MOONEY'S IN A JAM, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

BLUE BOOK

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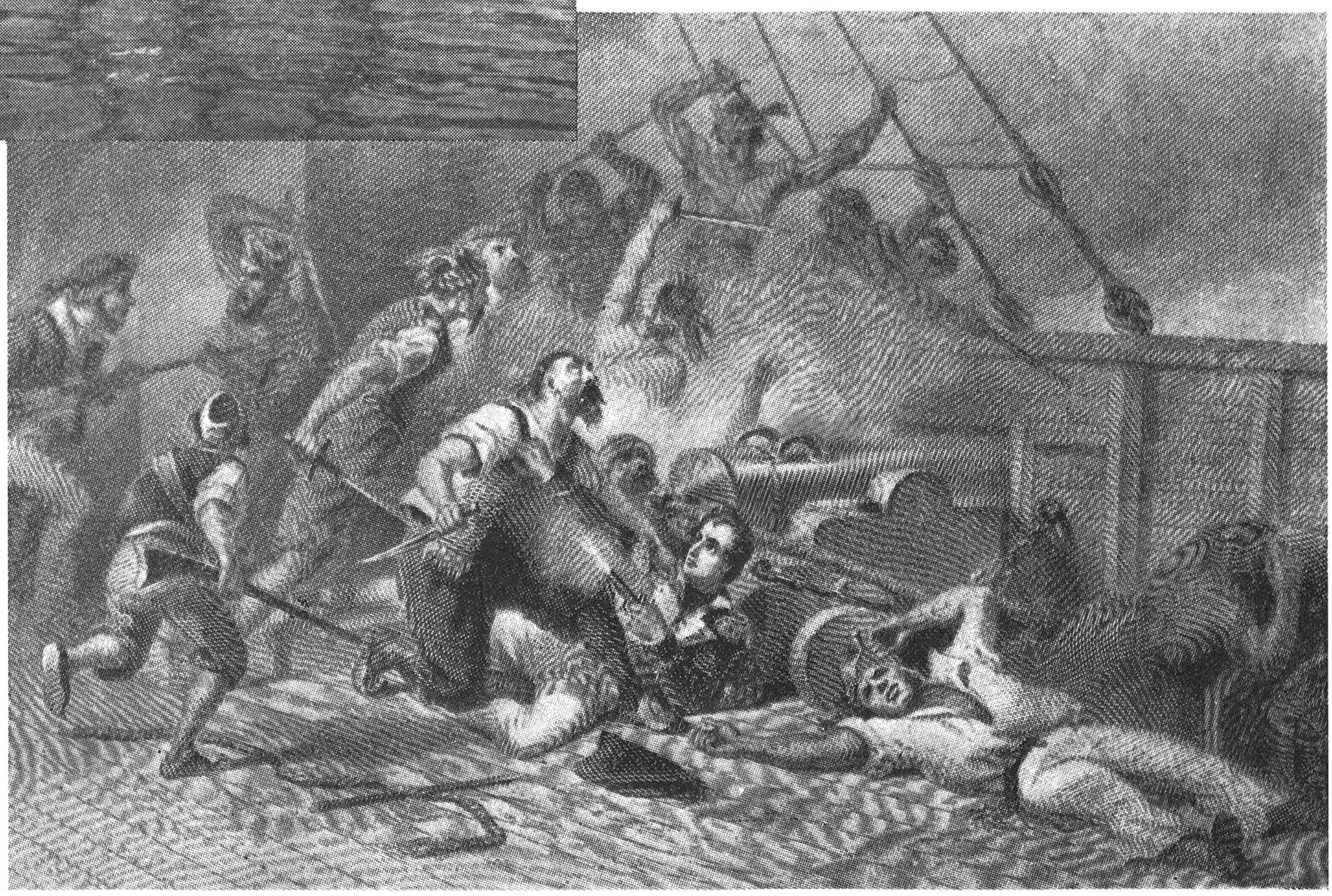
Shall We Fight Again in the Mediterranean?

The United States even in its infancy fought a foreign war—on land in North Africa, and on the Mediterranean. . . . At the top is one of Colonel Furlong's own photographs of present-day Italians in their trenches in Libya. At the left is the grand old *Constitution,* which fought against Tripoli and is still in commission. Below is an old print showing the fight on the deck of Decatur's ship in Tripoli harbor.



Photographs by permission Charles Wellington Furlong . . . Old print from Culver Service, N. Y.

Our War In the Mediterranean

For many years the rulers of Tripoli, Algiers and other north African states had demanded and received tribute from European nations; failing to receive it, they attacked and captured European ships and enslaved their crews. When the newly established United States of America found that we too must pay tribute,—or else!—we did not forbid these dangerous Mediterranean waters to our sailors. Instead we built us a navy, went to war and cleaned up the Mediterranean. A noted authority here tells this old but timely story.

By COL. CHARLES WELLNIGTON FURLONG

"HAD we been called upon to meet the dangers of the sea, or to fight the enemies of our country, we should, I know, like true American sailors, have encountered them without dismay."

So wrote Archibald Robbins of Weathersfield, Connecticut, in a journal he published in 1821, telling of the loss of the brig *Commerce* of Hartford, aboard which he was an able seaman. This journal describes the slavery and sufferings of the author and the rest of the crew upon the Sahara Desert during the years 1815, '16 and '17—three years of living hell for those who survