese puzzle are going to be fitted together in circum-

stantial juxtaposition until it will be known—by inference at least—who killed Joseph Goldman. There will be times when the sister's husband will watch her in a brooding, speculative way. Her father—her friends—will have moments of the same doubt. . . . If one carries out a certain action which seems imperative, it always exacts its price in one way or another—and it is difficult if not impossible to sidestep the payment. True, thousands of crimes will remain undiscovered—even unsuspected—until this Earth disintegrates. It's merely a question as to whether one cares to chance it. Now I mustn't delay your packing any longer. Thank you for seeing me—and good-by."

IN a discussion of the case at Scotland Yard that evening, it was tacitly admitted that unless further entirely unexpected evidence happened to be turned up, Goldman's elimination was likely to be labeled as one of the many unsolved mysteries. There were too many suspects with motive and opportunity—but not a shred of even circumstantial evidence against any one of them. After listening to the general opinion, Doctor Adams pointed out that they were trying to assemble facts with no imagination —no acceptance of inferential logic as a factor. They laughed at him indulgently—asked what time-limit he would suggest before agreeing with them.

"Not more than three days, gentlemen. The name of the murderer may be known tonight—published in the morning newspapers, but without any such accusation. Myself—I'd say about day after tomorrow. If we hear nothing before that, I suggest that we, and Mr. Frayne, spend the evening with Beresford in his Mount Street diggings. That's where the story began—and where I'm sure it will end."

They were convinced that he was entirely balmy—but on the evening mentioned, were in Beresford's apartment—playing auction bridge while the Doctor adjusted and modulated the Inspector's American radio-set. Just before midnight, the last-minute news began coming through the speaker from 2LO—the second report coming from a New York express liner in mid-Atlantic. Her Marconi officer said that the stewardess in charge of a certain room on the "B" deck had been unable to find the occupant that morning—a Mrs. Jessica K. Gordon of Cornwall. The Captain had ordered a search of the boat which had continued unsuccessfully throughout the day. As they had been driving through heavy weather and high seas, it was supposed that the lady had been washed overboard. London and New York offices of the Line were requested to communicate with any relatives of Mrs. Gordon's who could be located. As the Doctor switched off the radio-set with an air of finality, the other men looked at him in surprise—then in stupefaction.

"My word! Do you mean us to understand she was the woman whose picture was stolen from Goldman's study?"

"The woman who took her own and her younger sister's pictures away with her after killing Goldman—lest they be contaminated by their surroundings and the atmosphere of tragedy."

"You mean to say—she confessed?"

"Good Lord, no! . . . Confessed nothing! You haven't a shred of real evidence against her, and she knew it. Everyone who formerly had known her supposed that she died in New York a year ago—never dreamed she was in London. We talked over the various slants in the situation, and agreed, without being definite, that such an action was pretty sure to exact its price sooner or later, whoever committed it. Well, we let it go at that."

ADAMS told them the story as he had reconstructed it by the sheer cold logic of what he had learned in the first twenty-four hours.

"If she'd been entirely innocent, she'd have gone back to her show in New York as if our talk never had happened. If she killed him—well, her disappearance at sea is the logical outcome—isn't it?"

"Oh, by Jove!" Beresford exclaimed. "The only way out, d'ye see! Because we'd have been quite sure to spot her at long last—an' she'd have paid the penalty. You simply can't let a murderer go free! . . . They're always liable to do it over again!"

"Well—" Doctor Adams shook his head. "In a case like this I don't agree. It doesn't always follow. And for the sake of everyone concerned I'm going to exact a promise that her part in it never will be made public. You've no evidence against her beyond my bare statements—which I'll deny if necessary. I salute a courageous woman, who did what seemed to her the only possible thing to do—and then paid the price."

Another of these inimitable stories by Mr. New will appear in an early issue.

The Wild Man of Wolf

This unusual and tensely dramatic novelette by the author of "Hands" and "The Island Murder" shows the State Police and the Mounted fighting shoulder-to-shoulder against enemies of peace.

By ROBERT MILL

"THIS," said Lieutenant Edward David, "seems to be the scene of the party."

He halted the troop car at the side of a dirt road which a short distance back had wound its way across the unfortified, almost invisible boundary between New York State and the Dominion of Canada.

"Guess it is," agreed Sergeant James Crosby, his companion. "And the party is getting good. All of 'em suddenly finding out that they're hundred-percenters."

Before them were two groups of angry, gesticulating farmers. One group was composed of residents from the American side of the line. Canadian citizens made up the other. The members of the two groups exchanged hot words and made threatening gestures.

Standing by a fence near the edge of the road were two members of the Canadian Mounted. Their arms were folded, and they surveyed the scene with calm, sardonic smiles.

"Greetings," called Sergeant Crosby. "How long has war been declared?"

The Mounties chuckled. One of them, who wore the chevrons of a sergeant, turned to Lieutenant David.

"Glad you are here." He glanced at the silver bar on the huge man's collar. "Congratulations, sir."

Lieutenant David, who was known throughout the New York State Police as Tiny, waved a big hand.

"Thanks, Sergeant. Those lingerie-pins don't mean anything. They just lend them to you. But what caused us to sever diplomatic relations?"

The Mounty smiled.

"Just a tempest in a teapot, sir. During the night some blighter with a queer sense of humor dug up about forty of the stone markers along the border. Planted them all about quarter of a mile north of where they had been. So, the way things stand, your country has taken over quite a chunk of ours."

The smile vanished from the face of the Canadian officer.

"Ordinarily, it would mean just a good laugh for all parties concerned. But the rate of exchange has been playing around a bit lately. The tariff on butter and eggs hasn't helped any. And your beer has cut our people off from a lot of easy money."

The Mounty coughed apologetically.

"Besides, I am afraid our Inspector hasn't helped any. He means well, but he is young. He has the weight of the whole Empire on one shoulder, and all the cares of the Dominion on the other. I rather fancy he imagines this fool thing should be settled by the World Court."

Tiny David nodded.

"I've heard of him. Where is he?"

The question was answered by a young man in uniform who had detached himself from the group of Canadian farmers and now walked toward the four men. A few feet away he halted, drew himself up rigidly and saluted. Lieutenant David returned the gesture.

"Inspector Chesholm," said the young man.

"Lieutenant David," said Tiny.

Tiny David lighted a cigarette.

The Canadian officer began at once:

"Suppose we might as well coöperate in obtaining depositions. We can make duplicates and forward them to our governments. Then, I suppose, Ottawa and Washington will get together and appoint a joint commission. Seems the only thing to do—eh, what?"

Tiny David controlled his mirth. His manner was serious.

"Why, yes," he said. "But maybe I better telephone the Secretary of State first. Sergeant Crosby, do you have the Secretary's telephone number in your pocket?"

"I have the telephone number of one secretary, sir. She works in Lake Placid, and she's a blon—"

Head

Illustrated by Albin Henning

"The masked man started up Wolf's Head, reaching the summit just before daybreak. There he entered a sort of den made in the rocks."

"That's not the one," Lieutenant David interposed. "I am afraid you can't be depended on in an emergency. Remind me to speak to the Captain about you when we get back to the barracks." He turned to the young officer. "There you are: That's what happens when you try to settle things through official channels." His voice and manner were confidential.

"Here is a little suggestion: I'll ride herd on that bunch of nitwits from my side of the line; you round up your bunch of patriots; and we'll put the whole bunch to work with shovels. You can see that the lion has nothing to roar about, and I'll keep the eagle from screaming. In half an hour we can have those stones back where they belong. Then I'll lead my gang in singing the first and third verses of 'God Save the King.' In return, you can lead your gang in 'The Star Spangled Banner,' 'Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?' or something equally appropriate. Then everybody goes home happy, and if either of us gets his hands on the boy who pulled this bum joke, we give him a good spanking. What do you say?"

Inspector Chesholm had much to say. This was a grave international problem. The course suggested by the Yank —er—American, was impossible; it could not be done.

He was so engrossed in his objections that he failed to notice a car that pulled up alongside the little group. From the car tumbled a short, stout man, with a red face, who wore the uniform of a superintendent of the Mounted.

"What can't be done?" he demanded. "I don't like that word." His glance rested upon Tiny David. "Bless my soul! Who put that bar on your collar and turned you loose on an unprotected public?"

Tiny David grinned. He liked this man. He knew him, and respected him. It was a common statement in the Black Horse Troop that next to their own Cap-

tain Field, they would prefer to serve under Superintendent Durham, of the Mounted.

"Captain Field had something to do with that, sir."

"Probably in his dotage," came the retort. "I knew it. Hasn't said a word about me going hunting with him this fall. His mind is failing. Too bad."

Tiny David was very respectful.

"The Captain did mention your hunting trip the other day, sir. But he said he was afraid Superintendent Durham was too old to go knocking around the woods. Said he would miss you, sir."

THE chubby cheeks of the little man puffed out in an alarming manner, and the red in his face deepened.

"You listen to me, you young whippersnapper! I ride a horse ten miles every day of my life. I'm good for thirty-six holes of golf. When I sit down at the dinner-table, I eat and drink like a gentleman, and I don't fill my stomach with three-per-cent bellywash, either. Bah!" The outburst seemed to calm him. "What were you and my lad bickering about?"

They told him both versions.

"Good idea, that," was his verdict. "Get them started with the shovels." He glared at Tiny David. "I may be an old man, but if you break out with any of those blooming national anthems, I'll thrash you."

The farmers greeted the proposal to replace the markers with blunt refusals. Then, after listening to bitter sarcasm from Superintendent Durham and from Tiny David, they began work reluctantly. The Mounties and troopers worked with them, and it was Durham who saw that each group of workers contained men from both countries.

"Say, Mose," Tiny David addressed a farmer who lived on the American side, "how come you go so patriotic on me all of a sudden? Last time I talked with you, you said the United States was a hell of a country and that you were going to move to Canada. Today you are all ready to start a one-man war against Canada."

The laugh that followed helped to relieve the tension. Soon the markers were replaced; the farmers, as they dispersed, exchanged laughing comments.

"'By, my lad," Superintendent Durham told David. "Maybe Captain Field isn't slipping as much as I thought he was. Pity you weren't born on the right side of the line. Give the Captain my compliments, and tell him I'll go hunting with him, invitation or no invitation."

"Yes sir," said Tiny David. "I know the Captain will be glad to have you. We will take care of you both, and see that you don't overdo."

He was chuckling as he drove away with Sergeant Crosby at his side.

"Nice old boy, Super Durham!"

"He's a good skipper," his companion replied. "But did you get a load of that inspector—or as we say, leftenant?" He gazed full at Tiny David. "All lieutenants are bad enough, but that guy is poison ivy."

"Some day," said Lieutenant David in a conversational tone, "you are going to get mixed up with a mess of poison ivy, and you are going to suffer."

They were silent as the car ate up the miles on the way to the barracks. They leaned back in the seat, drinking in the crisp autumn air and gazing out at the blue landscape, with the St. Lawrence a silver ribbon in the distance.

Five miles from Malone, something struck the windshield with a resounding smack. Tiny David glanced up and saw an even round hole, with small cracks running from it. He whistled as he halted the car.

"Bullet," was his verdict. "From a high-power rifle." He turned to his companion. "Somebody doesn't like you."

Sergeant Crosby stood in the road, facing the direction from which the shot had been fired.

"Climb in," ordered Tiny David. "Like hunting a needle in a haystack to go after that guy. But something tells me that we left a lot of unfinished business back there." His deep voice became a growl. "We'll be back there before long, Sergeant."

"Right," answered Sergeant Crosby. "And we will be looking for guys who like to fool with markers and long-range rifles."

BEFORE Lieutenant David and Sergeant Crosby found opportunity to return to the border, Superintendent Durham rode up to the barracks, accompanied by an orderly. Captain Field,—commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop,—Tiny David and almost a score of troopers, who had been warned of his approach, were at the front of the building to greet him.

Tiny David winked at Captain Field, and then called in a loud voice:

"Trooper Mervine, hold Superintendent Durham's horse while he dismounts."

A trooper stepped forward, and was greeted by a blast of parade-ground language. Superintendent Durham, it appeared, had not reached that age where he required a nurse.

The men of the Black Horse Troop, listening to the performance with delight, passed *sotto voce* comments upon the officer's ability.

"Better tone than Captain Field," was Sergeant Crosby's verdict, "but not the volume."

"He repeated himself three times," declared Max Payton, who, as top sergeant, was an authority on these matters. "Not in the same class with the old man."

VISIBLE relief greeted this announcement. Then Captain Field contributed to the gayety of the occasion.

"Trooper Mervine," he ordered, "take Superintendent Durham's horse to the stables and have it given a good rubdown. The poor nag looks all in."

There was a second outburst.

"That horse and his rider," declared Superintendent Durham, "will be going strong long after a lot of alleged officers of so-called police outfits have been turned out to pasture."

Captain Field stepped forward, with his hand extended. "Glad to see you, Superintendent Durham."

The red glow on the face of the man before him subsided.

"Glad to see you, Captain Field." He turned to Tiny David. "If I had you in my outfit, young man, I would make something out of you."

The two officers retired to the private office. Pipes were lighted. The usual amenities were observed. Then Superintendent Durham put aside his pipe and leaned forward.

"Charley," he began, "I don't like the looks of things on the border."

Captain Field nodded. "I don't like them, either," he admitted.

"They pulled that marker stunt again last night," added Superintendent Durham, "this time putting them about half a mile south of the line. I did what your lad had brains enough to do the first time. Put both gangs to work with shovels, and returned the blooming stones where they belonged. But there was more bad feeling than there was the last time, and several blows were struck. Bad business. Don't like it."

He refilled his pipe.

"Lad of mine named Chesholm—bit of an ass, but means well—was driving home from the fracas this morning when a bullet nipped the radiator of his car, neat as you please."

"Same thing happened to Tiny the other morning," declared Captain Field. "Right through the windshield. Just missed a sergeant riding with him. Something is brewing there. I'd have thrown a patrol along the line, but I thought it would just fan the fire."

The Canadian officer was staring into space.

"Charley, this old world is sick. The Orient is in the grip of something worse than actual war. Most of Europe is a tinder-box, and nobody knows when or where the spark will fall. Damn it all, sometimes I think there are only two sane countries in the world, your United States and my England." He coughed suspiciously. "May be a sentimental old fussbudget, but blast my soul if I'll stand by idly while any foreign blighter uses that fool line to get us at outs with each other."

Captain Field unlocked a drawer, and threw a letter upon the desk.

"Same thought struck me," he declared. "Took it up with Albany, in a quiet way. Told 'em I thought it better if we didn't make it a Federal matter, just yet. That would mean secret service men, and a lot of trouble. Guess I am as sentimental as you are, but we never needed that sort of thing up here, and I'll be damned if we do now."

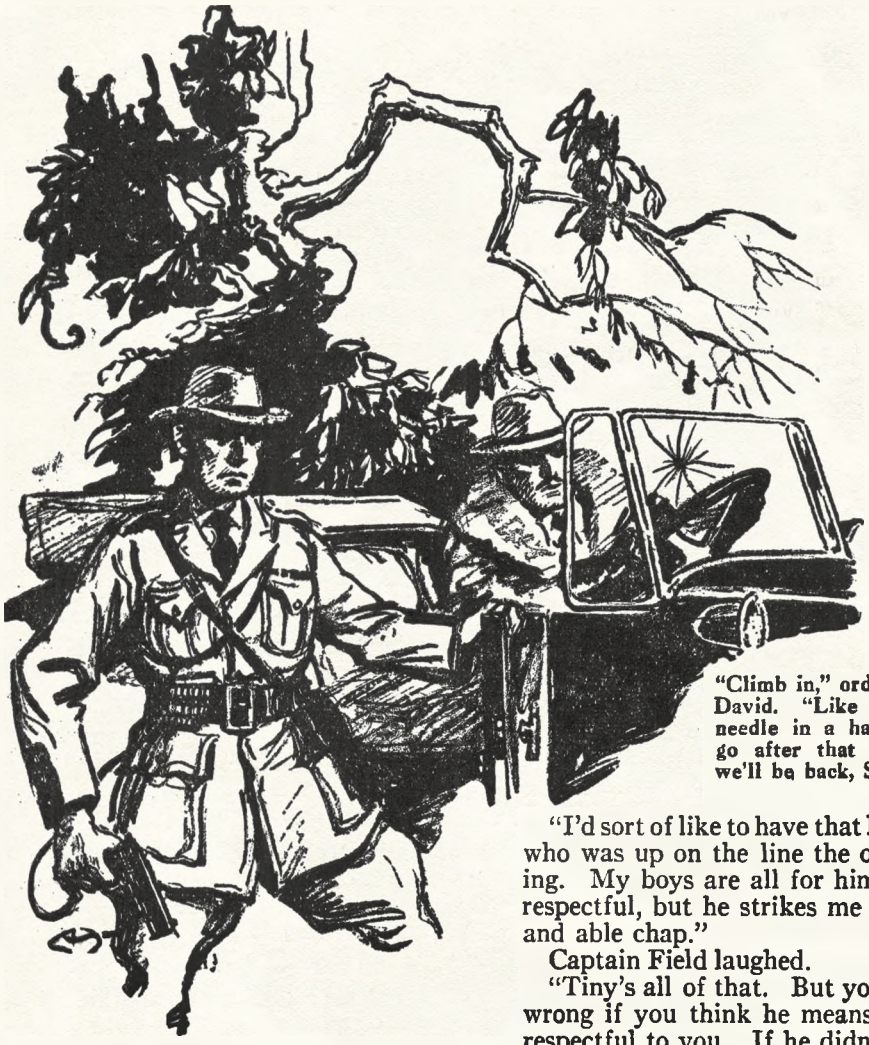
Captain Field replaced the letter.

"Well, Albany understood. They got in touch with a certain very high personage in Washington." The captain of the Black Horse Troop smiled. "He knows us, and he is all for us. He sent word that we are to work things out in our own way."

SUPERINTENDENT DURHAM nodded. "That's bully," he said. "My people feel the same way about it. Only they made their approval conditional upon your people seeing the thing in the same light. I'll pass the word along, and then we are free to take what steps we see fit. What do you recommend, Charley?"

Captain Field pondered. A trooper entered, and placed before him a newspaper containing lurid headlines based upon the morning's incident. Captain Field pointed to them.

"Might just as well come out in the open now," he declared. "How about a joint patrol of say twenty men? Ten men



"Climb in," ordered Tiny David. "Like hunting a needle in a haystack, to go after that guy. But we'll be back, Sergeant!"

from your outfit, and ten from mine. We'll pick the most level-headed men we have. Pair 'em off, one of your men with one of mine. The very idea that they are working together should have a good effect.

"Let 'em hang around that border on a roving assignment. They can keep their eyes and their ears open. They can spike the work of the rumor committee, and if they use their heads, they can do a lot of good missionary work. Then, if they have any sort of luck, we may be able to find out just what we are up against. Any suggestions?"

"Just one," Superintendent Durham said. "Suppose we pick this patrol from privates and non-coms. They get along better together. One commissioned man with them should be enough. Avoid friction that way."

The eyes of the stout little man were twinkling.

"I'd sort of like to have that lad of yours who was up on the line the other morning. My boys are all for him. Bit disrespectful, but he strikes me as a sound and able chap."

Captain Field laughed.

"Tiny's all of that. But you have him wrong if you think he means to be disrespectful to you. If he didn't like you, he'd smother you with politeness. I happen to know that he thinks you are aces; as he would say, a regular fellow. one of the boys."

The red face assumed a deeper hue.

"Humph. Thought I wasn't mistaken in that boy. Good, upstanding lad. Must see that my people do something for him in the way of a bit of brass to hang on his coat if he pulls this off. How about throwing that patrol in there tonight?"

"I'm all for it," declared Captain Field. He stood up and guided his guest to a table in the mess-hall, where they were joined by Tiny David. During the meal Captain Field, speaking in a low tone, outlined the plan to his lieutenant.

"Superintendent Durham wants you to take over the outfit," he concluded.

Tiny David's flushed face showed his gratitude.

"I don't know anything I would rather do, sir," he replied.

The eyes of the Canadian officer were moist.

"It may be more than just another police case, lad. There is something deep behind all this. If you need anything, call on either of us. Perhaps we're both a bit on the down-grade side of the track, judged by a youngster's standards, but you'll find us able to rally to the occasion —eh, Captain?"

Captain Field smiled his assent.

Half an hour later, when Superintendent Durham was ready to depart, Lieutenant David led the Canadian officer's horse from the stables to the front of the barracks, and Superintendent Durham swung nimbly into the saddle.

"Good hunting, lad," he called back as he rode north.

THE International Patrol, as the newspapers called it, soon settled to routine work. What slight friction developed between the men of the two commands was easily ironed out. Tiny David, sizing up his men and finding them capable, used as little authority as possible.

"You are on your own here," he told them. "Your job is to mingle with these people on both sides of the line, talk to them and get them to trust you. While you are doing it, keep your eyes and ears open, and maybe we can find what is at the bottom of all this. And everything you do find, no matter how unimportant it seems, talk it over with me."

So the two-man patrols, each composed of a Mounty and a trooper, went out. The men dropped in at crossroads stores, and took part in the discussions. They visited with farmers working in the fields. They made a habit of paying calls upon men known as leaders in little communities.

Some of the men showed real aptitude for the work. Others, obviously, were unfitted for the task. These last, with the coöperation of Captain Field and Superintendent Durham, were replaced. But the results obtained were negligible.

In fact, the only tangible thing to report came from Sergeant Crosby, who was paired with a sergeant of the Mounted named Devons. These two sought Lieutenant David one evening after the patrol had been established about two weeks. Devons, an intelligent and capable-appearing person, was the spokesman.

"Something is brewing, sir," he said. "I know these people rather well. I've worked among them all my life. And they have changed."

"In what way?" asked Tiny David.

"Well sir, they are secretive about things they formerly talked about openly. You see, no matter how much you talk about the invisible border and all that, a man's a Canadian or an American. Before this began, when you talked to a chap on our side of the line about a man on your side he didn't like, he called him a blooming Yank, and let it go at that. It didn't mean anything, and it relieved his feelings to get it off his mind. Talk to him now, and he freezes up like an iceberg."

"What started it all?" Tiny David demanded.

"That's just what we can't find out, sir. And we can't find out what is keeping it going."

"Any strangers?"

Devons smiled.

"We looked for that first thing, sir. Not a trace of an agitator."

The two men departed, obviously worried.

Two days later Tiny David stood on the running-board of a car beside Captain Field, who was paying his first visit to the line.

"How is it going?" asked the commanding officer.

"We aren't getting to first base," Tiny David admitted. "The trouble is here, but we can't put our hands on it."

"Stick to it, Tiny," was the advice. "You at least have broken up marker-moving as an outdoor sport. By the way, have you stumbled on any dope as to whose bright idea that was?"

"Nary a hint, Captain," admitted Tiny.

Captain Field appeared to be deep in thought as he drove away.

FALL gave way to winter. Nature spread her white blanket over the bleak landscape. The patrol stayed on.

Cold weather served to merge the separate identities of the two forces composing the patrol. The regulation coonskin caps of the troopers were warmer than the hats of the Mounties, and therefore all the men wore them. The mittens of the Mounties were more comfortable, and they became standard equipment.

Outwardly, all was calm and peaceable. But there were straws to show how swiftly the underground current was flowing. In Albany a legislator arose in the Assembly and launched a fiery verbal attack upon "the trouble-inviting army now being maintained on the border of two peaceful nations."

The sensational section of the press in both nations seized upon the speech and made the most of it. After the speech came special writers and photographers.

The showing of a news-reel in a theater in a little border town brought forth a volley of hisses directed at American soldiers shown marching in a parade. The hisses were followed by blows. Soon, it seemed, the entire audience was involved.

Then two husky men, wearing nondescript uniforms that made it impossible to determine their nationality, waded into the struggling mass, and order soon was restored.

Later, the two men told Lieutenant David about it.

"It was a swell shindig while it lasted, sir," said Sergeant Devons. He surveyed a skinned knuckle ruefully. "Did that on a flag-waver who was yelling that he could lick twenty Yanks."

Sergeant Crosby touched a swollen eye experimentally.

"That," he explained, "came from a patriot who was yelling that we had licked them twice, and could make it three."

Tiny David grinned.

"Where is he now?" he asked.

"I don't know which hospital they took him to," Sergeant Crosby admitted.

Tiny David's smile vanished.

"You both did a swell job," he declared. "But I'd give a month's pay if it hadn't been necessary."

"Yes," Sergeant Devons agreed, "I'm afraid that from now on, things are going to happen."

The first proof of his prophecy came in the form of telephone calls that continued throughout the night. The calls came from newspapers all over both nations. Over and over again, Lieutenant David told his story:

"Didn't amount to anything. Just a little trouble in a theater. Two men were able to handle it. They are Sergeant Cedric Devons, of the Canadian Mounted, and Sergeant James Crosby, of the New York State Police. No, we didn't call out any reserves. We didn't get excited about it, so I don't see why you should."

THE next evening Tiny David sat at his desk with what papers he could obtain spread out before him.

"RIOT IN BORDER THEATER!" screamed one glaring headline.

"YANKS BATTLE CANADIANS!" read another.

The tinkling of the telephone-bell caused icy fingers to clutch at Tiny David's heart. He picked up the receiver with leaden fingers.

"Hello. Lieutenant David speaking."

The soft, cultured voice of a woman, vibrant with worry, answered him.

"This is Mrs. La Farge. I am calling from Cold Stream."

"Yes, Mrs. La Farge."

"Constable Billings and Trooper Winton board with me."

"Yes, Mrs. La Farge. What about them?"

"That's what I don't know, Lieutenant. They left here yesterday afternoon. They said they would be gone about an hour. I told them I was having fried chicken and waffles for supper, and they said wild horses couldn't keep them away. They haven't returned yet, and my daughter said I should tell you about it." Her voice broke. "Oh, Lieutenant, I am as fond of those boys as if they were my own sons. Do you think anything has happened to them?"

Tiny David evaded the question.

"Don't you worry, Mrs. La Forge," he assured her. "I'll be right over to see you."

He replaced the telephone.

"Get Sergeant Devons and Sergeant Crosby right away," he ordered his clerk.

DURING the five minutes before their appearance, he worriedly paced to and fro in the little office. But the sight of the resolute faces of the two men who soon stood beside him reassured him. . . .

The troop car leaped at the miles that separated them from Cold Stream.

"Maybe this is our break," said Sergeant Devons. "Maybe we can dig in from here."

"Yes, Sergeant. Maybe it has come out in the open so we can fight it. But I think I would go haywire if anything happened to my men."

Sergeant Crosby, bending low over the wheel of the speeding car, glanced at his officer with alarm.

"Forget it, Tiny," he growled. "The boys probably took a night out for themselves." He fumbled with the throttle, trying to obtain a last ounce of speed. "Anyway, you aren't their nurse."

"It does strike hard, the first time, sir." The quiet statement came from the stalwart sergeant of the Mounted. He smiled, as if in apology for what he was about to say. "I know, because I was a leftenant in France." He passed his cigarette-case to the big man. "All any of us can do is to carry on, sir."

Mrs. La Farge had only one additional bit of information to give them.

"They said they were going to La Verne's store. But I have called there dozens of times."

She repeated the statement over and over.

Then the soothing voice of Tiny David sounded.

"Don't you worry. We will take a run over to the store and see what we can find out."

As they entered the car, Sergeant Devons slipped behind the wheel.

"Save time," was his terse comment. "I know where the store is."

He had another suggestion when they pulled up before the store.

"Suppose I do the talking. They all speak French here, you know."

There was the usual crowd of loafers in the store, which was lighted by sputtering kerosene lamps. The Mounty sought out the proprietor and conversed with him in French, Tiny David recognizing only the names Billings and Winton. Then Devons turned around and spoke in English.

"He says that when they left here, they said they were going to stop at Henry Fortune's farm, but only for a minute. They told him they were going to have chicken and waffles for supper, and that they didn't want to pass that up."

There was a stir among the men gathered about the stove. A farmer, clad in working-clothes, walked toward the officers.

"I'm Fortune," he said. "Was it Constable Billings and Trooper Winton you were inquiring after?"

"It is," Tiny David replied.

"They stopped over at my place, just as La Verne told you. Wouldn't stay for supper, though my missus asked them. Said they had a date with a chicken who had a swell sister named Waffles. They both was laughing as they started out. Took the short-cut through the woods for Mrs. La Farge's. I knew she has been looking for them all day, but I figured that maybe something turned up that needed their attention." He hesitated. "Maybe we better take a run over and see what is in those woods."

WHEN the three officers left the store with Fortune, every man in the place was at their heels. Outside, in the semi-darkness, Tiny saw other members of the patrol, Americans and Canadians, who had heard of this new development, and who, without orders, had rushed to the scene of action. They saluted him, silently and grimly, as he made his way to the car.

Sergeant Devons was at the wheel again. He spoke only once on the ride.

"The line runs through that woods, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Fortune answered. "My house is in Canada, but most of my land is in the United States."

There were more than a score of men at their heels, when, with flashlights in their hands, they entered the woods. Tiny David was in the lead. The trail was a narrow one, and it had been used so frequently that it was impossible to learn anything from the marks in the snow.

Then the trail seemed to come to an end against the trunks of large trees.

"It swings to the right here," Fortune explained.

Tiny David threw the rays of his flashlight in that direction. The beam of light found the opening in the trees and played along it. There, possibly ten feet away, the finger of light came to rest upon a huddled object.

LIEUTENANT DAVID'S heart seemed to stop beating; then it began to pound.

"Wait a minute!"

The command was automatic. So too was the motion of his thumb that turned off the rays of the flashlight. From somewhere in the crowd there came another hoarse command: "Douse those lights!" That, he realized dimly, was Sergeant Crosby. Head-work! Tiny groped his way forward in the dark. He felt, rather than saw, that one man had left the crowd, and was close behind him. He knew that man was Sergeant Devons. And his laboring heart seemed to ease a bit because of the knowledge.

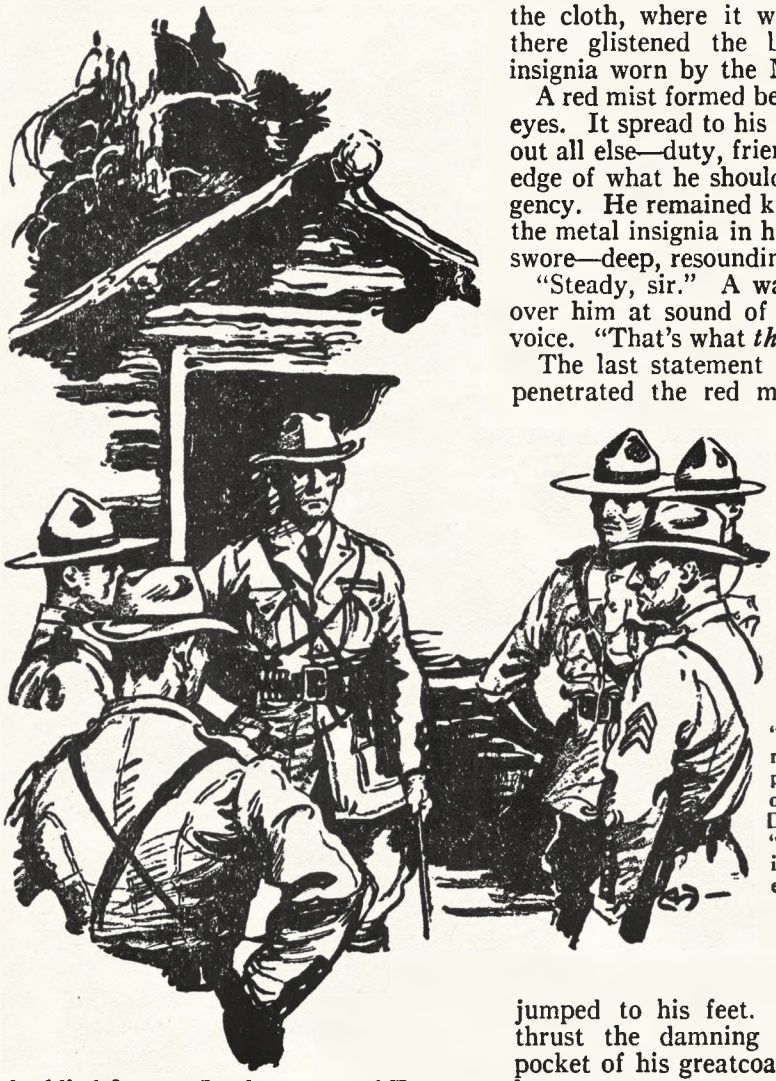
Then he was bending over the huddled figure on the trail. His brain telegraphed his thumb a command to press the button of the flashlight, but the thumb refused to obey.

"Steady, sir. I have the light."

The low voice of the Mounty sounded in his ears. The little pool of light rested upon black shoes with silver spurs. It traveled upward over black puttees, gray trousers with a black stripe, a sheepskin-lined coat. It came to rest again upon a white face—the face of Trooper Winton. Then the light went dark.

"Take mine, Sergeant."

Tiny David could hardly recognize his own voice. Once more the light found the



"Your job is to mingle with the people on both sides of the line," Tiny David told his men. "While you are doing it, keep your eyes and ears open."

huddled figure. In the center of Trooper Winton's forehead there was a small round hole. The right hand of the dead trooper was underneath his sheepskin coat, as if he had sensed danger and reached for his revolver, but all too late. The fingers of his left hand, they saw, were clenched, and in them there was some shining object.

For just a moment they knelt there together in silence, the State Police lieutenant and the sergeant of the Mounted. Tiny David broke the silence.

"We'll take a look at this, Sergeant."

He picked up the limp left hand, and gently pried the fingers open. The object they held fell to the snow. He stooped to recover it. Sergeant Devons adjusted the light as he examined it.

It was a small irregularly shaped patch of cloth, torn from a uniform coat. He turned it over. Upon the other side of the cloth, where it was firmly pinned, there glistened the buffalo head, the insignia worn by the Mounted.

A red mist formed before Tiny David's eyes. It spread to his mind, and blotted out all else—duty, friendship and knowledge of what he should do in this emergency. He remained kneeling, staring at the metal insignia in his hand. Then he swore—deep, resounding oaths.

"Steady, sir." A wave of rage swept over him at sound of Sergeant Devons' voice. "That's what *they want* us to do."

The last statement from the Mounty penetrated the red mist. Tiny David jumped to his feet. Automatically he thrust the damning insignia into the pocket of his greatcoat. But it was too late.

Grouped about were the men who had been waiting a few feet back on the trail. And a startling, sinister change had come over them.

The troopers were huddled together in one little group at the side of the trail. The Mounties were in another. Friendship was forgotten. Blood had called to blood.

The civilians also had separated into two groups. One group, composed of American citizens, stood close to the troopers. The other, composed of Canadians, had fallen into place beside the Mounties.

Not a word was spoken; but it was a tense, electric silence, which if allowed to continue, would generate death.

Tiny David took a step forward. He tried to make his manner and his voice casual.

"I want a detail to carry Trooper Winton to the house. There is no point in leaving him here."

Deliberately he turned and faced the group of Mounties, studying their faces in the glare formed by the light from a dozen flashlights.

"Constable Carter . . . Sergeant Perkins . . . Constable Wilshire . . . Constable Hawkins."

He called out the names as carelessly as if he were picking a stable watch. But a young trooper strode forward, his fists clenched, and his eyes flashing.

"They shan't touch him, Lieutenant. By God, they have done enough to Winton!"

A Mounty charged forward.

"I can lick the liar who said that!" he roared.

TWO men went into action, almost as one. Tiny David's big left fist shot out, landing flush upon the trooper's jaw. He dropped without a sound. Sergeant Devons' right caught the Mounty square between the eyes. He too went down. The Lieutenant and the Sergeant stood shoulder to shoulder in the narrow trail, and in their right hands revolvers glistened.

"Get started with that detail!" barked Tiny David.

The Mounties stepped forward. The Sergeant folded Trooper Winton's hands across his breast. Then, standing in the still, cold night, he shed his coat and placed it carefully over the white face. A tall Mounty fumbled in his tunic, produced a rosary, placed it in the folded hands, and then gently inserted his own hands beneath the still shoulders. Another Mounty paused uncertainly before Lieutenant David.

"Don't you think one of your men should stay with him, sir?"

Tiny David fought down the lump that formed in his throat.

"You are one of my men. You stay with Trooper Winton. I want the other men in the detail to report back here."

"Ready, men?" asked the Canadian sergeant. "Gently now."

Lieutenant David and Sergeant Devons snapped to salute. The other members of the patrol followed their example. Civilians uncovered. The little procession passed along the trail.

"Where is that bird Billings?"

The question, so much like a challenge, came from a civilian. Tiny David wheeled upon the speaker.

"We will find Constable Billings. You keep your mouth shut."

Soon the three men of the detail were back, and the march along the trail was resumed, with Lieutenant David and Sergeant Devons again in the lead. They had gone possibly fifty feet when they saw another huddled form.

Constable Billings lay face downward. They rolled him over. The upper part of his head had been crushed by some heavy object. It was Sergeant Devons' hand which sought the coat of the slain man and located the jagged hole where the buffalo-head insignia had been.

"God!" breathed Tiny David.

"They *wanted* us to feel that way," said the Mounty. He removed the revolver of the constable from the holster, taking care not to destroy fingerprints. A dull, unreasoning rage swept over Tiny David. He wanted to hurl himself upon Devons, and take that revolver from him. But even as he fought back the impulse, the Mounty, holding the weapon by the barrel, offered it to him.

Tiny David accepted it, taking care not to touch the butt, and broke the gun open. Standing so close together that their heads were almost touching, the two men examined the cartridge heads. One cartridge bore the imprint of the firing-pin.

Tiny David slipped the revolver into his pocket.

"That's that," he growled.

HE tried to down the thoughts that were racing through his mind. This was madness. It couldn't happen. But it had. The still form at his feet was mute evidence that it had. But there was some explanation—there must be—though so far it had him completely baffled. Yet on it depended, perhaps, the fate of nations, among them his own.

He squared his shoulders as he recalled a bit of advice Captain Field had once given him: "*When in doubt, stall.*"

He turned to the men gathered about him.

"This thing looks black," he told them. "There is an easy explanation of it. Constable Billings killed Trooper Winton. He, in turn, was killed by somebody, possibly an American citizen, who saw what he had done to Trooper Winton. Every physical fact supports that theory. We will make some scientific tests, but right now I know they won't help a bit."

He paused.

"Just the same, all the cop in me tells me something is wrong. This thing was

done by men who hate your country and hate mine. They want us to fly at each other's throats."

He fought back his emotion.

"Trooper Winton was one of my men. He is the first man I ever lost, and please God, he will be the last. Do you think I would send him away in the hands of comrades of a man who murdered him?"

He studied their faces, saw several of them nod in agreement as the force of the argument went home. He decided to stake his all on the men of the Black Horse Troop.

"Now I will show you how my men—I mean the Americans in my patrol—feel about this." He turned to face the troopers. "This is a request, not an order. Will four men volunteer as a guard of honor for Constable Billings? I want them to carry him back to the house, and I want one of them to remain with him."

He stood, apparently at ease, recognizing the men as they stepped out.

"Sergeant Crosby . . . . Trooper Herman . . . . Trooper Green . . . Corporal Hilton."

He saw, with a little glow of gratitude, that his men were quite as considerate as the Mounties had been. He was the first to salute as they passed with their burden. When they were out of sight, he spoke again.

"The men of the patrol will remain with me. All wise civilians will go to their homes and stay there for the balance of the night. The murderer of two husky men is still at large."

He stood there, outwardly alert and confident, while the crowd slowly dispersed. Then his shoulders sagged. He rested a hand upon the shoulder of Sergeant Devons, as if for support.

"I am licked," he muttered. "It was a good bluff, but it didn't get over. You light out for the nearest telephone. Call Captain Field and Superintendent Durham. Tell them to rush us all the reserves they have. Hell will pop here tonight."

Dimly he heard Devons relay the order to a Mounty.

"I am staying with you," said the Sergeant. "We'll carry on."

THEN Tiny David's head cleared, and he saw his men, Canadians standing side by side with Americans, awaiting his orders. . . .

Less than an hour after the finding of the bodies of Trooper Winton and Constable Billings, the teletype carried the summons to every substation and outpost in the five counties patrolled by the Black Horse Troop. Bells upon automatic typewriters clanged with unusual stridency. Sleepy-eyed clerks hastened to flash the answering signal. Then the clicking keys pounded out their call:

EMERGENCY ORDER.
ALL AVAILABLE OFFICERS AND MEN PROCEED AT ONCE TO NEAREST BORDER STATION. UPON ARRIVAL USE OWN DISCRETION IN QUELLING ANY OUTBREAK, BUT MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ESTABLISH QUICK CONTACT WITH AMERICAN OR CANADIAN OFFICER IN CHARGE OF YOUR SECTOR.
REPEAT. REPEAT. REPEAT ON EMERGENCY ORDER.

But before the message could be repeated, the men of the Black Horse Troop were on their way. Their troop cars, with sirens screaming, roared along the lonely roads of the north country. In the speeding, bouncing cars, grim-faced men tightened their belts and strained forward in anticipation of what was ahead in the darkness.

They left behind them only a skeleton force.

In Canada, the same sort of mobilization was taking place.

And then—the mysterious enemy of both nations struck again at their friendship. The sky north of Fortune's farm was illuminated with a dull red glow. Tiny David, hastening there with his men, found the barn of a Canadian farmer in flames. The wooden structure was doomed, but hastily formed bucket brigades saved the house.

The fire was still under way when other fiery beacons appeared in the sky to the east and the west. Then answering beacons blazed up in the south.

Tiny David, functioning automatically, divided his men, and dispatched them to the various danger points. Reserves were beginning to pour in. But that night was one of terror along the border.

It seemed as if insurmountable odds were arrayed against the officers. Members of volunteer fire-departments on both sides of the line, whose keen rivalries had been friendly enough until this time, now fought the flames in suspicion of each other.

Neighboring citizens on both sides of the line, urged by that love of conflict that slumbers in the breast of almost every man, hastened to the scene of the

struggle. These, however, were firmly turned back by patrols hastily thrown across the main roads.

It was well toward morning when some semblance of order was obtained. The fires had burned out their fury. There had been no fresh outbreaks for an hour. More than a score of arrests had been made. The prisoners of both nationalities had been herded into an old school building about which a guard of troopers and Mounties was posted.

Tiny David, his hands and face blackened with smoke, staggered from a burning building with the skirts of his sheepskin coat aflame. His glassy eyes were unseeing. His laboring lungs panted for air. Unmindful of the flames spreading about his knees, he staggered on.

A stalwart Mounty thrust forward his foot, tripped the huge man and rolled him in the snow until the fire was extinguished. Then he pulled the officer to his feet.

AS if in a dream Tiny David saw Captain Field walking toward him. Off in the distance he heard the voice of his commanding officer:

"You are out on your feet, Tiny. Get back to the office. Albany and Washington will be down on our necks. Don't answer any telephone-calls except from them. Stall them along, lie to them, do anything—only make them keep their hands off."

He gazed at the man before him uncertainly.

"That's an order. You hear me, Tiny?"

Tiny David saluted mechanically. He staggered toward his car. He was about to fall. But the arm of a Mounty slipped about his shoulders.

"Steady, sir," came the voice of Sergeant Devons. "I'll drive."

Then they were back in the office, and a telephone-bell was ringing furiously. He watched Sergeant Devons move toward the instrument, work the hook furiously and then speak into the instrument.

"Chief operator," said the even, cultivated English voice.

Tiny David slumped in his chair.

"Chief operator? This telephone is to be kept clear for official calls from Albany or Washington. No other incoming calls. Understand?"

The Mounty pushed the instrument aside. His smoke-blackened face twisted in a smile.

"Now we are in for it, as you chaps would say."

But the telephone was strangely silent.

Tiny David roused himself with a great effort. His lungs were burning. Each word was a painful job.

"Autopsy—Billings and Winton. . . . Call Dr. Green—Malone. . . . Best man in Montreal. . . . Impartial."

"Best man in Montreal would be Dr. Archer," said Devons. "I'll call them both, sir."

He seated himself before the telephone again. Tiny David dozed. Then he was aroused by Devons' voice. Confound him! Why did the fellow have to shout?

"Leftenant! Leftenant! I got through to both medical men. They are starting at once. Anything else, sir?"

"Ballistics experts—yours and ours."

"Righto," was the reply. "I'll call them both."

Tiny David slept again. He awakened to find a blackened, battered but irrepressible Sergeant Crosby standing before him.

"Hello, Handsome," said that worthy, calmly bridging the difference in rank between himself and this man, who once had served under him as a trooper. "Had your beauty sleep?"

He fumbled in his pocket and drew out a misshapen leaden pellet. His face softened.

"Bullet that killed Winton. Hell of a job digging it out of that frozen ground. Thought it ought to go with the collection."

Crosby placed the bullet on the desk. Tiny David fumbled in his own pocket and produced Billings' revolver and the bit of cloth with the buffalo-head insignia. He arranged them beside the bullet.

"Good work, Jim! I'd like to chuck the whole lot out of the window."

"That wouldn't help, sir," warned Sergeant Devons.

"SAY," went on Sergeant Crosby, "it sure was a great night! Inspectors and leftenants had a nice night, too. Remember that guy Chesholm we thought was poison ivy? We were wrong about that laddie, old-timer. He's all to the good."

Crosby lighted a cigarette.

"That bird must smell fires. Every new one I ran to, he was there ahead of me. Regular fire-eater, he is. Saw him carry one old woman out when I would have said there wasn't a chance of getting in and out of the place alive. Funny thing about that! As he carried the old girl out, he was singing away like a school-

girl at her first camp-meeting! It was some sort of gibberish I didn't savvy. And I wish you could've got a load of Chesholm's face when he saw I was watching his performance. He stops singing, puts the old girl down and gets very stiff and very British. He gives me one of those 'Who are you, my good man?' looks. I took it. I can take it from a guy with that much nerve."

He walked to the doorway, then turned to wink at Devons.

"Just goes to show you there is some good in everybody, even lieutenants."

But the remark was wasted. Tiny David's head had sagged again.

THE brilliant sun of noonday flooded the office when next he awakened. Sergeant Devons was gone. A clerk sat at the desk. The revolver, the bullet and the buffalo head were missing. The clerk looked up.

"Captain Field and Superintendent Durham looked in on you, sir. Gave orders you were not to be awakened. Told me to tell you everything was under control, at least until tonight."

The clerk fumbled with some papers.

"The autopsies are completed, sir. Here are the reports. Lot of technical stuff, the substance of which is that both men died at a time approximately the same. The difference, if any, was so slight that medical science could not determine it. Both doctors said it would be the happiest moment of their careers if they could swear that Constable Billings was dead when Trooper Winton was killed, but that they couldn't honestly do so. So that doesn't help a bit."

The clerk sorted out another paper.

"The ballistics men did their stuff too. No fingerprints on the butt of the revolver. The bullet that killed Winton was fired from Billings' revolver. Every land and every groove checks exactly; and the barrel has a slight defect that leaves a mark as plain as a signature."

The clerk shook his head sadly.

"So that's all to the bad, sir."

Tiny David assented bitterly. Wakefulness brought back the nightmare with added horror. Every muscle in his huge body ached. But the mental pain was twice as poignant. He had failed!

Even now, because of his failure, the full brunt of official disfavor probably was beginning to fall upon Captain Field and Superintendent Durham. Sensational newspapers would put misinterpretations upon the mysterious trouble along the border, and would boost the amount of the already large enough property damage. Called into action by their scare headlines and editorials, the stormy petrels of both nations would arise in public places with oratory that would pour oil upon the flames of misunderstanding.

He sat up with a start as the door of the office was flung open. Sergeant Devons entered. Behind him came a small, weazened man, who wore the rough garb of the woods. The Mounty, strangely excited, nodded toward his companion.

"He is Pierre Le Beau. He doesn't speak much English, so I better tell you his story. Incidentally, I have known this man for years. I would bank on anything he tells me."

Devons leaned forward in his eagerness. One of his hands, in which he held a cigarette, was shaking.

"Night before last, Pierre was walking along the main road near Fortune's place. I rather fancy that he was planning to jump the gun on the deer season, and perhaps do a bit of jacking in the bargain, but that is neither here nor there. He heard a cry from the woods, and then a shot, so he started to investigate.

"He took advantage of all the cover that he could find as he moved toward the woods. He was just entering it as something brushed by him."

WITH controlled excitement Devons repeated the trapper's almost unbelievable story:

"He says that it was a man over six feet in height, and broad in proportion. He says that the man was dressed in skins from head to foot, and that he wore huge, crudely fashioned snowshoes. He tells me that the face of the man was masked, but that holes were cut for the eyes, and that he could see them glistening. In his story to me, he said that the man's hands were ungloved, and that they were black. Pierre tells me the man traveled at incredible speed, and that as he raced along he was humming to himself.

"Pierre waited until the man was a good distance away. Then he followed him. They went south, striking straight across the country, and avoiding roads or dwellings. They traveled well into the night. They went south of Malone, and they entered the foothills of the Adirondacks."

He spoke in French to the trapper, who answered in the same tongue.

"The masked man started up the side of Wolf's Head. Pierre followed, keep-

ing about a quarter of a mile behind. He says there was bright moonlight, and that it was easy to follow the trail.

"The masked man reached the summit shortly before daybreak. There, Pierre says, he entered a sort of den made in the rocks. A short time later smoke came from an opening in the rocks.

"Pierre explained to me that he had heard other trappers tell stories of a wild man on Wolf's Head, but that he had never placed any credence in them. That was why he went to so much pains to follow this man, because he attached no special significance to the shot he heard in the woods, believing it to be the work of a poacher.

"Well, after watching the den for a while, Pierre started home. He had no desire to molest the man. He arrived here about half an hour ago. Soon as he heard what had happened, he hunted me up and told his story."

Sergeant Devons paused. Deliberately he banished his own enthusiasm.

"Sort of a goofy story, sir. What do you think?"

Outwardly, he was indifferent. In reality, he waited with bated breath for the answer.

Tiny David drove one huge fist into an equally large palm.

"This whole thing is goofy," he roared. "It is the work of a lunatic." His voice became grim. "We are going to get this lunatic, Pierre, you, Jim Crosby and myself. It's the break, man! The break at last."

The light of anticipation glistened in Sergeant Devons' eyes. But his voice was unemotional, even.

"Ordinarily I would call the whole thing a moonshine dream. But I know Pierre."

"You don't have to sell me on it," cried Tiny David. "I'm sold."

He turned to the clerk.

"Rout out Sergeant Crosby. You've heard what it's all about. When Captain Field and Superintendent Durham come in, tell them what I have done. We will stop at the barracks for snowshoes." A lump formed in his throat. "Tell Captain Field that if he wants to countermand my orders, or if he wants to relieve me of the command of the party, he can get in touch with me at the barracks." His face hardened. "But tell him he will have to be damned fast to catch me."

He herded Sergeant Devons and the trapper toward the door.

"Let's go!" he cried.

Sergeant Devons' hand located the jagged hole where the insignia had been. "God!" breathed Tiny David.

HIGH on the summit of Wolf's Head, a huge black figure lay flat on the floor of a rocky cave. Two bloodshot eyes opened slowly, blinked and then stared about. Two thick, hairy arms stretched widely and the figure, completely nude, rose to its feet.

It was a great black man, magnificently proportioned, and yet despite that fact, grotesque and repulsive. His hair, only slightly kinked, but deeply matted, fell to his shoulders.

The icy wind whistled through the cave, and the fire in one corner had died down, but the nude figure moved about without a shiver. Slowly the man donned garments fashioned from skins.

When he was completely clothed, he seized what had been the neck of a sweater and pulled it over his head. His red eyes peered forth from two openings. His matted hair extended above the sweater.

"It is not good for a god to show his face to the world," he muttered. "Serge Brovak says so. I too say so. It is so."

He moved restlessly about the cave, fingering his belongings: A submachine-gun, which he handled with loving care, and which had drums of ammunition beside it. A rifle, a shotgun, more ammunition. A pair of huge snowshoes, stores of food, a glistening revolver, which he picked up and tucked in some fold of his fur clothing.

He paused before a small compact radio set, and turned the dials. Lights gleamed on the face of the instrument. A jumble of words gradually became intelligible.

"—you latest bulletin from the Canadian border. After a night of arson, rioting and bloodshed the section is reported calm. Grave fears are entertained regarding developments tonight. The authorities of both nations are unable to advance any explanation for the strange and terrible series of events. The property damage is—"

He snapped a switch. The radio set was silent. He laughed aloud. It was a hearty laugh, but there was no mirth in it. Then he buried his face in his hands. The old familiar pressure was bearing down upon his forehead.

FROM a shelf above a crude table he seized a book—the year-book of a well-known college. He carried it to the light thrown by the dying fire and turned its pages. Pictures of young men in cap and gown confronted him. Once they had been classmates. Now he saw them as strangers. Even his own likeness, which appeared above the caption, *"Star athlete and honor student,"* brought not the faintest flicker of recognition.

He threw the book aside. Then he walked to one end of the cave, and climbed through a narrow opening. Outside, he stood upon a snow-covered shelf of rock.

Off in the distance he saw faint wisps of white smoke. The mirthless laugh sounded again. His black form stood in bold relief against the white crags as he lifted his voice in song.

It was a strange barbaric melody. The words were unintelligible. But in it there was the beating of drums, the whisper of the forests, the tread of marching feet of men under arms, the crack of machine-guns, and a fierce, joyous song of triumph. Each motive was distinct; yet they all blended together into the song of an oppressed race that found its salvation. And that salvation, as the song portrayed it, was one of blood.

The throbbing voice ceased abruptly, and the last jumbled words echoed against the rocky pinnacles. The pressure upon his forehead was easier now. His movements were brisker as he climbed back to the cave.

He heaped wood upon the fire, and soon the flames danced upon the walls of rock. He took another book from the shelf, and placed it upon the table. He put writing materials beside it. Then he sat down and began to read.

IT was an ordinary notebook. Upon the cover there was printed in bold letters, "EMPIRE WRECKERS, INC."

He turned the pages idly, pausing now and again to read an entry.

"Harlem is not the solution. It is a false paradise, built to a white man's scale. Yet that last is unfair. The fault lies with my own race. We are too prone to decry greatness in ourselves. I, with a gift of healing that my white instructors marveled at, starve, while the white quacks flourish, fed by my people. I can't go on.

"I met Serge Brovak in Greenwich Village today. He says he is a Slav, but he resembles an Englishman. He has a wonderful understanding of the race problem. He has visited his old home in Russia recently, and he says communism, while a step in the right direction, is not the solution. He held me spellbound. I could have listened forever. But that cursed pressure in my head drove me home. I must see him again. I gave him my address.

"My condition grows steadily worse. The pressure on my head grows greater. Neurasthenia—perhaps madness. 'Physician, heal thyself!' What mockery. How can one avoid one's very life? I should get away. But it would go with me. . . .

"Serge Brovak called on me today. Why did I say he resembles an Englishman? We sat before the open fireplace, and he was all Slav. He says the yellow and black races must rule the world. First, however, the white races must weaken themselves by fighting each other. He sang me a strange song. While he sang, I saw bearded men riding spirited horses about fires kindled on a huge plain. It made me forget everything, Harlem, race, my suffering. I only knew that I be-

longed to Serge Brovak, that I am his man.

"Serge Brovak is going away. He says he must work for the cause. He is going to Montreal. He wants me to join him there later. . . .

"Canada, I find, is kinder than Harlem, but the barrier remains. Serge Brovak looked me up today. He is a different man here in Canada. He had a mad plan. But is it madness? What is the line between madness and sanity? . . .

"This cave seems a home to me. My learned white brothers would say it is a return to the primitive stage of my ancestors. But how would they explain the immunity of myself, a member of an inferior race, to this biting cold? Serge Brovak brings me what I need. He says he will work in the outside world, while I remain here, ready to strike. He is clever. I will obey him, for a time. But I am a god. I have found myself, here with nature. . . .

"My clothes are wearing out. Serge Brovak would bring me others, but I refused. I will wear furs. It will be my punishment for accepting half a loaf for so long, and not daring to strike out for a whole meal of life. I must remember to keep my face covered. The face of a god should not be revealed. . . .

"I have named our venture 'Empire Wreckers, Inc.' The 'incorporated' is added for a reason. Every night the radio brings me the voices of two fools, who portray the white man's version of the humor of my race. All their childish business ventures are 'incorpolated.' So I have incorporated this venture, which will wreck the white man's world. Delightful irony. . . .

"The hour to strike has arrived. Serge Brovak was here last night. We sang together. At times I think he is mad, but his plan was a sane one. Tonight I went down to a border village and moved the stone markers along the boundary. I carried them north. During the morning I hid in an empty barn. I fired at two fools in a car. I missed. Then I returned here. Serge Brovak will move among the fools and sow the seeds of discontent. The superior race! Only fools would worry about stones. . . .

"I moved the stones again. This time I placed them to the south. It seems childish. But one must fight fools with fools' weapons. Serge Brovak was angry because I shot at the two fools in the car. He says things like that will betray us. I think he did something to cover that up."

He turned a page, seized a pen and began to write:

"We have builded well, this mad Slav and I. I went down to the world. Serge Brovak met me. We hid in a woods. Two men in uniform approached. Serge Brovak showed himself and called to one of them. The fool knew him. He left his companion and walked toward us. We were out of sight around a bend in the trail. I killed the fool with a blow on the head. Serge Brovak took the fool's revolver and went back to the other fool. He shot him dead. Then he returned the revolver to the first fool's holster. We tore a tin ornament from the coat of the first fool and placed it in the left hand of the second fool. That was clever. Then we stole away.

"We struck again. Brovak brought me phosphorus—little sticks of white hell that must be kept under water, for they burst into flame when dry. We roamed the country north and south of the border and placed these little sticks of hell in open cans, covered by only a little water, under porches and barn floors. When the water evaporated, those barns and houses burst into flames . . . . A night of triumph!

"I came back to the hills, where a god should live. Serge Brovak stayed on the earth. Some day I must kill him. He has served his purpose. He will die with honors. He has served a god."

HE blotted the entry, and closed the book. His head was hurting again, so he crawled through the cave-opening and stood on the rock ledge. The afternoon sun was sinking. He sang the weird song, but his heart was not in it. He stopped suddenly as the rays of the sun reflected metal on the mountain below him. He reached inside the cave, found a pair of field-glasses and trained them upon a clearing on the side of the mountain.

"More fools," he muttered. "Four of them."

He slipped back into the cave. He seized the submachine-gun and cradled it in his arms.

"You shall serve a god, little foolkiller."

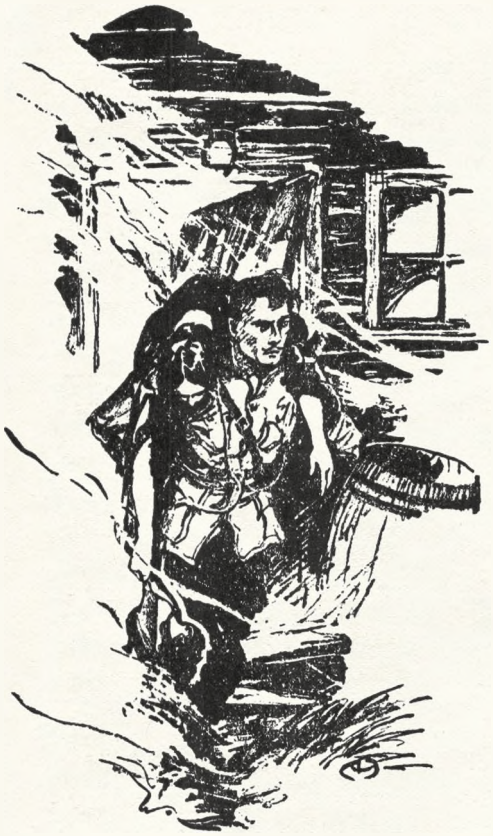
He put the gun aside, and picked up a drum of ammunition. Using the blade of a huge knife, he carved a cabalistic sign upon the leaden head of a cartridge.

"You are for the big fool, who leads them."

He marked a second cartridge.

"You are for the Canadian fool, who walks beside him."

He marked a third.



"Regular fire-eater, Chesholm is—saw him carry one old woman out when I'd have said there wasn't a chance of getting in and out alive!"

"You are for the fool who flounders along behind them."

He carved the fourth cartridge head with an elaborate design.

"You are for the little fool who moves through the snow without effort. You must do your work well, little bullet. He knows the ways of the hills where the gods dwell. He will be hard to kill, that fool."

He loaded the gun. He placed a pile of ammunition upon the floor. Then, with the gun cradled in his arms, he took his stand near the opening of the cave. He was singing. The crack of machine-guns predominated in the song.

PIERRE LE BEAU moved through the snow with an easy, tireless gait that taxed the strength of the three officers to the utmost. They were badly winded when they reached a clearing just a short distance from the peak of the mountain.

"Right here," declared Tiny David, "is where we take time out for a rest."

He threw himself into a drift, and stretched luxuriously, with his feet, to which the awkward showshoes were attached, extended before him. Devons and Crosby followed his example. The little trapper stood to one side, a smile upon his weather-beaten face. He spoke a few words in French.

Sergeant Devons chuckled.

"Pierre says," he translated, "that if he ever wishes to avoid the police, he will lead them through deep snow."

"He could leave me, all right," Tiny David admitted. "Well, might as well reel off some more of it. As the lad in the poem said, 'Excelsior!'"

They struggled to their feet, and started across the clearing. Tiny David was in the lead. Devons was at his right, and a few feet behind. Crosby, making hard going of it, wallowed along in their wake. On their left, and considerately matching his pace to theirs, was the trapper.

HALFWAY across, Le Beau halted. He shielded his eyes with his hands, and gazed upward. He spoke in English.

"Wild man. Him there. Look!"

They gazed where he pointed. Outlined in bold relief against the rocky crags, they saw a huge figure. A glint of light flashed from it.

"Him got glasses," explained the trapper.

Then, as they stood watching, the figure vanished.

"Well," said Tiny David, as the climb was resumed, "the gentleman is at home."

"Righto," said Sergeant Devons. "And I rather fancy he is preparing a welcome for us."

The clearing ended. They entered dense woods, in which it was impossible to see the summit. They moved in single file now. The trapper went first, holding branches he pushed aside so that they would not fly back and strike the faces of his companions.

On and on they climbed. The sun had disappeared. The leaden twilight of a late winter afternoon hung over the mountain when they reached a spot where the trees began to thin. The trapper spoke excitedly in French.

Sergeant Devons translated:

"He says we are very near now. When we step out from this thicket, there is no protection."

Sergeant Devons paused.

"This will be a ticklish job, sir."

Tiny David swung into action.

"Wait here," was his terse command.

The Lieutenant moved forward from tree to tree. Suddenly he was at the end

of the clearing. He threw himself flat in the snow, seeking shelter behind the stump of a fallen tree.

BEFORE him, so close it was startling, was the stone cave. Only a small clearing separated him from its narrow entrance. He broke a long twig from a bush. He removed his hat and placed it on the twig. He held the twig up so that only the hat-crown appeared above the stump.

There was a roar as the machine-gun in the cave poured forth its leaden hail. Bullets tore through the coonskin hat. They ripped and splintered the stump; they plowed through the snow. Tiny David drew the twig down abruptly. The firing ceased.

From the cave there came loud, mirthless laughter. A full, resounding voice cried out a challenge:

"Come forward, superior ones. Four lords of creation! Only one member of an inferior race. Why do you hesitate, my masters?"

Tiny David glanced back over his shoulder. He saw that Devons and Crosby had moved forward, and that they had found shelter behind a fallen tree near him. The trapper crouched behind a huge boulder. The three men had their revolvers drawn.

"Don't fire," he ordered.

Tiny David removed a small wooden box, which had been fastened to his belt. He opened it, and from it he took a sphere about the size of a baseball.

"Draw his fire by holding your hats a bit above your barricade," he directed.

The three men obeyed. The machine-gun swung toward them, and let loose a spray of death.

Tiny David leaped to his feet. His great right arm drew back. Using every ounce of his strength, he hurled the sphere toward the narrow opening of the cave. Then he dropped behind the stump just as the bullets tore at it.

The sphere sailed upward. It struck the rocks three feet below the cave and shattered. The wind, whistling over the mountain top, picked up the gas and whisked it away.

Tiny David turned toward the others.

"That was my best offering," he muttered. "Only three bombs left. Any of you fellows think you can heave one in there?"

"Not a chance, sir," said Sergeant Devons.

Le Beau, however, was talking rapidly, and making excited gestures. Sergeant Devons interposed a few words, obviously an objection. The trapper answered with more emphasis. Then the Mounty addressed Tiny David.

"He says that if you will give him the gas-bombs, he will creep back and approach the cave from the other side. The only opening he saw there the other day was a small loophole. He thinks that we can keep the gentleman so busy on this side that he will be able to approach the cave from the rear, climb on the roof and chuck the bombs through the entrance. He is quite insistent that he be permitted to try it."

Tiny David pondered.

"It is a good idea," he admitted. "But we can't let him go. I'll have a try at it."

There was a long string of vehement French. Sergeant Devons chuckled.

"The sum and substance is that none of us would have the chance a wolf has of entering the Kingdom of Heaven. I would be for letting him have a try at it. Once he is on the roof, the maniac can't reach him. And we can make things lively."

Tiny David still hesitated.

"I can't order him to try it," he demurred.

"You'll have a harder time ordering him not to do it," said Devons. "He says if you won't give him the gas, he will make the try without it."

Tiny David held the wooden box in his hand.

"Catch!" he ordered.

DEVONS caught it easily. He took off a snowshoe, placed the box upon it and sent it skimming across the hard-crusted snow toward the trapper, who was grinning broadly.

Then Sergeant Devons was on his feet. His right hand was raised, and the barrel of his revolver pointed upward. It was sheer, splendid bravado. Tiny David watched him, spellbound. The barrel of the revolver came down until it was trained upon the cave. Then Sergeant Devons opened fire. He fired leisurely and calmly. Judging from his manner, he might have been standing on a practice range. Only when the gun was empty did he drop behind the shelter.

There was no answering fire from the cave, but a mocking call floated down:

"The fool would show his courage. It amused a god—once. Try it again, fool. This time the god will not be amused."

Tiny David glanced toward Devons, who was grinning. He peered beyond the Mounty. The trapper was gone.

The minutes passed slowly. The twilight deepened. There was an occasional burst of machine-gun fire from the cave. The three men returned it. Then Tiny David, straining forward to peer through the gathering gloom, saw a dark object pressed close to the roof of the cave.

"Keep your fire low," he warned his companions.

As they watched, an arm was extended over the edge of the cave's roof. It hurled something through the opening in front. The barrel of a machine-gun shot out and groped upward. It was unable to reach its target. The arm flashed down again, almost beside it. The barrel of the gun drew away from the opening. A third time the arm descended.

"Cease firing!" barked Tiny David.

The huge negro climbed through the opening in the rocks. He crouched upon the shelf. The tear-gas had done its work. He was blind and helpless. But instinctively he held the machine-gun cradled in his arms. The neck of the sweater was drawn over his face. He longed to remove it, so that he could drink in this fresh air more freely. But his throbbing, twisted brain told him it was not good for fools to look upon the face of even a disabled god.

"Drop that gun!" roared Tiny David.

The submachine-gun clattered down across the rocks. The trunk of a sapling halted its wild flight.

THE three officers walked toward the cave.

"Put up your hands!" cried Sergeant Crosby.

The tortured figure on the rocky shelf straightened. A black, hairy paw, which had been fumbling in the fur garments, was withdrawn; in it there was a revolver. The blind giant fired at the place where the voice had sounded.

Sergeant Crosby stopped in his tracks. He swayed; then he seemed to sit down in the snow.

There was a fiendish laugh. Tiny David and Sergeant Devons fired at the same time.

The fur-clad figure swayed on the edge of the rock shelf. It plunged forward, bouncing from rock to rock. It came to rest just a few feet away from where Sergeant Crosby was lying. The mad descent had torn the sweater-neck from his face. This madman, who dreamed of wrecking empires, and who thought his face too holy for mere mortals to gaze upon, lay in the snow before the men he hated—dead and unveiled. . . .

A faint trace of gas still lingered in the cave, although they had waited two hours before entering it. A fire in one corner lighted up the rocky interior. Sergeant Crosby lay upon a litter made of uniform coats. His eyes were closed, but his breathing was easy, regular. Crouched beside him sat Tiny David and Sergeant Devons.

"The bleeding has stopped," said the Mounty.

"Thank God for that," replied the State Police lieutenant. He glared at the far corner of the cave, where the bulky form of the black man was covered with filthy blankets.

"I am not a doctor," continued Devons, "but I would say Jim is all to the good. Clean flesh-wound in the shoulder. I've managed to stop the bleeding. He is unconscious, but I don't think that means anything. Shock, probably. Those bullets have a kick like a mule."

Tiny David nodded.

"Le Beau should be almost there. It was tough, putting it all in a letter. I told what had happened here. Said we were convinced that this wild man killed Billings and Winton. I suggested to the skipper that he put the news on the radio right away. Might prevent another night like the last. Only hope Le Beau makes it in time."

"He will," said Devons. "He can make three miles to our one. That's why I was all for letting him try it alone. If one of us had gone with him, we would have held him back. We argued all that out, sir, at the time." He glanced at the face of the wounded man. He felt his pulse. "Jim is resting easy. I'll stay with him. Why don't you take a look around this shack?"

Tiny David nodded.

"I have been longing to do that," he admitted. "But getting word off and taking care of Jim came first. Here is hoping, Sergeant. We have a long way to go before we are at the bottom of this thing."

He walked about the cave, turning over the various belongings. He bent over the bulky form on the floor and threw back the blankets. Making a gesture of disgust, he thrust his hands through the filthy fur clothing.

"Nothing," was the verdict.

HE walked to the crude table, and fingered the things on it. Then the shelf of books caught his glance.

Reaching up, he selected the year-book of the college, and turned its pages.

"Now we are getting somewhere."

He studied the photograph of a negro youth. Below it was the caption:

BOYD WILSON
Star athlete and honor student.

The white margin bore the penciled notation:

"When I was a fool, without race-consciousness. Later I acquired it, and became a god."

Tiny David tossed the book to Sergeant Devons, who caught it in an expert manner.

"That partially answers the question of identity. Gives us something to start on, anyway."

Sergeant Devons, who was examining the book, made a gesture of assent.

The cover of the notebook attracted Tiny's attention. He picked it up from the shelf. The title glared at him:

EMPIRE WRECKERS, INC.

He sat down before the crude table and began reading. Soon he produced pencil and paper, and made notes:

"Serge Brovak . . . Slav, but resembles Englishman . . . Has been in Russia."

He came to the passage describing the murder of Trooper Winton and Constable Billings. He gave a low growl. Sergeant Devons looked up from the year-book.

"Strike anything?" he asked.

WITH a start, Tiny David came back to the present. He studied the clean-cut face of the man sitting beside the wounded sergeant. He owed that man much. He had found him honorable, courageous and ever a gallant gentleman. But the words of the entry in the journal were dancing before his eyes.

"Yes," he answered. His words were deliberate. "The brains of this outfit is a man named Serge Brovak. That may or may not be an alias."

He saw the look of interest that crossed the Mounty's face.

"Russian, eh?"

"Slav," Tiny David corrected.

He paused.

"Ever hear of him?"

The Mounty pondered.

"No. Can't place the name. Any description?"

"Yes." Tiny David spat out the words. "He is a Slav, but he resembles an Englishman."

He saw Sergeant Devons recoil as if from a blow in the face. Neither man spoke. An icy barrier seemed to settle between them. Gone was their friendship, their mutual respect and their understanding. He watched the Mounty moisten his dry lips with his tongue.

"Anything else, Leftenant?"

"Yes," said Lieutenant David. He read aloud from the journal:

"'We hid in a woods. Two men in uniform approached. Serge Brovak showed himself and called to one of them. The fool knew him. He left his companion and walked toward us. We were out of sight around a bend in the trail. I killed the fool with a blow on the head.'"

LIEUTENANT DAVID looked up from the notebook.

"What do you make of that, Sergeant?"

Again the Mounty recoiled.

"Several things, sir," he replied. His voice was low and lifeless. "The man who called to Constable Billings was known to him. He was a man Constable Billings would obey without question. He was a man whose authority Trooper Winton also must have recognized."

"Exactly," snapped Tiny David. "And what does that make him, Sergeant?"

Sergeant Devons' head was bowed.

"He is an officer." He made the admission calmly. "We already know he resembles an Englishman. Therefore he must be a Canadian officer."

"We agree on that," declared Tiny David. He turned the pages of the journal, and read aloud a recent entry, the ink of which was blurred and blotted:

"'The four fools fight well, the English fool best of all. He has all the courage of his race. He stood up and shot at me like a man. As if his bullets could harm a god! It amused me. I called to him. He made no reply. Nothing is hidden from a god. I know why he was silent. *He is Serge Brovak in another form.* That man is a devil. He can change his form at will. First he is a Slav. Then he is the Englishman, with a name that baffles me. Now he is another Englishman, seeking to destroy a god who can serve him no longer. I was through with him. I should have killed him sooner. But it is not too late. He shall die with the other fools. But his shall be a lingering death. I must attend to it now.'"

Tiny David read that line again: *"He is Serge Brovak in another form."* He stared at Devons. It did not seem possible. And yet—

"I would rather not have you sitting beside Sergeant Crosby," he said.

He saw the red stain the face of the Mounty; watched him bite his lip.

"Certainly, sir."

Sergeant Devons stood up. He fumbled at his waist. His cartridge-belt, to which his revolver was attached, fell to the floor. The Mounty stepped away from it.

"Will you accept that, sir?"

A wave of regret swept over Tiny David.

"I didn't ask for that, Sergeant."

"You are entitled to it, sir. If I were in your position, I would demand it."

Tiny David made no movement toward the gun. The two men sat facing each other. They were silent. The minutes lengthened into an hour. Crosby groaned. Devons started to rise, then checked himself. Tiny David walked to the side of the wounded man. But Crosby's eyes were closed, and he was breathing easily, so he returned to his place by the table.

MORE minutes passed. Then Sergeant Devons spoke.

"Would you care if I took a look at that book?" He flushed. "I give you my word of honor I will make no attempt to destroy it." He laughed bitterly. "'Word of honor' sounds strange coming from a man in my position."

Tiny David handed it over. The Mounty read it eagerly. His face was expressionless. Only once did Tiny David detect a faint flicker of interest. Then the mask was resumed.

The first pink of dawn came through the opening of the cave when Sergeant Devons put the journal aside.

"May I make a request, Leftenant?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"When we get back, sir, will you turn me over to my commanding officer? And will you make nothing public until you hear from him?"

"Certainly, Sergeant. I owe you more than that for what you have done for me."

He hesitated, trying to put his thoughts into words.

"Whatever may happen, I want you to know that I will always think of you as a man I was proud to serve with. I'll keep hoping this is all a nightmare until the very end. Isn't there something you can tell me now?"

The Mounty's eyes were moist.

"Thank you, sir. I'll always remember that. I was proud to serve under you. I wish there was something I could tell you. I owe you that. But—facts are facts, aren't they, sir?" he concluded.

Before Tiny David could answer, there was a call from outside. There were trappers, troopers and a young doctor, who was puffing from the climb.

"Where is the patient?" demanded the physician.

He climbed into the cave and bent over Sergeant Crosby. Tiny David stood at his shoulder.

"Humph," said the doctor. "Sheer exhaustion as much as the wound. How long had this man been on duty without sleep before this happened?" He went on without waiting for an answer. "And who put on this bandage? He did a splendid job."

"Sergeant Devons did that," said Tiny David. He turned to confront Max Payton, his top sergeant. "How are things, Max?"

"Quiet," was the answer. "You fellows ended the war. We are still making a noise like an army on the border, but there is nothing to do."

The beaming face of Pierre Le Beau appeared.

"You did a swell job," said Tiny David.

The trapper smiled.

Sergeant Crosby opened his eyes, blinked twice and demanded breakfast. They placed him upon a stretcher built of pine limbs. Stout woodsmen picked it up. The body of the madman was placed upon a similar litter.

The journey down the mountain began. Devons walked beside Tiny David.

"Shall I walk ahead of you, sir?"

A lump formed in Tiny David's throat.

"Don't be an ass, Devons," he ordered.

IT was three hours later when they reached the cars on the main road, and began the journey to the border.

Sergeant Crosby, protesting loudly, was taken to the hospital in Malone; the body of the maniac was taken to the morgue.

Captain Field and Superintendent Durham were standing before the temporary headquarters on the border when the cars drove up. Sergeant Devons walked up to Superintendent Durham and saluted. He made a gesture of protest to stem the flow of congratulations.

Tiny David, with two books under his arm, stood watching them. He was sick at heart.

"I am surrendering to you, Superintendent," said Sergeant Devons. "May I talk to you in private, sir?"

The two men walked away. Tiny David's heart was a heavy weight as he turned to Captain Field and saluted. There was a look of bewilderment upon

the usually genial face of the commander of the Black Horse Troop.

"What in hell has happened, Tiny?" he demanded.

Tiny David swallowed hard. "Shall we go into the office, sir?" he asked.

"WHAT is the verdict, sir?" Tiny David pushed the two books aside, and leaned across the top of the desk. Captain Field, who had listened to every detail of the story, removed a battered pipe from his mouth and exhaled a great cloud of smoke.

"The verdict," declared the commanding officer of the Black Horse Troop, "is that the law of averages has caught up with you. You were overdue."

"What do you mean, sir?"

Captain Field tapped the pipe against his heel.

"Just this: You have been riding along smooth for a long time. Sooner or later you were bound to make a jackass of yourself, and I'll say this for you: when you did it, you did a Grade A job in every respect."

Tiny David started to speak, but the Captain raised a hand.

"I can find plenty of excuses for you. You haven't had those silver bars long enough for you to get really used to them. You were up against an unusual situation. You lost two of your men. You haven't been getting your rest. All that helped, but one thing drove you haywire.

"You are genuinely fond of Devons. Don't blame you. But you are all cop, and the fondness you have for Devons just caused you to lean over backwards to play the cop. We all go through that sooner or later, when we are young."

Captain Field's voice and manner were genial.

"We are going to try this right here. You have stated your case. I am going to tear it to pieces. You prove me wrong, if you can."

A great wave of relief swept over Tiny David. He knew these sessions of old. Captain Field was harder to convince than any jury. More than one guilty man had gone to prison because of these sessions. But—this thought brought joy to Tiny David—more than one innocent man, who otherwise might have gone to jail, was free because of them.

"I start right here," said Captain Field. "You knew nothing about this wild man in the hills until you heard Le Beau's story. Devons brought Le Beau to you. Would Brovak do that?"

Tiny David's heart leaped with joy. But he hastened to find an objection, knowing that by doing so he could best aid the man he wanted to clear.

"He might. He would know it was inevitable that the story would get out. He might think that by bringing it out himself he avoided suspicion. Also, he might have wanted the wild man killed, now that his work was done."

"We will call that a draw," Captain Field admitted. "But Devons deliberately stood up where the wild man could see him. He had heard one cry from the wild man, and he knew that if his identity was shouted out you'd hear it. Would Brovak do that?"

Tiny David, hating himself for the part he was playing, advanced a reason.

"We know the distance was too great for the wild man to recognize the face. Brovak might have known it when he stood up. He has been to the cave before."

"We reserve decision on that," Captain Field declared. "But Devons had a chance to leave the cave with Le Beau. You say he argued in favor of letting the trapper go it alone because he could make better time. He could have gone with Le Beau, lost himself in Malone and made his getaway."

Tiny David advanced an objection with reluctance.

"Maybe he didn't want to leave me alone in the cave until he knew what would be found."

"All right, but he made no effort to search the place. He was willing to let you go ahead."

"Maybe he thought nothing incriminating would be found."

CAPTAIN FIELD snorted derisively. "That's a bum argument; it voids your reason as to why he didn't leave with Le Beau. But let that pass. Devons knew you suspected him. He not only surrendered without a struggle, but he voluntarily gave up his gun. Would a man like Brovak do that?"

"He might," Tiny David retorted. "I can't see into a man's mind."

Captain Field refilled the battered pipe.

"No, son, you can't. Not when your heart tells you a man is innocent, but your sense of duty distrusts your heart and makes you act like a fool in trying to convict him. But I can, just from what you have told me."

He lighted the pipe, and drew upon it experimentally.

"Devons is a smart cop, just as smart as you are. He knew all the facts you did. He knew there was a mass of evidence against him. But he had the advantage over you. He knew he wasn't Brovak."

Tiny David leaned forward. The load he had been carrying was lightened. Only one part of his burden remained.

"But how about the last entry in the diary, Captain?"

Captain Field made a clucking sound.

"A maniac wrote that. He wrote it at a time of great strain. He was beginning to turn against Brovak. We have a previous entry in which he spoke of killing him. He probably realized Brovak was more of a fiend than he was, and he was afraid of him. He had reached the stage where Brovak became the dominant thing in his disordered mind, and almost anybody would resemble Brovak."

The last part of the burden was slipping. But Tiny David had one more objection.

"Devons must have realized that. Why didn't he point it out to me? Why didn't he attempt any sort of explanation? If I ever saw a guilty man, Devons looked and acted the part."

Captain Field put the pipe aside.

"Devons saw you were hell-bent on convicting him. He knew you weren't in a mood to listen to explanations. Probably he was too proud to offer them.

"Devons knew he wasn't Brovak. So he knew some other Canadian officer was. Devons is an Englishman, son; proud, reserved, and full of love of country and the traditions of service. This thing must have struck him like a rock. It is the sort of thing an Englishman doesn't talk about with any other man. And you probably rubbed plenty of salt on with your words and your manner."

"I am beginning to see," said Tiny David slowly.

SUDDENLY he was on his feet, his eyes gleaming. He pounded the desk with his fist, pushing aside his gun-belt, which he had removed and thrown there when the conference began.

"My first job is to put Devons so far in the clear that fifty diaries written by lunatics can't touch him. Why, the whole thing is as easy as it can be. Where was Devons at the time Billings and Winton were killed?"

He seized his hat and buttoned his coat.

Captain Field was chuckling.

"I was waiting until you got down to earth enough to ask that. Didn't want to hurry you. It's only the first question you should have asked."

But Tiny David was on his way toward the door.

"Jim Crosby has the answer to that, skipper. He and Devons were paired together on the patrol. I am off to see him."

The door slammed behind him. On the desk lay his gun-belt, quite forgotten. Captain Field gazed at it thoughtfully for a moment; then placed the gun, the cartridges and the belt in a drawer.

TINY DAVID'S heavy foot drove the accelerator toward the floor as he urged the troop car to a burst of speed. He drove west along a lonely Canadian road, heading toward the main highway, which would take him over the border and south to Malone.

His big hand slapped the steering-wheel, giving emphasis to names, none of which were complimentary, which he called himself. Snow and ice had made the road a thing of peril. There were great ruts, into which the wheels slipped, and from which there was no escape.

He swore softly as he saw a car with a lone occupant approaching from the opposite direction. That meant delay, for one of the drivers would be forced to stop while the other pulled around him. He slowed down. A quick glance ahead showed him the approaching car bore an official Canadian license. He cursed again. Courtesy demanded that he pull to the side of the road, and allow the Canadian official to proceed.

The tires of the troop car groaned as he pulled them from the ruts, guided the car to the side and brought it to a halt. The Canadian car drew alongside. But the lone man in it, instead of proceeding, halted his car when the drivers' seats were abreast.

"Cheerio, Leftenant David! What's the good word?"

Tiny David glanced at the driver for the first time.

"Hello, Inspector Chesholm."

He made his greeting brief, and not overly cordial. He had no desire to waste time in conversation with anyone, Chesholm least of all. His dislike for the man had been instinctive at the time of their first meeting. But he dimly recalled something laudatory Crosby had said about him on the night they fought fires kindled by the madman. So he tried to mask his feelings.

"Bit of a party you and Devons had, eh what?"

Chesholm was upon him again; a rain of blows, which in his dazed condition he was unable to block, drove him steadily backward.

Tiny David flushed. He thought quickly. Chesholm, obviously, was on his way to Canadian headquarters. Here was his first chance to start about righting the wrong he had done.

"Yes," he answered. "Party enough to cause me to lose my head, and generally make an ass of myself."

Chesholm appeared interested. He opened the door of his car, and stepped to the road. Tiny David joined him.

"Just how did you distinguish yourself?" asked the Canadian officer. He smiled. "Dispatches I saw all said you did a top-hole job."

Tiny David took the bit in his teeth.

"Hardly. You see, the bird we got had an accomplice. Some things we found there gave us more than a hint as to his identity. I went haywire and suspected Devons."

The Mounty gave an incredulous laugh.

"My word! But whatever caused you to suspect old Devons?"

Tiny David's one desire to do justice to Devons caused him to plunge on blindly.

"I haven't much of an alibi. But the bird we were after is a Slav, who resembles an Englishman. He is a man who was known to both Billings and Winton. He is a man Billings obeyed without hesitation. So we knew he must be a—"

He broke off suddenly, prompted by some vague warning of danger. Chesholm's face was contorted with rage. The features, which a minute before had been typically British, now were foreign, almost barbaric. Chesholm's right hand was upraised. In it there was the heavy butt of a service revolver. And that revolver butt, descending with terrific force, was aimed at the head of the man standing beside him.

Tiny David threw his right arm up. It met the descending arm, blocking the full force of the blow, but only slightly. The revolver butt crashed against his head.

He felt his knees sag, and a black haze formed before his eyes. He summoned every ounce of his will-power and his strength. Instinct, rather than reason, caused his left hand to fly up and grope for the revolver.

The touch of the cold metal steadied him slightly. He tried to pull the weapon from the fingers that clutched it, but his strength was not equal to the task. His muscles, seemingly working without any direction from his clouded brain, sent his right hand upward to aid his left. All the while Chesholm's free hand was battering and tearing at his unprotected face.

The revolver came free with a wrench that threw Tiny David off his balance. He threw his hands forward to right himself. The revolver slipped from his grasp,

skidded across the ice and came to rest in a deep rut.

Now he was fighting for his very life, and his opponent was a madman. He sensed it dimly. No time to hesitate or quibble. His right hand dropped to his hip. It fumbled about, then came away empty. His gun-belt was gone!

Chesholm was upon him again. A rain of blows, which he was unable to block, drove him steadily backward. Suddenly the direction of the blows changed, causing him to give way to one side. Dimly he sensed the purpose of that. He was being driven toward the revolver, but so far away from it that he would be unable to reach it, while his opponent would recover it.

Tiny David threw his body forward, and went into a clinch. A series of vicious hooks, which would have disqualified his opponent in any prize-ring, caused him to break clear. That gave him a respite that was a matter of seconds. He stood there, dazed, battered and bleeding, waiting the next rush of his adversary, powerless to be the aggressor.

NOW that rush came; Chesholm came weaving in with the grace and skill of a professional boxer. His lips were parted in a confident smile. From those parted lips there came a song, savage, bloodthirsty and triumphant.

The song ceased as the two men met. A terrific blow drove Tiny David back. Chesholm bore in. Tiny David, already off balance, was thrown backward. But as he fell, the fingers of his left hand hooked in Chesholm's collar.

The two men crashed to the ice together. They rolled over and over. They came to a halt with Tiny David on his back, and Chesholm sitting astride his chest, showering blows upon his face.

Tiny David's right arm lay limp upon the ice. As he tried to raise it, his twitching finger touched some hard, metallic object. His fingers closed about it instinctively. With an effort, he raised the arm. It came upward, and the point of the metal object touched Chesholm's chest. A fist drove hard and true toward the point of Tiny David's jaw. The trigger finger of his right hand moved convulsively.

The blow went home. Just before it landed, Tiny David heard a great roar. His injured right arm suffered from a violent recoil. Then the black mist, which had been dancing persistently before his eyes, settled down completely.

TINY DAVID opened one eye experimentally, found the process a painful one and abandoned it. He moved his left arm. That pained, too. He tried the right. That wouldn't move. He opened both eyes to find out why. He saw that the arm was in a cast.

He also saw that he was in a bed. Near the bed was a second bed, and sitting propped up in it, reading a book and smoking a cigarette, was Sergeant James Crosby.

Tiny David groaned. Sergeant Crosby put the book aside, and regarded his roommate with interest.

"So you are with us?"

Tiny David closed his eyes.

"Don't do that," begged Sergeant Crosby. "If you keep them open, I'll ring this bell. I'd ring it anyway, but I've been ringing it all morning, and I'll catch the devil if it isn't on the level. So no matter how much it hurts, keep your eyes open. It's worth it."

There was the swish of starched skirts. A trim, dainty nurse stood in the doorway. Her smile was mockingly reproachful.

"What now?" she demanded.

"Go easy on me," begged Sergeant Crosby. "The boy friend is with us."

The nurse advanced toward the bed with a professional air.

"You must be very quiet, Lieutenant. You had a bad knocking around, you know."

Tiny David tried to force words from a parched mouth.

"What—what day is this?"

"What do you care?" demanded Sergeant Crosby. "All days here are good days except Monday. That's her day off. But if it will ease your mind any, you have been out for two days. In addition to other fractures, contusions and lacerations, you took a nice whack over the head. Don't worry about it, though. The doctors say you will have as much mentality as you ever had."

DAVID stirred uneasily. Memory was returning.

"And Chesholm?"

"Serge Brovak, you mean. One newspaper report I saw said he was very dead. As far as I know, he hasn't contradicted it."

The nurse advanced to the windows and pulled down the shades.

"No more talking," she warned. "The Lieutenant is going to drink a little broth, and then he is going to sleep again." She

addressed Sergeant Crosby. "If you don't keep quiet, you will go out of here. Dr. Green said yesterday that you could be discharged."

"There are lots of things that doctor doesn't know," said Crosby.

The lights were turned on when Tiny David awakened again. The pain remained, but it was bearable. His head, while still heavy, had cleared. He saw Sergeant Crosby put aside his book.

"Do you know anything about Devons, Jim?"

"He's ruined," came the reply. "They made an inspector out of him. That's as bad as being a lieutenant."

"That's swell."

Tiny David closed his eyes. It was good to rest.

"I—I suppose he wouldn't want to talk to me?"

Sergeant Crosby sat up in bed.

"Who?" he demanded. "Sir Cedric? No, he doesn't want to talk to you while you are unconscious. He said so all four times he was here. You talked to him plenty. But he just stood there looking down at you. I gathered that he is kind of sore at you. He thinks you gypped him out of going to work on Chesholm."

SERGEANT CROSBY chuckled. "And he has another down on you, as we British say. What you jokingly called your suspicions resulted in the baring of the shady past of Cedric Devons. Seems he is the oldest son of a giddy duke, or something like that. Won enough medals in France to give the family a new set of plate, if they were melted down. But he got hipped on the idea that he led good men to their death, while he escaped. So he gave back the pretty medals, renounced all claims to the jolly old title, came to Canada and signed up as a private in the well-known Mounted. Turned down a commission four times. Took it this time after old man Durham talked to him like a Dutch uncle.

"Reads like a book, doesn't it? Damn' sight better than this thing I have been reading to the tune of your raving. But maybe he wasn't sore at you when the newspapers got wise to it and gave him a play that was nobody's business! He blamed the skipper for tipping off the papers, but Captain Field just laughed and told him to get—"

He broke off abruptly.

"Hello, sweet child of mercy."

The nurse ignored him. She addressed Tiny David.

"A gentleman to see you, Lieutenant. A very insistent gentleman." She glanced at a tiny wrist-watch. "I told him he could stay just fifteen minutes."

INSPECTOR CEDRIC DEVONS entered the room. He was very stiff, and very British.

"Hello, you blooded nobleman," called Sergeant Crosby.

The stiffness vanished. A smile lighted up the tanned face.

"That's something like. Afraid you chaps would act stuffy about all this foolishness."

He advanced to Tiny David's side.

"Nurse says you are not allowed to talk. I'll do enough for both. Nothing like having a fellow down."

For just a second the stiffness returned, but then it was gone.

"Want to say thank you and all that, for the way you treated me up there on the mountain. Most chaps would have brought me in with bracelets on my wrists. You didn't even pick up the gun I let fall. That was sporting of you."

Tiny David groped for words.

"I know how you feel," continued the man by his bed. "Captain Field and I had a long chin. But I knew before that."

He seated himself carefully on the foot of the bed.

"The whole mess was my own fault," he continued. "I thought of Chesholm as soon as you allowed me to read the journal. That line about the two men singing reminded me that Jim had told us Chesholm sang like that when he carried a woman out of a burning house.

"You didn't have that to help you, of course. You were a bit blotto the night of the fires. I should have told you, up there in the cave. But one can't make unsupported charges against one's superior officer, can one? So let's write the whole thing off, as Jim would say."

Tiny David tried to move his right hand, remembered the cast, and extended his left. Devons grasped it.

"Why don't you two boys waltz?" asked Sergeant Crosby.

They both grinned, a little ashamed of the emotion they had shown.

"My time is running along," declared the Mounty. "Have to speed up in order to tell you the things you are interested in. When I explained the situation to Superintendent Durham, he gave me permission to barge off to Montreal to check up on Chesholm. I was off while you were still pleading my case with Captain

Field. Superintendent Durham had ordered Chesholm in at once. That was why you ran up against him on the road.

"In Montreal, we put the telegraph, telephone and cables to work at once, and soon had results. Scotland Yard nailed the credentials he'd used to enter the Mounted as rank forgeries. *That* was never put over on us before, but this time it was! He evidently had accomplices, secretary chaps, who supplied him with stationery, and took care of additional inquiries to people whose names had been forged. The police recognized Chesholm as Serge Brovak from our description, and they had a record of him as an anarchist, forger and suspected pyromaniac.

"The Paris police knew him for his part in a plot to restore the Bonapartes. In Vienna, he was legally classed as criminally insane and incarcerated, but he escaped and fled the country.

"The New York police had the most complete record. Their Radical Squad described him as the reddest of Reds. He first came to their attention as a harmless radical, who had just returned from his home in Russia. But soon he was connected with revolutionary work among Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese and negroes. He pretended sympathy with their race problems. He told them the salvation of the world rested with the yellow and black races. He hoped those races would be able to start a conflagration that would engulf the world. When that happened, according to his plan, his own Russia would stay aloof, waiting. After the other nations were weakened, he anticipated an easy victory for Russia.

"But the police fellows put a crimp in his plans. He was taken to Ellis Island for observation. While there, they noticed his peculiar reaction to fire. A fishing boat burned within sight of the Island. He raved, and he sang. When the flames died down, he appeared to be as normal as anybody. Incidentally, that probably explains the fires the other night.

"BROVAK was ordered deported, but escaped by swimming to the mainland. We know now that he remained in New York, but his activities were greatly curtailed. He contented himself with one disciple, Boyd Wilson, who seemed cut to his measure. He conceived the idea of starting a war between the United States and Canada. So he came to Montreal with forged passports, forged war-records, forged letters of introduction and forged letters of recommendation. The vast machine of which he was a cog made discovery almost impossible. If the owners of the forged signatures were communicated with, the inquirers received a forged answer endorsing the original forgery.

"As Chesholm, he did well in the Mounted. He was capable and efficient in all routine matters. His commission followed as a matter of course. As soon as he had it, he sent for Boyd Wilson, and they went to work."

Devons laughed.

"You know what happened after that as well as I do. But they failed."

He glanced at the door.

"Yes, nurse. This very minute. I want to be allowed in again."

He paused at the doorway.

"Cheerio, you fellows."

Sergeant Crosby sat up in bed.

"That guy doesn't need a title to make him a prince." He jabbed the push-button on the table near him furiously. "Won't sleep a wink until that nurse comes in and tells me a bedtime story." He held aloft a newspaper, upon the front page of which his own picture was prominently featured. "What's the use of being a crying hero if it doesn't rate you something?"

* * *

MONTHS passed. The snow and ice disappeared. Budding fields gave promise of summer's glory. And the border country awakened to a gala day.

Automobiles and horses and carriages dotted the streets of the usually sleepy little town. Men in various uniforms moved about. Streets and buildings were adorned with flags, flags that were intertwined, the flags of the United States and the Dominion of Canada.

Early in the afternoon the crowds with one accord moved toward a large open field, across which, at intervals of a quarter of a mile or so, there ran a line of plain stone markers. Drawn up on the north side of the invisible line between the markers, and facing the south, was a detachment of the Canadian Mounted, headed by Superintendent Durham. Six feet to the south, and facing the north, was a detachment of the Black Horse Troop of the New York State Police, headed by Captain Field.

To the east of the two groups, and running from north to south, was a line composed of the members of what once had been known as the International Patrol. Lieutenant Edward David and Inspector

Cedric Devons commanded that line. Its left flank extended well into American territory, and its right a considerable distance into Canada. There was only one break in the line. That was right at the border, and it was the size that would have been required for two additional men. Those places were held open in memory of Constable Billings and Trooper Winton, who died because two mad men dreamed of wrecking empires.

A BUGLE sounded. There was a hoarse command. Men stiffened to attention. Then a group of men wearing frock coats and high hats, men whose faces were familiar to almost every resident of both nations, walked between the lines of troopers and Mounties and came to a halt before the members of the International Patrol.

There were two short speeches. Then two of the frock-coated men,—they were the two best known,—moved along the line. They paused before each man, spoke to him briefly, and then pinned two glittering objects on his chest. One of the objects was the gift of the United States, and the other of Canada.

They came to the end of the line, but their task was not done. Chatting pleasantly together, and with their hats in their hands, they moved toward an automobile in which two women were seated, and beside which a trooper and a Mounty stood at attention.

The crowd stood with bowed heads while the mothers of Constable Billings and Trooper Winton received the decorations their sons had won.

The two men walked away from the car, and paused.

"Pierre Le Beau," one of them called. "Is Pierre Le Beau present?"

"Yes sir." The answer came from Tiny David. He stepped from the line, seized the collar of the little trapper, who was in the crowd, and thrust him forward.

Both men were smiling as their hands went to his chest. They nodded pleasantly to the men before them as they walked away toward their escorts.

"Dismiss!"

The command sounded along the lines.

Superintendent Durham and Captain Field walked away together.

"Not a bad show," was the verdict of the former. "Bit sloppy, but what can you expect from politicians?"

They came face to face with Tiny David and Devons.

"Bless my soul!" cried the Canadian officer. "Enough tin on their chests to sink a battleship. There will be no living with them."

"Maybe they will need a bit of taking down," Captain Field admitted.

The four men fell into step.

Superintendent Durham gazed at the green fields.

"The trout are biting, Charley. Are we going to have a try at them?"

"Why not?" asked Captain Field. "We don't relish having an alien take all the fish out of our streams, but I think I can promote a license for you. That is, if you feel equal to it."

Stalwart Mounties and bronzed troopers paused in gleeful anticipation.

Superintendent Durham's cheeks were swelling almost to the bursting point. His ruddy complexion deepened.

It was Tiny David who applied the final spark. His left eye twitched slightly as he turned to Devons.

"If we were invited, we might go along," he suggested. "We could get up early and dig enough worms for the whole party."

"Righto," said Devons, who appeared to have developed an affliction which made control of his lips difficult.

"Worms!" The explosion came from Superintendent Durham.

"Fish for trout with worms!" That was Captain Field's contribution.

Then they both were off, each vying with the other in his effort to find language sufficiently picturesque and forcible to depict the shortcomings, the iniquities, the immoralities, the lack of intelligence and the general worthlessness of their lieutenants.

LITTLE groups composed of Mounties and troopers formed about them, making low-voiced wagers upon the outcome of the performance. They silently applauded hits scored by one or the other and exchanged knowing winks.

Tiny David and Devons stood side by side. Outwardly they were listening attentively to this double-recital of their failings. Inwardly they were very happy. This marked the return to sanity. For a time, in these broad fields and distant mountains, there had been madness.

These shouting, gesticulating men were a symbol. They stood for all that was fine and sane in two great nations. Just so long as nations could produce men like these, there would be no madness.

THE END

The Iron Horse of

By HERBERT McNARY

THE referee's whistle shrilled, and a score of tired athletes lifted themselves reluctantly from the cool turf. Almost alone of the twenty-two players on the field, Bill Craddock had failed to relax on the grass during the two minutes of time out. And now—he hurled his helmet toward the sideline.

A shout of approval greeted its flight. The gesture meant to the Hanover enthusiasts that the Iron Horse of Hanover was getting down to business at last. After nearly three periods the one-man team was lifting the responsibility for victory from the padded shoulders of his green-jerseyed teammates and was swinging into action.

Perhaps football honors had come to Bill Craddock too easily. For the third straight season he had confounded opponents and had aroused national interest because he played end on the defense and fullback on the offense, and excelled with All-American ability at both positions.

Standing still, Craddock appeared as firmly rooted as a giant redwood. In action he moved forward like a runaway locomotive. There was an iron hardness about his body that quickly inspired the title of "Iron Horse of Hanover" some forgotten scribe had accorded him. . . .

The teams lined up. A new electric thrill of confidence seemed to seep through the Green team. As the ball snapped into Craddock's embrace, the line leaped forward. The next instant Craddock's steel-thewed legs trampled across what had been the scrimmage-line. He waded through a tangle of red-and-white arms. Fingers clutched at him. Bodies fell away from the impact as from a stone wall. Forward progress slowed to a walk and became stationary because of weight of numbers.

The referee shrilled the end of the play. Craddock remained erect, easily distinguishable because of his close-cropped blond hair that grew like moss on rock, clinging to a rugged structure. Craddock tossed the ball to the referee, who waved the linesmen ahead.

With Craddock carrying the ball on three out of four plays, the Green swept up the field in the first sustained drive in nearly three periods until Ithida called time out with the ball on her six-yard line in Hanover's possession. Craddock led Findlay, Hanover quarterback, aside.

"Use Vic on an off-tackle smash," said Captain Bill Craddock.

"Again?" protested Findlay. "Let's get one touchdown before you start handing them to him on a platter."

"A touchdown will mean a lot for Vic," said Craddock, letting his glance rest on the dark-featured Vic Whitman, right halfback, and ordinarily a brilliant broken-field runner.

Findlay's jaws hardened, and he glanced toward a group of tired players gulping water or pouring it on their heads.

"Don't think Vic can take it over. He should have done his thinking at one this morning."

Craddock stiffened. "Where was Vic at one o'clock?"

"I'm no tattler, Bill!" And Findlay moved away.

Craddock looked after him. Findlay and he were seniors. Vic Whitman should have been, but he had lost a year because of his own carelessness. And now Vic had been kicking over the traces again. No wonder he had been off form.

The whistle pulled the tired players off the grass. Hanover huddled while the bolstered Ithida line dug in tenaciously. Disappointment showed on the Hanover faces as Craddock named the play.

Half the stadium pleaded for a touchdown. The other half chanted: "Hold that line!"

The ball snapped back. It passed into Craddock's hands and out of them as he crashed into the line on a fake. Whitman had juggled the ball momentarily and had lost an all-important fraction of a second. The waiting hole off tackle

Hanover

A lively story of football—and that more strenuous game which is called life.

closed again. Whitman tried to circle the end, but a wing-back threw him outside for a loss of three yards.

Whitman turned on Craddock in the huddle. "I know your game," he cried. "You're trying to show me up."

Craddock bit his lip. "Give me that ball," he said to Findlay.

A tornado hit the Ithida line on the next play. It bulged, it massed, it swayed as Ithida players tried to flatten the blond-haired iron man who plunged forward. Craddock broke to the right! Arms like tentacles wrapped around him. The mass shifted from side to side and finally collapsed!

The referee peeled off green jerseys like the leaves of an artichoke. Then he leaped into the air and waved both arms. A touchdown!

AS the shadows settled over the stadium and the timekeeper watched for the closing second, the scoreboard revealed Hanover leading 26 to 0. Craddock had smashed through for all four touchdowns.

And in the locker-room Craddock's mates pounded and slapped him; but this afternoon his usual unassuming smile was absent. His teammates liked him because of his modesty, even though he puzzled them because of the seriousness that made him appear years older than his actual age.

But Craddock wasn't happy over his afternoon's achievement. He knew what the newspaper wires were already humming: The one-man team had done it again. One-man team—just what he wanted to overcome. It wasn't fair to the other hard-working players to have them get nothing out of the game save the knowledge that they had played in the supporting cast. He had been given honors enough. It was time others should share. . . . Coach Fowler felt the same.

Craddock went directly from the stadium to the private house where he roomed alone, chosen from the double viewpoint of solitude and economy. He entered a room where tables, chairs and divan were littered with books and pamphlets, the room of a real student. He stood thoughtfully for a moment before the single photograph on his dresser. He saw the kindly face of Vic Whitman's mother, almost the only mother Bill Craddock had known. Bill owed much to the woman whose saintly features smiled at him, more than the loan of money he was already beginning to pay through scholarships. Bill was sorely troubled about Vic Whitman.

Bill detested interfering in some one else's affairs—even though he was studying to be a doctor, a profession which would make concern with other people's business mandatory. And he felt that Vic would settle down. Only—he would have to get over sowing his wild oats before he broke his mother's heart. . . .

It must have been close to midnight when Craddock was pulled from deep concentration in his book by the bursting open of his door. His first startled visualization of the disheveled Vic apprised him that the latter was in trouble. A second realization caused Bill's jaws to harden: Vic had been drinking—plenty!

"For heaven's sake, Vic—"

"Don't, Bill. I—I hit some one. A girl—two of them. An accident."

Craddock started back. "What on earth are you talking about?"

Whitman dropped on the divan and ran his fingers through his already disheveled hair.

"I hit another car. I kept on going."

"Without stopping to see if anyone was hurt? You couldn't."

"I did. I'm—I'm sure of it. My mind's a blank. Just now I found myself parked near your house. It must have been rotgut I was drinking."

"You imagine all this."

"No. I'm sure of it, Bill. Two girls, and a crash of glass. My fender is smashed, and one light gone." His dark eyes were round with horror. "I wanted to go back, Bill, when I realized. Honest, I did. I couldn't start the car. I've forgotten how to *drive!*"

Craddock thought he was going to slump to the floor. But as Craddock sprang forward, Whitman straightened.

"I wanted to go back, Bill. I wan—"

"All right. Do you know where the accident occurred?"

WHITMAN passed a hand over his brow. "It must've been on the road from Middleton. That's where I went."

Craddock's face hardened as he kicked off his slippers. Middleton—banned to football-players in training!

"Did you leave your keys in the car?" He pulled on a shoe.

"I—I must have. Bill, don't you go. Don't you get mixed up in this."

"Stay where you are." Craddock pushed him back onto the divan. "Get undressed. You're staying here for the night. You've been here all night."

Craddock threw on his coat and grabbed his hat on the run. A moment later he was on the street looking up and down. One blinking headlight revealed what he sought. A glance at a battered fender and headlight banished his final doubt.

Jaws set, he climbed into the car and found the key in the switch. The motor caught as his foot pressed down on the starter. He turned the roadster and headed back toward Middleton.

He had gone about two miles through the somnolent college town where single and wide-spaced dwellings appeared tucked away for the night beneath the spreading branches of ancient elms, when he sighted one house brilliant by contrast because of a light-flooded porch and windows of the lower floor. Craddock's foot instinctively came off the gas pedal. High shrubbery hid the driveway, but as he drew nearer, he made out a car careened against a tree almost at the gravel entrance.

CRADDOCK rolled into the driveway just as a State trooper emerged from the house and stood limned beneath the white globe. He stared at the car slipping into the driveway, and then sprang forward, galvanized into action.

"Is this the other car in the accident?" he snapped at Craddock.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" asked Craddock quietly, as he pointed to the damaged front.

"I'll say it does. Where you been? I just phoned the barracks to drag all roads for you." His glance roved over Craddock's figure.

"One of the college crowd, huh? I thought as much." A glint of satisfaction loomed in the steely eyes, a thought of retaliation for some of the annoyances inflicted upon him and his mates by Hanover students. "You know it's a pretty serious offense, young feller, to leave the scene of an accident without makin' yourself known."

"I had to think of some one else," said Craddock. Although the bald truth, it was meant to be misleading.

"A dame, huh?"

"Yes," said Craddock, thinking of the picture of Vic's mother.

"Where's your license?"

"I haven't it with me."

"And your registration?"

"I borrowed the car."

"Without the owner's consent, I'll bet! There'll be plenty of charges against you. From what the girl in here tells me, you were entirely to blame. She said you were all over the road. 'Cording to her description, you must have been plenty drunk."

Craddock made no comment.

"You sobered up pretty quick, but there's a doctor inside. We'll have him pass on you."

Craddock preceded the trooper into the house. They stepped from a hallway in-

to the living-room. Two men and a woman stood before a divan. Craddock received two shocks: The first when he caught a glimpse of the girl on the divan. She wore a flimsy evening dress of autumn brown, but her head was completely swathed in bandages. His heart seemed to miss a beat. But she was not even unconscious—she was the first in the room to see him. Two eyes peered through a slit in the surgical dressing.

"Well," said the trooper, aware of the dramatic touch, "I found the party what caused the accident."

And Bill Craddock's second shock came when the men turned. The taller of the two men, a man with gray temples, proved to be Dean Fenwick. He was new to Hanover this year—he had come from a Western college. And in the few weeks since the opening of the term, Craddock had encountered the new dean only once and then very informally. This injured girl must be the dean's daughter, Craddock realized. He remembered some discussion about the new dean having grown daughters.

"Doctor," said the trooper, "I want you to examine this guy. He must have been drinking."

AS the physician came closer to inspect Craddock, the dean likewise peered at Craddock and frowned.

"Aren't you Craddock?" he asked.

"Yes sir."

"Are you sure you have made no mistake?" asked the dean of the trooper.

"He admits it," said the nettled trooper. "He beat it because he had a dame with him. Married one, I bet. Then he decided he'd better beat it back here. It won't do him much good. I've enough charges against him to bag him for a year."

"I'm afraid," said the physician, "that driving under the influence of liquor will not be one of your charges. He is quite sober."

"He didn't drive like a sober guy," growled the trooper.

"How do you know how he drove?" asked a muffled voice. "You were not there."

Eyes turned toward the girl on the divan. "You told me yourself," said the trooper.

"I must have been irrational." Craddock liked the timbre of the muffled voice. Her form was slender, and now he noticed stray tresses of auburn hair outcropping from the mummylike swathing.

"The fault of the accident was entirely mine. I tried to make a sharp left turn into the driveway without signaling."

"Why, you told me—"

"I'm telling you now, Officer. That's my story, and I stick to it."

"I think," said the dean, "that we had better drop the case."

The trooper's lips compressed in disappointment. "That won't be up to me I gotta turn in my report."

HE left, and Craddock departed soon afterward. The dean had crisply instructed him to see him Monday morning. From the physician Craddock had learned that the daughter, Gay Fenwick —Craddock liked the name—had been cut by flying glass.

"Severely?" asked Craddock.

"Quite. But the bandaging was her own idea. Vanity. Couldn't bear to see her face patched up."

"Will there be any serious consequences?"

"It is too early to tell," said the doctor.

Craddock brought that indefinite word back to Vic Whitman. The latter had sobered and listened to Craddock's account with tragic concern.

"How about the other one?" asked Vic. "I'm sure there were two girls."

"If there was another one, she must have escaped with a few minor cuts. Nothing was said about her."

"Bill, you shouldn't have taken the blame. I'm not going to let you do it—"

"You'll do what I say, Vic," said Craddock gravely, forcing the smaller lad back on the bed.

"But don't you see—the dean's daughter—you'll be suspended from the team."

"It will be a good thing for the team. It will give you fellows a chance to do something on your own. I'm not doing this entirely for you, Vic. I'm doing it for your mother, for the debt I owe her. If you take the blame, they'll be able to tack a drunkenness charge on you. Where were you, anyway?"

"I don't know much. I got tired of discipline. Sore about today's game. Oh, I had a few drinks. Then I went to some night-club in Middleton. It's all hazy, but I have a recollection of a fuss. Two girls and a man, as though one girl was trying to get the other away. Anyhow, I butted in. I would. There was a jam."

"Well, don't you see what you'll be digging up if you admit you were driving the car involved in the accident? There

Weaving, dodging, Vic pivoted away from clutching hands and raced for a touchdown.

will be newspaper scandal. Names will be involved. You'll be dropped from college. And your mother—well, she's pretty much wrapped up in you, Vic."

"And how have I repaid her?" His eyes were wide. "You've been the *real* son. . . . No, Bill. I can't let you go through with it. What kind of a rotter would I be to let you be dropped for what I've done?"

"In less than a month I'd be through, anyway. You have another year."

"But there's the team to consider, Hanover and Fowler. Why, you're the greatest football-player in the country."

"No, Vic, because I've been a one-man team. I've prevented other men from showing the stuff they've got. This idea isn't entirely new with me, Vic. I've often felt I should step aside and give others a show at a game they enjoy more than I do. Yesterday I hung back as long as I could—"

"For me."

"And others, too. Fowler feels the same way about it, I know. I've broken training. I'll be suspended. Meantime the team will have a chance to find itself."

"Oh, it all sounds so unfair—"

"And I'll be saving your mother a few heartaches. Now go to sleep. This thing isn't air-tight yet."

Sunday brought no new developments. Monday Bill Craddock presented himself at the dean's office, and then, acting on impulse, he went out to the Fenwick house. The injured girl had obviously changed the first version of the accident by informing the State trooper in Bill's presence that she was to blame. Here was a weak spot in the case.

Bill was permitted to see the girl after an ample-bosomed housekeeper had left him standing on the porch. He found Gay Fenwick in bed, her face still encased in bandages as though she were being prepared for the Egyptian room in some museum.

Judging from the housekeeper's glances she did not approve of the situation or of Bill. While she adjusted pillows Bill turned aside and considered a picture on the dresser. It was a framed enlarged snapshot of a girl in her teens, a girl who was decidedly not pretty. The eyes were squinty, and the face freckled, while stringy hair hung over thin shoulders.

"How do you like my map? Do you blame me for keeping it wrapped up in these bandages?"

Craddock turned. The housekeeper had stepped into the hall.

"I suppose," continued the muffled voice, "it will look like a jigsaw puzzle now."

"I hope you were not badly cut."

"Perhaps I'll have an entirely new face. It couldn't be much worse, could it?" She waved in the direction of the enlarged snapshot.

"I wish you wouldn't joke about it," said Craddock gravely. "It was splendid of you to pull me out of an awkward situation by taking the blame for the accident." He looked at her curiously, but the restricted view he had of her eyes told him nothing.

"I'm used to taking blame," she said. "Perhaps I did it for the team. Have you seen my father?"

"Yes. He said it was both a personal and college matter. He wanted to know if your sister was with you."

"You didn't tell him?" The voice sounded anxious.

"No, I didn't."

"How about your standing on the team?"

"There isn't any. I'm suspended."

"Not so good."

"On the contrary, I think it best for all concerned." And then he told her what he had tried to explain to Vic Whitman, how the players would get more out of the game; but it was very disconcerting to be looking at a mask of bandages. He was still talking when the housekeeper returned and made it quite plain that Craddock should leave.

"I HAVE enjoyed listening to you," said the voice from behind the gauze. "I didn't know All-American football-players could be philosophers. I hope you find satisfaction in your theory when you watch the game next Saturday."

Bill Craddock left, wondering what she had meant by the last remark. If he could only have seen her face!

He was still wondering when the next Saturday afternoon he sat in the stands and played the rôle of spectator at a big football game for the first time. He fretted impotently as he saw Hanover collapse before Carthage. Vic Whitman played desperately and reeled off several lengthy runs, but Hanover presented a defense of green paper which the other men ripped to shreds. Bill experienced a far from pleasant feeling of isolation. He wanted to get down on the field, to bolster a sagging line here and to straighten out a chaotic offensive there. Instead he was faced with the appalling realization that not only could he not go down this afternoon, but he never could again.

Vic Whitman suffered remorse after the disastrous rout. All Hanover was howling over the defeat and Vic knew that he was to blame. He insisted on making a clean breast of everything; and it was with difficulty that Bill Craddock kept him from carrying out his intention.

"But how can I go on like this," protested Whitman, "hearing them saying things about you, playing with men and seeing them go all to pot because you're not in there—and knowing that it is all my fault and that I can straighten out everything by telling the truth!"

"That's just the point; you can't," said Craddock. "You can't help matters by telling. You will only cause your mother heartaches. You will open up a lot of scandal. People will say that there is a lot more behind this than even your story can reveal. What about Dean Fenwick's daughters? You say there were two girls in the car. What became of the other sister? And why did she disappear? We can't go digging into that."

"But if Hanover loses its games," persisted Whitman, "we'll be in just as much hot water."

"Then Hanover must win its games. And you must win them."

"It won't be because I'm not trying, Bill; but I'm not a miracle man, and you are. You can't step out, and expect men to carry on. You might as well take the mainspring out of a watch. And how about the State game? State has one of the best teams in years."

"We'll win that, too."

"*We?* Where will you be?"

"I'll be wearing a Black Shirt," said Craddock grimly.

The Black Shirts were the men against whom the varsity scrimmaged all week. Men who for one reason or another were ineligible to play on the varsity, but gave their all every day in the week save Saturday—the unsung heroes of football.

BUT Bill Craddock had more success in convincing Whitman than he did in assuring himself that everything would work out for the best. Like most strong men he failed to recognize the lack of strength in others. It had never occurred to him that in his absence his teammates could give such a wretched performance as he had witnessed that afternoon.

Gay Fenwick's cryptic remark came back to him. She had hoped he would find satisfaction in his theory. He had not. Had she suspected? What did she know?

He found himself wanting to talk to her. He tried to match that face in the enlarged snapshot with the girl whose muffled voice he had heard, but failed to do so satisfactorily. He knew he wanted

to see her again. They had something in common in this accident.

This time he brought flowers. He was admitted to the Fenwick home by a girl with round face, reddish gold hair and large blue eyes. She was beautiful, and in contrast with the picture of Gay Fenwick seen by Craddock she was very beautiful. This, he realized, must be Gay's sister.

"I called to inquire about Gay," he said. "I'm Bill Craddock."

The eyes widened, stared at him for a startled moment while her breath came in a quick gasp. "Oh," she exclaimed. "I'll tell Gay you're here."

SHE ran up the stairs, leaving Craddock standing in the hall. After a moment he stepped into the living-room.

He heard a patter of feet and looked up to see a slender girl with bobbed auburn tresses and a face of creamy complexion somewhat marred by strips of adhesive tape. Bright eyes looked at him quizzically.

"I'm Gay," she said. "How do you like me without my mask?"

"Why," he gasped, "you're pretty."

She considered him. "Yes, I guess you mean it. Not beautiful, of course. But one beauty in the house is plenty. Better than that picture I showed you."

"I wouldn't believe it."

"I am skeptical myself at times. That is why I keep that horrible snapshot. Gloria was always beautiful, while I was all legs and arms and freckles. But when I was seventeen nature took pity on me. Oh, are those flowers for me? Lovely! But sit down. Tell me how you enjoyed the game."

Craddock sat down frowning. He wondered if she were laughing at him.

"The team will be better next week," he assured her.

"Why?" she asked bluntly.

He told her why. At least he tried to convince her, and himself. He told her how little the Hanover players were getting out of the game because he had monopolized the spotlight—he told her how much they would benefit by assuming responsibility. He told her how much more he was really doing for the players by confining himself to the Black Shirts.

And all the time Gay looked at him with those disconcerting eyes.

"All very interesting," she said finally. "I hope you are right. You must come again and let me know how your theory is working out."

On Monday, Craddock joined the Black Shirts. The Iron Horse of Hanover played harder on the ineligibles than he had when wearing the Green. In practice sessions he ripped the varsity to shreds. He trampled down men who had played with him and who had come to depend upon him. Like a parent bird that thrusts its young from the nest to make them fly, Craddock endeavored to make the men he had captained shift for themselves.

But Craddock was sadly mistaken if he thought he could step out of the football spotlight into the shadows without recriminations. A powerful Haven team pounded Hanover into submission the following Saturday. With Whitman breaking loose in the final quarter Hanover made a desperate comeback, but fell one point short of tying. The game went into the records as another defeat, and alumni and undergraduates commenced to screech.

Bill Craddock continued to call at the Fenwick home. He found a ready listener in Gay, but he had no assurance that he convinced her by his earnest explanation that everything was working out for the best.

Brighton defeated Hanover 7 to 0. And State had trounced Brighton 27 to 13. The State game was only a week away.

FOWLER tried desperately to whip his team into shape and Craddock worked like a Trojan. At first Craddock suspected that Fowler had been secretly pleased at the removal of Craddock from the lineup. Fowler was only human enough to resent the impression that any coach could win with Craddock. Here was an opportunity to show what could be done without his star. But nothing much had been done to enhance Fowler's reputation. However, there was always the realization that a victory over State would atone for all past sins.

But by Wednesday it was a foregone conclusion to the coach that unless some miracle happened Hanover would receive the worst trouncing in its history of State-Hanover clashes. Hanover had the material to put up a stiff battle; but the mental attitude of the team was hopeless.

"How are you going to feel after the game is all over?" Gay Fenwick suddenly asked Craddock that evening, interrupting his arguments tending to show why Hanover could win. "Wouldn't you like to be in that game, doing something for Hanover and realizing it was your

last chance to ever play football for Hanover?"

Gay had struck home, even more than Craddock himself realized until that moment. No more chance to play for Hanover. He slumped forward. Fingers twitched nervously.

Gay stood in front of him.

"I thought so," she said, her breath coming quickly. "All this time you have been going through a masquerade. Trying to delude yourself and thinking you were fooling me." She paused. "Why," she asked, "did you take the blame for Vic Whitman?"

HE looked at her, startled. "Oh, it's useless to deny it," she declared, with cheeks aglow. "I knew the night the trooper brought you into the house that you were taking the blame for something you didn't do. I was selfish enough to take advantage of your assuming the blame for the accident. Yes, and curious, too, to find out why you had done so. I have known now for some time why you did it."

"You have?" he asked in surprise.

"You forget how much you have revealed to me of your life in your visits here. Knowing what I did and that you and Vic Whitman came from the same Southern town, it was not difficult to identify that sweet old lady to whom you owed so much as Vic Whitman's mother."

"What are you going to do?" asked Craddock.

She looked away. "I don't know. I have heard much about Southern chivalry; but this self-sacrificing business can be overdone. And it usually results in making a mess of everything, just as in this instance. I don't know what I am going to do, but please go."

And Craddock went, feeling that he had been let down by the one person who should have understood him. But she had been right. He had made a mess of everything. He had just about ruined the team and its chances for a victory over State. This thing would hang over him the rest of his life. He took a kick at a rock bordering the gravel driveway, hurt his toe and felt better for the pain.

On Thursday Bill Craddock received a summons to the dean's office. He found Dean Fenwick alone, slender hands locked before him on the mahogany desk. His scholarly face revealed lines of perturbation.

"I believe I shall feel better, Craddock," he said after a pause, "if I make my announcement as brief as possible. Your suspension is lifted. Don't ask me why. You are permitted to play Saturday if Coach Fowler so desires."

Craddock stared in wide-eyed amazement. Why had his suspension been lifted?

"That is all, Craddock." The dean rose and crossed to the window and stood with hands clasped behind his back. In a daze, Craddock rose and started to leave.

"Just a moment, Craddock." The latter paused at the door. The dean crossed to him.

"I can not be quite so bald. I am informed you were partly motivated in your course by an impression that you were permitting your teammates to derive greater benefit from the game through your removal from the lineup. I am not familiar enough with football to understand the significance of your act. As to your other motive, I believe you were impelled by a mistaken sense of chivalry. For which, however, I must acknowledge my gratitude."

CRADDOCK left the dean's office with one thought dawning through his confusion. Vic had confessed! Well, it wouldn't do any good. He had told Vic he would refuse to play if he gained reinstatement through Vic's confessing.

"I don't know what you're talking about," declared Vic, several minutes later. They stood in Vic's room. "I didn't go to the dean, though I wish to heaven I had, weeks ago."

"Then you haven't been told you couldn't play?"

"Not yet. I hope I do get sacked. I'll feel as if I have made some restitution for the mess I caused."

Bill Craddock's jaw set grimly. He believed Vic. Then if Vic had not told the dean, only one other could have—Gay Fenwick. . . .

Bill Craddock's reinstatement revived the hopes of the Hanover alumni and student body; but it had come too late, apparently. In the first place Fowler had proceeded on the belief that Craddock would not play and had revised his plays and offensive accordingly. In the second place the players could not forget three successive defeats or snap out of their mental funk in two days.

The weather-man coöperated to the extent of making the November Saturday an ideal day for football. The air that blew across the surrounding hills was cool and crisp and a cloudless sky be-

spoke no danger of any rain. The gridiron was dry and firm and the breeze blew across-field. Neither team could have a chance to alibi.

Once again Bill Craddock led the Hanover squad onto the field with ball tucked under his arm, and he seemed to tread on air. He saw the packed and colorful stadium and heard the blare of the band and the Hanover cheers thrown back from the hills. He had seen and had heard all this before and had accepted it with a blasé smile; but today the blood coursed warmly through his veins, his eyes misted and a lump came to his throat.

He found escape in running through a brief signal drill, and when a moment later he went to the center of the field to meet the State captain in the presence of the officials his heart thumped at normal rhythm again.

Craddock called the toss and chose to receive.

Twenty-two nervous players lined up at the kickoff. Sixty odd thousand spectators waited expectantly. State punted to the goal line and smothered Hanover's return with a thoroughness that bespoke a hard day for the Green.

Hanover huddled and Bill Craddock took command.

"They are liable to be over-confident," said Craddock. "Let's start them off with a jolt. Call Number Twelve."

The Green swung out of the huddle in lock step. Two lines faced across the ball. Bill Craddock stood in the backfield with the eyes of sixty thousand spectators and eleven State players focused upon him. The ball snapped. The Green melted into a crisscross. The oval slipped into Craddock's hands as he swung toward the right end. The red-and-blue-striped State players massed to meet him and fought through the green defenders. Suddenly Bill Craddock pulled up short.

Only rarely had opposing teams seen Bill Craddock the passer, and State was not prepared. Breaking wide for the sideline on the left, Vic Whitman scampered at full speed. He glanced over his shoulder and gauged accurately the bulletlike diagonal pass coming toward him. He raised his arms and the ball nested into his cupped hands. A forward pass on the first play!

The Hanover side of the stadium went wild as Vic Whitman tucked the ball under his arm and sprinted up the sideline. White stripes passed beneath his flying feet and a touchdown seemed a certainty; but a desperate dive by the State safety

unbalanced Whitman and caused him to step outside at the fifteen-yard line.

A quickly called lateral with Whitman on the end of it picked up seven yards. State called time out. When the lines merged again State crashed through and slapped down Findlay for a five-yard loss. Bill Craddock studied faces. State had recovered from the opening shock and the Green had lost some of its initial confidence.

"Guess we've got to depend upon you, Bill," said Findlay in the huddle, and nine other faces reflected the sentiment.

As Bill swept into the line on the next play he saw the Green forwards lifted out of the way by the charge of mightier State forwards. The Iron Horse hit a stone wall. He broke the wall only to have it close in on him again and pin him for no gain.

The State side of the stadium roared its elation. State had stopped Craddock dead in his tracks. Hanover faces were drooping. But thrills of pleasure coursed through Bill Craddock's veins. Here was real opposition—a real fight.

Hanover came out of the huddle. Findlay scraped the dirt from his cleats and poised as though to try for a field goal. But the ball snapped into Craddock's arms. He was off like a bullet, body inclining forward, high knees driving like pistons. It was fourth down and eight yards needed, a desperate spot for a line plunge. But Craddock crashed into the tangle of bodies. His iron shoulders split

Craddock's steel-thewed legs trampled across what had been the scrimmage-line. He waded through a tangle of grasping arms. Fingers clutched at him; progress became stationary

the line. His steel-thewed legs broke through grasping arms as he pounded forward. Plunging straight on at top speed he crashed into the State secondary, spilled it back, straight-armed a safety and with several hanging onto him pulled across the goal line. The Iron Horse was on the war-path!

The Hanover players mobbed the smiling Craddock as they came away from the goal line. The Hanover side of the stadium had gone balmy. The band blared, the cheer leaders somersaulted and hats sailed into the air. And a moment later Craddock made the count 7 to 0.

But for all his elation Bill Craddock was not underestimating State. The game was young and State was already discounting that score. It seemed to whip the Red and Blue into a frenzy.

State received and immediately opened up with smooth running plays. The Red and Blue carried through its assignments perfectly. Bill Craddock quickly saw that. Here was a team that man for man outclassed Hanover. Well, Bill Craddock would have it that way. The real thrill of the game came not in proving yourself the better team, but in licking the better team.

And playing defensive end Bill Craddock hurled himself into play after play. He rolled up that powerful line. He crashed into the backfield and spilled that splendid interference before it could function. And then on the offensive Bill Craddock brought the ball back into State territory again. It was a contest between State and Bill Craddock, more than Craddock in his elation realized.

AND then late in the second period came the breaks. A State forward dropped into the hands of a waiting end and interference formed perfectly. It swept down the Hanover secondary and the State end breezed over for the touchdown. State tied the score a moment later.

The disconcerted Hanover team received—and fumbled on the kickoff. State recovered on the fifteen-yard line. Craddock crashed into the backfield on the first play but a lateral around the opposite end carried to the two-yard line and a State back knifed through the wilting Green line on the next play.

Again Hanover received with the score board reading State 14, Hanover 7 and the half nearly over. And then Bill Craddock gave one of the greatest exhibitions in his career. Carrying on almost every play, restricted by a great defense to gains of three and four yards, Bill Craddock piled these short gains end on end and rolled back the Red and Blue. With the half nearly gone he smashed across the goal line for his second touchdown. And there was just time enough left for him to kick the tying point!

All the way to the locker building Craddock's teammates jovially pounded the smiling warrior. And in the win-

tergreen-scented dressing-room the serious-faced Coach Fowler permitted his charges to enjoy their almost hysterical joy for a full minute or two before he made them relax. Brawny athletes, suddenly realizing their fatigue, dropped on the floor while others, recalling forgotten bruises, climbed upon the rubbing tables.

Alumni, those of such prominence that they could not very well be barred, crashed the door. They were as excited as the players and had to tell the world about it.

And as they talked, Bill Craddock's enthusiasm waned. All said the same thing. This was the greatest team Hanover ever boasted, and Bill Craddock was the greatest football-player who ever walked on cleats. Bill Craddock glanced at Coach Fowler and read the latter's concern.

"Perhaps," said the Graduate Manager of Athletics, "we ought to have a few words from Captain Craddock."

CRADDOCK rose reluctantly. He faced the squad soberly.

"Everyone has been telling you that you're the better team," he said. "I'm going to tell you the truth. You're not the better team. Measured by every football standard, State outclasses you."

"But with you we can beat 'em, Bill," called a cross-legged player on the floor.

"You're going to beat State without me, or you're not going to beat State at all," said Craddock, staring down the gasps of astonishment. "It's up to Coach Fowler, but if he is willing I'm going to sit on the bench this half. For some of you this is your last football game, just as it is mine. I've had my share of fun. It's up to you to get yours. For others this game will make or break you for next year. You've been going through the motions all season, letting me carry the load—and you don't know what you're missing. Go out there this half and have some fun. Win or lose, give all you've got. And take something away with you, something you will remember after you have said good-by to Hanover."

Craddock wondered if he had been foolishly sentimental again as the teams faced each other for the second half while Bill sat on the bench next to Coach Fowler. But life was not entirely a matter of victory and success, he told himself—it was rather a sense of satisfaction in doing well the job at hand.

"What do you think?" Bill asked hopefully of the coach.

Fowler shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. My job seems to be to win games. Without you in there I don't see how we can. We are hopelessly outclassed."

BUT the team felt different about it. State played to the best of its ability, but a fighting Hanover aggregation played beyond its ability. Time after time the powerful Red and Blue drove back the stubborn Green, but Hanover always rallied and with Vic Whitman and others giving everything they possessed Hanover carried the ball right into State's backyard repeatedly.

Bruised and exhausted Hanover players came off the field, smiling happily through the grime. And other players replaced them with the same grim determination to carry on. Breaks did not deter the Green. Hanover kept on fighting. And late in the third quarter Vic Whitman finally got away.

Bill Craddock found himself standing and yelling himself hoarse. But so were thousands of others. If only Vic's mother were here. But she would never come to a football game. Perhaps next year.

Vic had whisked through an opening off tackle. A beautiful cut back brought him into the heart of the State secondary. Weaving, dodging, straight-arming and fighting, Vic slipped past tackler after tackler. He broke free with the pack on his heels. He sped down upon the safety, tricked him with a change of pace, pivoted away from clutching hands and raced twenty more yards to plant the ball for a touchdown!

Through a hectic fourth quarter a valiant Hanover team fought to hold its 20 to 14 advantage. Twice the Red and Blue banged down almost to the shadow of the Hanover goal only to run into a stone wall. Hanover players streamed off the field, but inspired substitutes replaced them. And now with the stadium wrapped in dusk the Red and Blue drove down to the goal line again, for a first down on the five-yard line. Time was again taken out for Hanover, and an exhausted player came limping off the field. Fowler turned to Bill Craddock.

"I haven't anyone else. Don't you think you had better go in?"

Bill Craddock leaped from the bench and ran across the shadowed field. The Hanover spectators saw him. With no idea why he had not been in the game this second half, they cheered his belated arrival.

Forced to remain silent for one play, Bill Craddock stood aloof as the two tired teams lined up. Craddock saw the Hanover left guard wilt. Craddock's eyes lifted quickly to the State quarterback and saw that his scanning gaze had read the weakness in the line.

As the ball snapped back from the State center Craddock leaped forward and brushed aside his left guard. He encountered the full impact of the State drive. His iron frame braced against the crash of a running guard and backfield men. His reaching hands ripped them aside and he hurled himself against the ball-carrier to pin him for a loss of two yards.

Bill Craddock rose from the turf as pleased as the Hanover fans seemed to be.

State essayed a lateral on the next play, but Craddock sized it successfully, followed it along the line and pinned the runner for no gain.

State was still six yards from the goal line with but two plays remaining. The quarterback might try a desperate forward; but the more logical play was to try one more smash at the line. To influence the State quarterback toward this choice, Craddock loudly warned his teammates to watch for a forward and stationed his men accordingly. He left the weakened left guard unprotected—that is, until State called its play.

ONCE again State banged the weak point in the line, hurling the full force of its charge, and once again found Bill Craddock crashing into the breach to spill the play!

With seven yards to go, and only one down left, the frustrated State quarterback had practically no choice but a forward. And Bill Craddock could not guard both ends of the line. But as State huddled, Craddock spoke a word to the Hanover left end.

State came out of the huddle. A tense silence settled over the darkening stadium. The timekeeper carefully stared at his watch. Signals impinged clearly upon the November air. Suddenly the Hanover left end scrambled back from his place and Bill Craddock leaped into his position. The ball snapped. Craddock went in with the play. He fended off a rangy tackle. He batted down a defending back. He charged straight for the fading quarterback. He leaped high into the air, reached up and batted the ball!

As Bill Craddock saw the ball strike the ground and bound away for an incompleted pass he knew that he had made the final play of his football career. But it was a glorious finish. An instant later the gun sounded the end of the game.

Hanover had won!

An assistant manager passed a bit of paper to Craddock in the locker-room. After several minutes Craddock found opportunity to read it.

"Can you meet me in the library after the game? It is my turn to confess.

Gay."

WITH Hanover celebrating its great victory the library should be the most deserted spot in town. When Bill Craddock entered, only a sleepy attendant glanced up apathetically; but Bill caught a flash of color in the alcove.

Gay looked at him questioningly.

"Well, Hanover won; and you played. Are you happy?"

"I suppose I should be very happy," he said, "particularly as no action has been taken on Vic Whitman. And you must have told your father about Vic."

"Not about Vic," she said. "About my sister."

"Your sister? I don't understand."

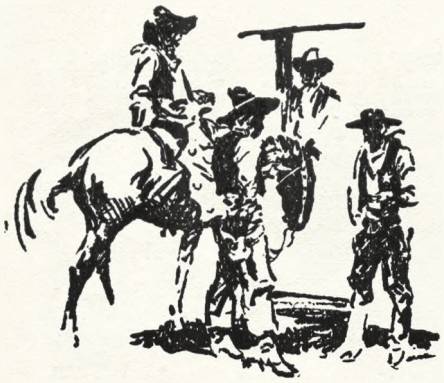
"You should. I said I took advantage of your accepting the blame for the automobile accident. Just as you were trying to cover up Vic Whitman, I was trying to protect my sister. She was with me in the car; but I managed to get her into the house. You see, out West she became infatuated with an actor who hasn't bothered to untangle his present wife. It was because of that affair Father accepted this post. Then the actor came East. He and Gloria met at a Middleton night-club. Your friend Vic was under the weather and overdid matters in coming to my assistance. And he followed us home, with what results you know. I wanted to keep it all from Daddy, if possible. Particularly since the experience had cured Gloria."

"It cured Vic, too," said Craddock.

"Yes, our jobs are over. Just as you have been big-brothering Vic Whitman I have been big-sistering Gloria. Perhaps because ever since she was a baby she has been the pretty member of the family."

"That was before you grew up," reminded Craddock.

And just then the library attendant coughed discreetly.



REAL EX-

The Wrong

By THOMAS

"Some time ago I was called for jury duty on a murder case," writes Mr. Hickey. "When asked if I would convict on circumstantial evidence, I stated that I would not under any circumstances whatever. The attorney for the defense asked me afterward for my reason, and I told him the story I am sending you."

THAT day in April when I came to the top of the bluff, where I could look down and see the Missouri River, I knew that my day's ride was nearly ended.

I had been riding since early morning and I was hungry and tired. My gray horse Toby was leg-weary, and my bay pack-horse Patsy had begun to lag behind.

When halfway down the bluff, I could see the little town of Fort Benton across the river, and the ferry-boat coming to meet me. Right then I thought I was sitting on top of the world. A lone cowpoke, with a five-hundred-dollar outfit and nearly eight hundred dollars in cash —I wasn't worrying about a thing. When I reached the river, I dismounted and led my horses onto the boat. We were about halfway across the river, as I noticed two men standing on the landing and when the boat landed I saw the short man had a sheriff's star pinned on his vest. I turned around to see that both horses got off the boat all right, and when I turned I was looking squarely into the Sheriff's six-gun. At the same time, he told me to put 'em up *pronto,* and I put 'em up, even quicker than that.

The Sheriff, whose name was Matt Wood, told Slim, his deputy, to take my gun and search me for weapons; and he did a good job. He not only took my gun and pocket-knife, but my bank-roll, as well. "Mr. Sheriff," I said, "now that you have cleaned me, may I take my hands down, and will you put me next to the joke?"

He then handed me a paper, saying "Read it, and you'll find out about the joke." The notice read as follows: *"$500.00 will be paid for the arrest and conviction of one 'Lefty'—Height about six feet; 185 pounds, age 24 or 25; dark complexion, heavy brown mustache. Carries .44 Colt, with holster on left side. On night of April second, stole from Clark's Ranch, on the upper Musselshell, one gray horse with blotched brand on left side; one bay horse, unbranded, and no identifying marks. On night of April third robbed the Taylor Road Ranch, north of White Sulphur Springs, of about $600.00. When last seen by one of Taylor's sheepherders was riding gray horse, leading bay with bed pack tied on with squaw hitch. Was heading into the Bad Lands, south of the Missouri River, evidently making for the Canadian Line." Signed, Ben Roberts, Sheriff, Meagher County, Montana.*

After reading that notice, I looked at Sheriff Wood with what would be called a sickly grin, and said that Sheriff Roberts must have been opening my mail. Then Wood began to check up. He looked at his paper and then sized me up: "Height six feet; weight 185 pounds, dark complexion; age 24 or 25 years. .44 Colt on left hip. Riding gray horse, blotched brand on left thigh; leading bay horse; no marks or brand; bed pack tied on with squaw hitch." Then he said: "I've been Sheriff of this county for twelve years, and this is the first time five hundred dollars just came right up and slipped into my pocket. Now, Lefty, you tell one."

"Well," I said, "I don't so much mind being called a horse-thief, but I do object to being mistaken for a damned fool. Do you think that if I had stolen

PERIENCES

Cowboy

N. HICKEY

In the belief that nearly every life offers some experience so exciting as to merit record in print, we each month offer prizes for the best stories of this sort received. (For details see page 3). First an old-time cowboy sends us from Idaho the story of what happened when he was mistaken for a horse-thief.

these horses, I would ride right into your arms in broad daylight?"

"Lefty," Matt said, "I have found that a man who will steal horses will do any old thing. I'll bet there aint a dozen punchers in Montana carrying .44 Colts, and not half that many who carry them on the left side. Besides, I've never seen two unbranded horses with no identifying marks; nor a cow waddie with a five-hundred-dollar outfit and a bank-roll that'd choke a hound. It'll take a lot of explaining to keep you out of jail."

I told him that I had had nothing to eat since six o'clock that morning and if he would lead me to a restaurant we would feed and then go to his office. I also asked him to send Slim to the livery-barn with my horses, and have them fed grain. "All right," Matt said; that was all right with him. But after we had eaten, and reached Matt's office I concluded he was a man with a single-track mind, and that anything I could say would not keep me from being locked up. The circumstantial evidence against me was so strong there seemed no chance for me. Anyway, I told him my story:

I had bought the gray horse three years before on Hat Creek, South Dakota. The brand on his left side, instead of being a blotch was a fleur-de-lis. Being out of a job that winter I rode the grub line up through the Black Hills, the Belle Fourche and the little Missouri River countries, winding up in the spring on the Big Powder River, where I worked for the S Bar and L X Bar until the previous August, when I developed a case of wanderlust. I bought the bay horse from a small rancher on Tongue River. This man only had a few work-mares and didn't brand his colts. I had had a bill of sale for both horses, but had lost them. That was the weakest part of my story. I told him I had saddled Toby, thrown my pack on Patsy and headed north up through northern Montana, finally reaching the Musselshell, where I took charge of a beef herd for Dave Fratt of the Horseshoe Bar. After the beef were shipped I hired to ride for the Musselshell Stock Association, with headquarters at the Horseshoe Bar Ranch. When my contract with the Association was up, I had saddled and packed and headed north and here I was.

"Now, Mr. Sheriff, that is all gospel truth, and I want you to get word to Dave Fratt at Lavina. If he don't say what I told you is the truth, you can lock me up and tie the key to a jackrabbit."

"Lefty," Matt said, "that's a mighty fine fairy story, and I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to send word to Ben Roberts, at White Sulphur Springs, to come and get you. Then I'll collect that little reward."

"Yes," I told him, "when Roberts gets here he will turn me loose, and you will be laughed out of the Ter."

BUT Roberts didn't turn me loose when he arrived in town ten days later. He identified the horses, called me Lefty, and acted as though he had known me all my life! He told me we would start back for White Sulphur Springs next morning early.

That night I heard the two sheriffs talking. I heard Matt tell Ben what a joke he had on Lander, the stock inspector. He said Lander had gone up the river to head off the outlaw at Great Falls, feeling sure he would head for Canada and try to cross the river at the falls, and "Here he came right into my arms," laughed Matt.

I had known Harry Lander on the Oregon Trail in '82, when he was driving a herd for the Niobrara Cattle Company. I was rough-string rider for Sam Ellis of

the same company. I put in the greater part of that night awake, hoping Harry would get his man and get back and save me the trip to the Springs.

Next morning, about nine o'clock Slim brought my horses, saddled and packed, and tied them with the Sheriff's horse, in front of the jail. The sheriffs had escorted me down the steps of the jail, when we saw two men riding up the street, leading a pack-horse. One man was riding a big buckskin; the other was riding a sorry-looking gray. As they came nearer, we could see that the man on the gray horse was handcuffed, and had an empty holster on his left side. The nearer the two men came, the more worried looked the two sheriffs. Wood was the first to recover his speech. He said: "Damned if it aint Lander! Wonder who he's bringin' in?"

I hadn't heard Slim speak a dozen words in ten days, but now he cut loose. He said: "If you two old women want to know, that's Lefty—I worked with him two years ago on the Yellowstone, and I knew all the time that you had the wrong man."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so?" Matt asked. Slim laughed at him and said he would like to see anyone tell Sheriff Wood anything.

By that time Lander had come up with his prisoner. "Ben," he said, "here is your man. He beat me to the ferry at Great Falls, but I caught him over on the Teton below Choteau. He was headed for the line, just like I said he would." When he saw me, he said: "Hello, Tom." And after we had shaken hands: "So you're the boy Sheriff Wood has been holding? But you don't want to blame Matt too much. Circumstantial evidence was pretty strong. In age, height and weight, you and Lefty might be twins, but otherwise you look no more alike than the devil and Santa Claus."

"You know, Harry," said Matt, "the two things that made me sure I had the right man was the .44 Colt on the left side, and the bay horse with no brand. I didn't believe there were two unbranded horses in Montana."

"Well," Harry said, "you were right about the horses. The bay horse I brought in is branded with monogram 'JH' under his mane."

Of course, they gave me back my outfit, and we adjourned to the nearest drink emporium, where we had one on Sheriff Wood. Once more I was a lonely cowpoke, sitting on top of the world.

Buried Alive

Entombed by a tunnel cave-in, this hard-rock man had the dubious pleasure of reading the newspaper story of the accident before he was rescued.

By JOHN J. (HAPPY) MAHONEY

ON February 14, 1909, at about ten o'clock in the morning, the newsboys of a certain large Western city were yelling: "Extra! Extra! All about the big tunnel cave-in!" The headlines read: "EIGHT MEN BURIED ALIVE—TWO KNOWN DEAD." The article went on to tell about the frantic efforts being made to save the entombed miners; and some two hours later the entombed men (I was one of them), were reading those "Extras"—while we were still entombed! Indeed, there was grave doubt whether it would be humanly possible to tunnel in to us before our small supply of oxygen was exhausted.

A few months previous to this, a large contracting firm had been awarded a million-dollar contract to construct a giant trunk-sewer tunnel.

The greater part of this gigantic engineering project was sublet to smaller contractors, but the place where the accident happened was being done by the main firm. A shaft was sunk to a depth of perhaps thirty feet, and the tunnel had been driven in about a quarter-mile. At this point it was about sixty feet underground. A branch railroad line ran directly overhead, and beside it there was a water-tank. The constant dripping from the tank and the heavy winter rains made the ground very heavy.

In soft-ground mining there is no bench, the work being done directly from the face of the tunnel. The work was carried on in three eight-hour shifts. As we were walking in to our work on the morning shift of this fateful day one of our number noticed that a plumb post

was about an inch out of place. The foreman said: "Tomorrow the tunnel will be bricked up, and the next day concreted. After that it will be absolutely safe."

We had been working only about an hour in the face of the tunnel when suddenly there was a cracking of timbers, followed by a crash. I started to run toward the face of the tunnel. I felt a timber graze my arm. All was confusion—timbers cracked and crunched as they came tumbling down. Tons of earth were falling with a dull thud. The lights went out and we were enclosed in total darkness. It was only a matter of minutes—though it seemed like an eternity—before I found myself near the side wall, my shoulders hunched, my feet braced apart, every muscle tensed—waiting for the end.

After the fear and confusion of the past few minutes it seemed this ominous silence was smothering me, crushing me.

Then some one spoke, and I realized that all of us had not been crushed to death in that avalanche of earth and grinding timbers. My tensed nerves relaxed; I was trembling from head to foot and my knees were wabbling. But this feeling of weakness soon passed.

"Well, boys," I said, "I guess we are safe for the moment at least." We lost little time in conversation, however; we were rushing around frantically, trying to find some hole through which we might crawl to safety, but without success. Finally, utterly exhausted by our futile efforts to get out, we sat down on some broken timbers and talked for awhile. Then we got up again and lit a match or two and tried again to find a passageway. We found that we had been buried alive! We decided we might as well take the situation as easily as possible and trust that those on the outside would be able to reach us before it was too late.

That eight of us were breathing the air from a space approximately fifteen feet in length, eighteen feet wide, with a ceiling of twenty feet, gave us great concern. We would soon consume all the life-sustaining oxygen in so small a space.

We were all seasoned miners, so we knew that those on the outside were making frantic efforts to get in to us. But could they reach us before it was too late? Our nerves were on edge, yet all we could do was to sit and wait.

As the moments dragged past we began to speak of the things uppermost in our minds. Each of us wished we might send some message to a loved one, and each of us had our own particular worries paramount at the moment. One young man longed for a chance to see his mother, who was in the East. Another man was worrying about the fact that he had seven hundred dollars in the bank at Spokane, out of which he would never be able to get any good!

After our first outburst, we had all become engrossed in our thoughts. Presently some one said, "Listen!" And above the thump of our heart-beats we could hear a dull *thud-thud-thud*. We knew that this dull thudding was caused by men driving a ram against a two-inch pipe—they were doing their best to get an airpipe to us.

Now we stationed ourselves a few feet apart, and began feeling along the surface of the ground that had caved in. But the pipe didn't come through. They had driven it too low, had struck timbers and had been forced to try again. We were all watching for the pipe to break through the surface. In our eagerness to find it, we had almost exhausted our meager supply of matches. We were about ready to give up in despair.

PRESENTLY one of the men cried out, "Here's the pipe, fellows!" It didn't take us long to remove the plug from the end of the pipe; then we took turns filling our stifled lungs with the fresh air. We were overjoyed to know that our worst fear had been allayed.

After we had taken our fill of fresh oxygen, one of us called through the pipe, "Hello—outside!" The news had spread that we were buried alive, and they had even sent for the coroner. We found out

afterward that it was he who answered our first call! His voice sounded to us like a voice coming over a telephone. He called down: "How many men are in there, and what are your names?" We took count of our number and gave him our names—and not until then did we realize two of our crew were missing.

"Take it easy, boys," a voice shouted through the pipe. "We're doing our damnedest to get you out as soon as possible." One crew had started to sink a shaft directly over our heads, but later abandoned it. Another crew was driving a three-by-four tunnel directly through to us. We did not have to suffer the unbearable silence any more; different people were constantly talking to us through the pipe.

LATER we discovered four electric-light globes that had not been broken in the crash. We asked the electrician to shut off the current and pass a wire to us through the pipe, and by the aid of our precious few remaining matches we were able to make a connection on the inside.

"Turn on the juice!" I yelled through the pipe. And for the first time since our entombment we were able to survey our surroundings clearly.

"My God, how good it seems to see light again!" one of the men ejaculated. After we told them on the outside that we had lights, they said that they were passing something in to us. A piece of piano wire came through the pipe, and tightly wrapped around it was the clipping, "EIGHT MEN BURIED ALIVE." And that is how we were able to read about it—while we still were buried alive!

During the day people sent out all kinds of food and drink. But the boys who were digging us out got most of these good things—and the Lord knows, they justly deserved them!

After over twenty-four hours of labor, we were brought to God's green earth once more. A most spectacular feat in mining had been accomplished: in one day and one night they had driven a tunnel three feet by four feet, right through thirty-four feet of muck and broken timbers—which goes to show what courage and will-power can accomplish, even at great odds.

We were out and alive. Our bodies were stiff and weary, but otherwise we were little the worse for our terrifying experience. When we reached the top of the shaft we found that nearly two thousand people had gathered to greet us. Batteries of cameras were taking our pictures and newspaper men were asking for interviews. They wanted to know what our reactions were and what thoughts had been uppermost in our minds as we faced imminent death. One young reporter said to me:

"Would you be so kind as to tell me a few things I would like to know? If you will assist me in getting out an interesting story, it may mean promotion for me and publicity for yourself." I turned to him and said, "The hell with publicity! When do we eat?"

One man standing near by remarked to another: "Did you hear that? Can you beat it? Why, the man has no imagination—and absolutely hasn't a nerve in his body!"

When we got downtown we were treated as heroes. The town was ours; everything was gratis. The choicest liquors, the best steaks, and reserved seats at the theaters were showered upon us. Hundreds of times I answered the same question—"Were you afraid?" And I answered them truthfully by saying, "I'll say I was! I was scared stiff—and what man wouldn't be, under such circumstances?" After it was all over and we were safe upon the face of the earth again I realized that I had never been so scared in my whole life.

Another question that was often asked was, "Did you say any prayers?" I answered, "I've got all due respect for all religious beliefs and creeds; I think every man is responsible to his Maker as he himself sees what is right and wrong—but my philosophy of life has never included last-minute prayers. In fact, I don't think He likes us to be quite so insincere as that."

"Did you sleep any while you were entombed?" was another question. I answered, "Yes, I slept a trifle over three hours." That was the truth, but people would not believe it was possible for a man to sleep under such terrific stress.

YEARS have passed since then; some of the men buried with me are dead. The man who was the foreman of our shift that fateful day in 1909 was killed instantly in a tunnel near Olympia in 1928. But a miner's life is always a dangerous one; we take the day's work as it comes. Many of us become more or less what you might call fatalists—we cannot worry about what *might* happen, or we could not be miners!

Cockney Joe

A desperate fight with an alligator on the warpath.

By GUY EARLE

AS a toddler I was imbued with the idea of travel—every mudhole, pigsty and weed patch beckoned me on. As a youth every trail, tree, rock and glade for miles around were known to me. The burrow of the ground-hog, the haunt of the rabbit and the nests of the birds were all absorbing. To steal away and wander aimlessly, time forgotten, was to me an unalloyed pleasure. Many a dinner did I miss while thus absorbedly engaged—to the intense displeasure of my mother.

I was educated as an engineer—but wanderlust might better be called my profession. The irrepressible desire to see that which may lie around the next bend of the river, or on the other side of the mountains,—be it a giant range of the Cordilleras, a rolling hill of my own State, a trout-stream in the North, or some coffee-colored river of the tropics, —was not to be denied.

Many a strange happening, on many a strange trail have I seen—but the most vivid of my adventures is one that took place in the Everglades of Florida. And for sheer nerve, a cool head, ability to act instantly, and bulldog tenacity, I take my hat off to my companion Cockney Joe.

"Cockney Joe" was my buddy for many a year—true, tried and trusted. Our first meeting had been an event in itself:

I was being hard-pressed by a gang of mahogany-colored natives on a quay in Costa Rica, when glancing hurriedly sidewise, he appeared at my side and said:

"Let's rush the blooming devils!"

Comradeships develop fast in the tropics, and ours was a lasting friendship, proved on many a hard job and in lonesome camps, from the mines of Bolivia to a trap-line in Canada. But it was in Florida that a queer trick in hunting alligators, taught us by a Carib Indian, came very close to being the death of us both.

We were camped deep in the Glades on a hummock covered with cabbage-palm and pine, overrun with vines, creepers and drooping festoons of Spanish moss, while all about us was a veritable labyrinth of stagnant waterways, bayous and foul lagoons—the home of the Florida alligator.

Our hunting was done entirely at night, and these stagnant pools, bayous and dead-waters among the cypress were our hunting-grounds.

The swamp, so still and lifeless by day, is a hum of murmuring sound by night.

As we poled our flat-bottomed punt silently along, the light from the carbide lamps worn on our hats flickered searchingly over the water, searching for two ruby-red points of light, a hand's-breadth apart, which means a 'gator—lying silently, all submerged but his snout and eyes.

Cockney Joe would kneel in the bow of the punt, a short-handled ax in his hand; I would quietly pole the boat directly at those gleaming eyes.

NOT a sound must be made, or the 'gator sinks out of sight; not for an instant is the light moved from our prey —and as though hypnotized he awaits our coming.

At just the right moment Cockney Joe strikes hard and sure between those glistening eyes and almost at the same moment reaches overboard, seizes the 'gator by the tip of his jaws and hauls him aboard.

An alligator is killed instantly if hit in the right spot—but miss it one-half inch, and you only make him furiously

angry. With one hand a man can hold the awful jaws of a 'gator closed; but once opened, their crushing power is terrific and thereby hinges the tale of a desperate struggle.

This night we had pushed deep into a bayou of slimy water tangled with snake grass, wild hyacinth and lily-pads. 'Gators were plentiful. Did you ever hear the deep bass roar or bellow of a bull alligator? If not, you have missed one of the most thrilling, weird and blood-chilling sounds made by any animal—seeming to come from nowhere and ending the same way.

Suddenly, scarcely a boat's length away, two red eyes appeared where a moment before there had been nothing. Only a second for preparation! Cockney Joe was on his knees; I crouched over the pole. A quick twist of my wrist brought us alongside. Then came the blow dealt by Joe, a heave and a pull, and a seven-foot 'gator slid aboard—and then things began to happen!

THE 'gator had been only stunned by the blow; now he gave a hiss like a broken steam-valve, and action started. Almost at the first movement of the 'gator, Cockney Joe lunged for its head, —for those jaws must not open! Landing directly on its back and head, Joe reached the jaws in time, and with legs clamped in a perfect body scissors hold about the reptile, began one of the most deadly of struggles—saurian against man.

Unluckily, I was in the path of the first violent sweep of the 'gator's tail, and went overboard like a ten-pin leaving its alley, so I missed the first few moments of this terrific struggle. Coming to the surface, reeking with filthy water, slimy mud and tangled grass, I grasped the bow of the punt, breathlessly watching Cockney Joe, as over and over he and the 'gator rolled. All was dark—our lights had gone overboard. Only by the faint moonlight was the struggle visible.

The white underbody of the 'gator was uppermost for a moment; then Joe's pale face came into view and I saw the quick gleam of his hunting-knife rising and falling as he strove to drive it home to some vital spot in the reptile's throat. The deep labored breathing of Joe, and the spasmodic whacking of the 'gator's tail in the stern of the boat seemed never to slacken. One side of the punt had been knocked loose from the transom and only my weight on the bow, rising the stern out of the water, kept us afloat.

How long this conflict lasted I do not know; perhaps it was ten minutes, or it might have been twice that long—but to me it seemed unending. Gradually the struggles of the saurian ceased; evidently some of Cockney Joe's blows had gone home.

REACHING shore was a nightmare: Joe, exhausted, dazed and bleeding from many cuts and gashes, was almost "out;" the stern of the punt was smashed, the pole gone.

Our plight was indeed desperate, for to sink here meant death, yet to swim in the grass and lily-pads was impossible —but somehow a landing was accomplished and I helped Cockney Joe up the muddy bank to dry ground. Here I left him and made my way on foot to our camp, secured our canoe and before daylight had Joe back in camp.

Now my task as nurse began. I believe he was the most thoroughly bruised man I ever saw: As I removed his torn clothing,—which were ripped to shreds, —bruises, lumps, scratches and cuts appeared, bumps the size of pigeon-eggs on his head, a torn ear, a skinned nose and a twisted ankle; and in between all of these a mass of black and blue bruises which gave him a most peculiar appearance, as well as being very painful.

Cockney Joe took it in his usual stoical way, saying, "What else could I do? If that 'gator got those jaws working, it meant overboard for us and that meant curtains—for no man could ever get out of that quagmire of grass paddies and slimy mud."

I sure did agree with him.

A WEEK of basking in the sunshine, aided by such remedies as we had, made Cockney Joe as good as new. We came to the conclusion that we had enough of hunting 'gators, and that we were very lucky to be alive. In the future we would stick to our trade, which was installing machinery in the mines or on sugar-plantations; it might not be as much sport, but at least it would be more remunerative and less hazardous.

A few days' trip by canoe, through the lower part of the Glades, then down Shark River to the Ten Thousand Islands, a leisurely day at a fishing-camp on one of the keys—and soon we were back to Fort Myers and the playground of civilization.

Wild Horses

Her husband was badly hurt while breaking outlaw horses —and she had to fight a runaway team to get him to a doctor in town.

By MRS. F. F. HUNTLEY

BEFORE we were married my husband worked on a large Oregon horse ranch. He was an excellent horseman, and after we were settled on a little ranch on Rye Valley Creek he could never quite get over fooling with bronchos. There seemed to be a sort of fascination in it for him. Conquering horses that had bluffed other men out was his passion. His reputation became known far and wide, and people brought outlaw horses from scores of miles away, for him to break.

At first I begged him to quit this hard and dangerous game. I knew the wild, vicious natures of Oregon cayuses, and I felt with an awful certainty that if he kept it up, sooner or later one would "get" him. But he only laughed at my fears, and pointed out that he often received a very fancy price for gentling a valuable horse which had been spoiled by injudicious or ignorant treatment. After a time I said no more about it. But every time he went whistling down to the corral I feared he might not come back alive. The thought haunted me by day, and I dreamed of it at night. I knew it was foolish to worry, however, and tried to forget about it.

As time passed I did get partly over this fear.

Yet I couldn't help holding my breath every time I would see him going down through the sagebrush, standing up in the wagon and calmly manipulating the lines on some wild runaway, or riding a bucking, squealing horse that most men were afraid to get into the corral with. The chances he took were enough to turn my hair gray. The smash-ups and narrow escapes he had would fill a book, though so far he had never been seriously hurt.

Then one afternoon he had an accident. I was standing at the window watching him drive a team of spoiled horses. One horse would have its forelegs across the other's back, then around its neck; sometimes both horses were on one side of the wagon-tongue, or one would be astraddle of it. They bucked, and kicked out of their traces; all the while they were running madly. My husband stood holding the lines, expertly balancing himself as the wagon lurched and bounded over the sagebrush clumps. Then for some reason the wagon-tongue dropped down and ran into the ground, causing the wagon to rear high into the air before the tongue broke. My husband was thrown out and the wagon crashed over on him.

I DON'T recall how I got there; I must have run all the way. The horses had dragged the wreckage of the wagon a short distance before they jerked loose from it. My husband lay perfectly still —his face and hair covered with blood and dirt, his clothing torn, one arm twisted beneath him. I dropped to my knees and lifted him up. Blood from a long gash in his head soaked through my dress and oozed down over my hands and arms. I thought he was dying.

Collecting my scattered wits, I realized he must be taken to a doctor as quickly as possible. I thought of going for help, but our only close neighbor, I remem-

bered, was away from home. It was up to me! I put him down, propped his hat to keep the late afternoon sun off his face, and ran back to the corral.

The only horses in that corral were a saddle-horse and a team of half-broken bays. I shall never know how I managed to catch that team of colts and get the harness on them; one never knows what one can do until real necessity calls. At any rate I got them hitched to the spring wagon, then bundled our eleven-months-old daughter into the rig, and drove down to where my husband lay.

The horses shied away from him so that I couldn't get the wagon very close, and I had to unhitch them to get them to stand. The awful fear that he was dying lent me strength, and somehow I dragged him to the wagon and managed after a time to get him lifted into the back of it. I arranged him as comfortably as possible with his head on a pillow I had thought to bring, again hitched the skittish, snorting horses to the wagon, and started on the twenty-mile trip to Huntington.

THE sun sank behind the Blue Mountains. Dusk gathered about us as the light of sunset died away. The young horses were soft, and were soon dripping with sweat, but they went steadily onward at a swift trot. My husband showed no signs of returning consciousness.

The road to Huntington crossed and recrossed the old Oregon Shortline several times. We were on the east side of Burnt River, approaching a place where the road crossed from the west to the east side of the track. Just beyond the crossing the railroad ran through a deep cut. The road sloped steeply upward over the hill, with just enough room for a wagon between the high hill on the left, and the railroad cut on the right.

As I drove across the track I realized that a train was approaching through the cut. The headlight was on and clouds of smoke and sparks shot up from the stack. Those wild mountain horses had never seen a train, and they paused uncertainly. I cut them with the whip. They leaped forward a few feet and stopped again.

The horses were facing the oncoming train. There was no place to turn around nor aside. We were only a few yards past the crossing, with the train puffing and snorting upgrade right toward us. Again I slashed them with the whip. The engine whistled deafeningly for the crossing. The terrified horses stood rigid, with legs braced far apart, and snorting wildly. Then they began to back toward the crossing just behind us. I tried to shout at them, but my voice was lost in the thunder of the train. There was no time to get my husband and baby out of the wagon. The locomotive was fairly upon us.

With the frantic strength of desperation I plied that whip, first on one horse, then the other. But they scarcely felt it; they kept backing, and in spite of my greatest efforts cramped the wagon toward the track.

I never knew why they did not turn around to run from the train, and upset the wagon. But they seemed too paralyzed with fear to do anything but back. Again and again I slashed them. It seemed like an eternity, while the wagon was moving closer to the track with every second.

At last the locomotive thundered by, not more than a half dozen feet from the end of the wagon. But the horses saw the cars still rushing toward them, and inch by inch, foot by foot, they continued to back. Not for an instant did I cease to ply the whip. I dared not take my eyes from the horses to look back, but I could feel the rush of air from the cars as they whizzed by. It seemed that the train shook the earth!

The last car passed, clearing the wagon not more than six inches. The horses leaped forward and dashed up the hill and down into the valley beyond before I could regain enough strength to pull them down.

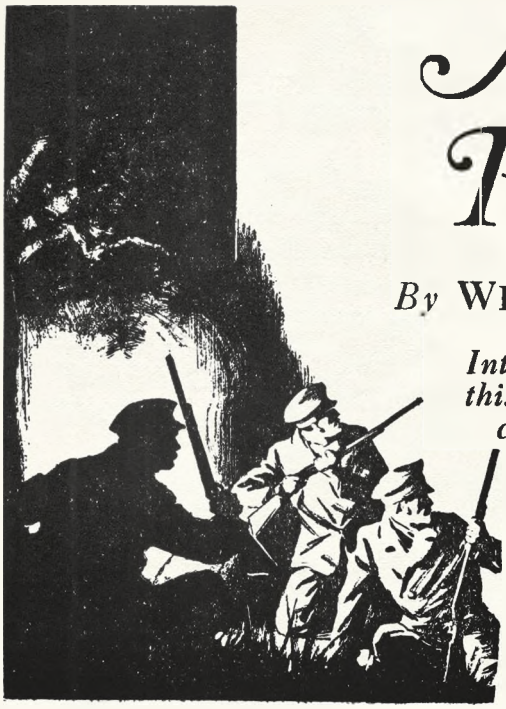
It had all happened in a matter of seconds, but every one of those seconds seemed like a year. The reaction left me shaking like a leaf.

Then out of the darkness my husband spoke. His voice, weak and husky, was the most welcome sound I have ever heard.

"Kid, you're all—right!" he said.

IN due time he recovered from his injuries.

But when he had regained consciousness that night in time to witness how narrowly we all escaped death, he realized for the first time the danger and, what was more important to him, the great ordeal he had caused for me—and he promised that he never again would attempt to break a spoiled or an outlaw horse.



Ashore in Patagonia

By WILLEM MOLKENBOER

Interned at Punta Arenas, this German sailor enjoyed a curious adventure ashore.

DURING the first two years of the World War, I was on a German ship—the *Radamis* of the Kosmos Line—in the port of Punta Arenas, situated in the Straits of Magellan, where she had sought refuge, together with several other ships from German companies. I occupied the berth of "painter and sailor," which means a trained painter signed on the articles as a sailor. This is a custom only on German ships running from Hamburg, as far as I know. There was little work to do aboard and we were always on the lookout for some excitement.

One of the sailors—I will call him "Fritz,"—was a bit of a huntsman. He was the son of a big German land-owner, had served in the German navy, and had been personal "striker" to Prince Heinrich. This sailor had made friends with a German fisherman of the town who owned a heavy, big-caliber rifle, which he used mostly for sea-lion hunting.

One day in December—which, by the way, is summer down there—our third mate, Mr. Janssen, persuaded the Captain to let Fritz and me go for a hunting-trip.

The Captain, anxious to relieve the monotony of our ship's fare, gave his consent readily on condition we must be back with our boat before nightfall—or else, he said, there would be the devil to pay.

We started early next morning. Fritz of course took the borrowed "Big Bertha" along, and the third mate had a shotgun, which he knew very well how to use. I had seen to it that we had bread and cold meat, and that our boat was in order for the trip.

The day was exceptional for that latitude, and we had a strong breeze behind us. After a two-hour sail we could readily recognize landmarks described to Fritz by the fisherman. There were some weird, dark rocks, about one hundred feet in height, close to the mouth of a beautiful clear stream, fed by a glacier far up in the mountains. There was plenty of room to hide our boat between the rocks so it could not be seen easily. Each put his share of the bread and meat in his pocket, made sure he had not forgotten his tobacco and matches; then we were ready to go.

The part we were in now was mostly level toward the north, with some little hillocks here and there. Far inland we could see the rim of a dark forest. We went along easily for a couple of hours in the direction of the timber. We didn't see a living thing except thousands of little birds, feasting on small red berries, which covered the bushes. We noticed the prints of half a dozen ostriches in the sand, but after following those for awhile, we desisted, for the space between the prints proved the birds had been running fast. We marched the rest of the forenoon; then after we had eaten our bread and meat, we rested for awhile—not knowing what would happen to us later—and started out with fresh energy. The trees were soon close, and we advanced along the edge and slightly away from it with the intention of working back to our boat in a big half-circle. After about an hour we entered a spot surrounded by the hillocks I mentioned before. In rounding

one of them I was looking at some tracks on the ground, so I didn't see movement ahead. The next thing, four guanacas were running right at me. I was just in time to execute a creditable side jump.

But those animals were as surprised as I! They turned around and raced back. The next moment the big gun roared, then the mate's shotgun, and one guanaca fell behind, its left foreleg shattered at the shoulder and dangling uselessly. Apparently the shotgun had done no damage. We went after them, hell-bent.

In our excitement we paid no attention to direction; so we were surprised after a half-hour chase to find ourselves close to the trees again. We hadn't yet located the wounded guanaca, but Fritz assured us it could not last much longer. We rested a few minutes and then followed its blood-spotted trail again. The trail led us toward a low ridge and we rounded this almost simultaneously. The third mate was slightly ahead, and I heard him exclaim in an awed voice the German equivalent of "gosh!"

The guanaca was there all right—but something else was there too! A big puma or cougar was standing with its forepaws on top of the dead guanaca. The cougar had evidently just started his dinner, and his resentment at our interruption was not to be mistaken. He stood stretched gauntly to his full length, his long tail sweeping the ground with short, angry jerks, his dangerous gleaming teeth bared and blood dripping from his jowls. In those eyes was an insane rage.

DID we run? We did not—we were rooted to the spot, so fascinated and amazed were we by the picture before us. Remember, we were not three yards away. I must confess I felt a chill creeping up my spine, facing that big cat there in the open, and I know the others felt the same. I was standing at the right of Fritz, the mate at his left. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Fritz' rifle rise very slowly. At the same time I saw the cougar's sinews contracting and his belly sinking, also slowly. The rifle was in position now. Fritz' finger was contracting around the trigger, the cougar's belly was almost touching the dead animal under him, when suddenly with a diabolical half-screech, half-roar, the cat rose six feet up straight in the air, turned about on nothing and landed in the same instant fifteen feet away, in front of the nearest trees. At the same moment the terrific roar of the big gun blasted the air close to my ear, and the bullet splintered a stone on the ground in a direct line with the spot where the cougar's head had been a split-second before. Fritz had been too slow by just that amount of time, or the puma had been just that bit too fast.

We stood dumfounded for a moment, with our months open. I never had believed such acrobatics possible. Fritz, usually so quiet, let loose a stream of words which alone would have killed the puma, and burned him up besides, had he still been there. He was standing on the same spot where he had landed, facing us and hoping probably to see us go away and leave him and his meal alone, but as soon as Fritz, who had loaded again, lifted the rifle, another jump landed him between the trees.

By now the beast seemed to have gone mad; he started a series of screeches and groans which sounded as if some one had kidnaped somebody out of hell and a whole regiment of devils were chasing him. It seemed to me that all the grievances of a long life of struggle against odds, topped off by the spoiling of his latest dinner, had come to a head and he was telling the world in general, and a bunch of green, would-be big-game hunters in particular, about it in no uncertain language. In the meantime he was leaping around between the trees, clawing big chunks of bark off the trees and snapping at the bushes.

Fritz was now shaking all over with the excitement of the hunt. He had known something of this before, stalking deer and boar on his father's estate back home and also when hunting in Siberia. His voice was hoarse as he rasped, "Let's go after him!" The third mate only nodded. He had completely forgotten his orders—and who could blame him? Not I—I was willing to follow that puma clear through Patagonia if need be!

WE advanced again, Fritz ready to bang away at the slightest chance of a hit. The puma retreated, we after him. What we had heard about a cougar not attacking man seemed to be the truth. He was still clawing at the trees and howling, and we forgot all about time and the darkness which comes early inside those dark Patagonian forests. We had but one urge—to get that elusive puma. We saw only tawny streaks flitting ahead of us now. Then for a long time we would see nothing. When we stopped we would hear a screech again and the tearing of brush. It was kind of spooky, playing

hide and seek with us that way, but still we went deeper in those woods.

After a long time of this we became suddenly aware that all was still again. We stopped and looked at each other. There was a curious twilight here and the third mate was making some bright remarks about our situation, when we heard that unearthly yell again close by. Forward we went again like hypnotized men, stumbling in the half-dark and making a noise like elephants.

CRASH! The third mate had fallen headlong across a rotten log. His gun went off and we heard the whistling of buckshot through the brush. He was mad as a hornet now. "This has got to stop!" he thereupon delivered himself. "What are we chasing anyhow—a ghost?" This sensible remark brought us up short with a realization of the foolish antics we were indulging in. He looked at his watch. The crystal was broken, and the hands had stopped at close to six o'clock. We *were* in a mess! Those Patagonian forests are as gloomy inside as they look from the outside. They loom up almost black against the landscape. Besides, they are eternally collecting moisture; this becomes fog by nightfall, which makes it a very wet place indeed.

The cougar seemed to have vanished entirely. What should we do now? Fritz and I were willing to take a chance on getting out of those dark woods but Mr. Janssen wouldn't hear of this. "We'll stay right here," he said. "We're much too far away from our boat to try finding it now, and I'd rather take my medicine tomorrow than make any more blunders and risk losing ourselves altogether." And stay we did.

We were a thoroughly tired and worried lot of fellows. Reluctantly we set about in the darkness to find a suitable spot to settle down for the night. There was a small clearing a hundred yards away. Soon we had a smoky fire going, and after each had stretched out on the wet moss with his back against a convenient tree, we proceeded to make ourselves comfortable as best we could with our pipes going full blast, to allay our hunger somewhat.

Our safety did not concern us much. We knew that the puma is the only large carnivorous animal ranging this far south, with maybe very seldom an occasional jaguar. Snakes are absent altogether, owing to the chilly climate. Still, not knowing but that our friend might be slinking about, we kept our eyes and ears open. I suppose this keyed-up condition made us hear all kinds of stealthy rustlings, and see sinister shadows flitting through the scant undergrowth. Several times one or the other of us would jump up in alarm and once I was sure I saw the reflection of the fire throw flaming specks into a pair of baleful greenish eyes a few yards away.

There it was again now, that rustling! Each of us was looking, when into the firelight strode the cause of it. A skunk! Dapper, swaggering and unafraid, as if it were invited, it passed between us through our small clearing, and out again on the other side. "Gosh!" groaned the mate. "Not that too!" And we understood perfectly to what he referred. Skunks are plentiful down there and our fourth engineer while exploring one day on the beach had met one. Not knowing the dangerous defense of the little fellow, he had attacked it with a stick. The result was appalling, and worse, he had come rowing to the ship looking for sympathy.

Our particular skunk seemed to like us, though, because he came back time and again, mostly poking his little head from between the bushes and looking around at us with bright, fearless eyes. Or he would come a few feet inside, standing still and looking into the fire. Then he would scurry off again, but always in a dignified way. We hardly dared to move, afraid of scaring him and setting off the works.

IT was now late in the night, and growing cold. Water was dripping from above continuously. We felt miserable; we tried to sleep but couldn't. We had been smoking, but now our tobacco was giving out too. It was an hour more before I saw the mate's pipe fall from between his lips; his shoulders slid along the tree, and before long his head was safely resting on the moss. Fritz was dozing, though sitting upright, his pipe clamped firmly between his teeth. I threw the last of our fuel on the fire and then I was ready for a nap too. The last thing I saw was our friendly little skunk setting himself close to the fire, its back toward the mate's feet and ready for action on the slightest provocation.

I was sleepily wondering what would happen if the third mate moved his feet; then the next I knew, Fritz was shaking me awake. It was growing light and he was standing pointing at the mate. That worthy was still in the same position in which I last saw him, but on the breast of

his heavy jacket, close to his throat, a six-inch-long centipede was making toward the warm shelter inside. I crawled stiffly to my feet and made for him, Fritz at the same time. We were so clumsy though that we both slipped in the wet ashes and fell on top of the mate. In falling I managed to brush the centipede away with my hand, but the motion brought my elbow in contact with his nose. He came to his feet with a wild yell—imagining, as he said later, that the cougar was on him. His legs wouldn't support him though, and he fell right down again. There he sat, glaring about him and looking so funny we couldn't help bursting out laughing. That made him sore and only after I showed him that ugly-looking crawler on the ground and explained about it did he cool off some, though when I told him how he had slept with a skunk at his feet he was ready to admit things could have been worse.

We were an unhappy and disheveled trio of big-game hunters that morning as we stood there, working the kinks out of our muscles.

THE way back was not hard to find; we could see broken bushes and trampled moss we had blundered over and through the day before. We even saw, after some fast going, the fresh scars on the trees, made by the cougar's claws.

We made splendid progress. Our stiffness was soon gone, but the dampness kept our dander up and some salty remarks were heard along the trail. We had divided our last tobacco long ago and our appetites had become something fierce. At last we burst into the open. It was still fine weather outside and the sun was well up in the sky, which made things take on a brighter aspect right away. As if at a command, we turned toward the spot where we had left the carcass of the guanaca. We rounded the ridge again and stood rooted again. There was nothing there!

Bunches of hair, bloody spots and broken bushes, showed where it had been dragged off into the woods about two hundred yards away.

Fritz looked hopefully at the mate.

"Nothing doing, fellow," he forestalled us. "We've had enough of that. Leave him alone, he's earned it!"

The sun warmed us up soon now and the mate looked after his shotgun. There was still hope of escaping the worst of the Captain's wrath. And sure enough, we were less than two miles from the shore when we neared a small area of close brush and small rocks.

The mate had almost passed when with a big flurry and a whistling noise an emu left shelter and raced away. Fritz' gun went up, and the bullet was on its way before the mate whirled to see what had happened behind his back.

The big bird fell fifty yards away in full stride, turned several somersaults, kicked once and lay still, the long neck underneath its body. The mate leaped toward it, but Fritz and I went between the rocks first. There between two of the biggest rocks in a plain hollow, scooped out of the sand by the bird's feet, lay six eggs, each as big as a good-sized coconut. One of them was still warm, the others were cold—a sure sign that the bird hadn't begun to set yet, therefore the eggs were fresh.

I took off my coat, and laid the eggs carefully in it. Then we started toward our hill. The bullet had struck the big bird squarely in the back below the base of the neck. It was a beautiful shot and Fritz was proud of it. We cut out the giant drumsticks and the breast-meat with our sheath-knives, and left the rest.

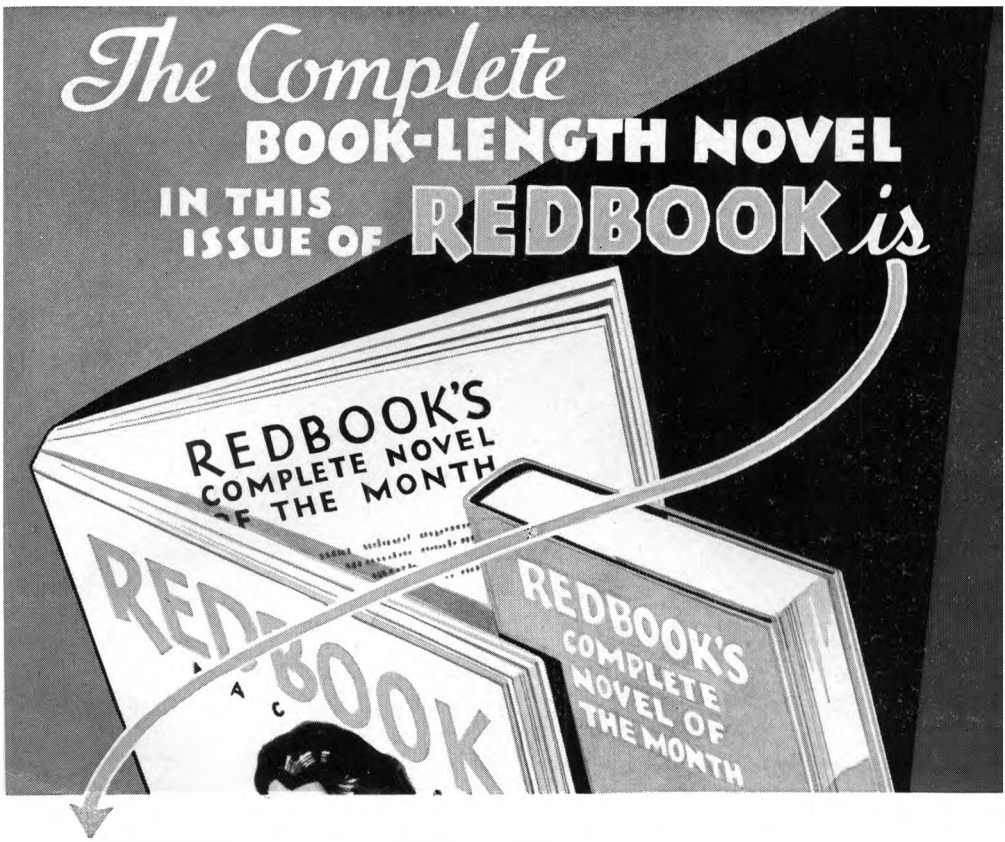
Forgotten now were all our discomforts of the night before. The trip had been successful after all. The third mate had saved his face; Fritz had got in two good shots and I had shared in the excitement. Our boat was still in the place where we had left it, which swept the last shreds of worry from our minds.

Three hours later we were nearing the gangway. Everybody on board was lining the rails. The Captain's face was like a thundercloud.

"Well! What have you got to say for yourself, Mr. Janssen?" was his greeting. The mate proceeded to give a true account of our adventures. When he came to the night's part of it we saw nothing else than broad sardonic smiles.

AFTER the mate had finished his story, the Captain couldn't restrain himself from a wise-crack. "And so, Mr. Janssen," he said, "you want me to believe that puma lured you away into the woods so he could go back and have his dinner after all? Some nerve, Mr. Janssen! —All right, cook, see what you can make out of that chicken and those eggs!"

And that was all the scolding that mate got. But I still believe that we were deliberately fooled by that wise puma on our "big-game hunt."



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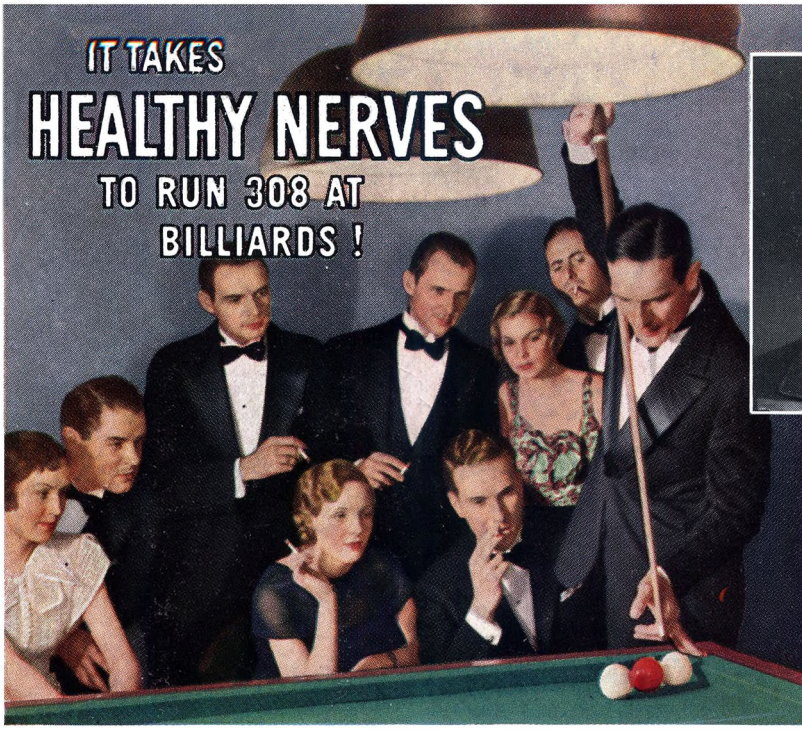

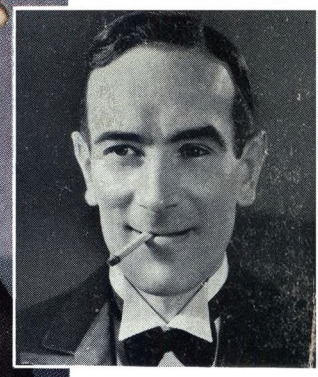

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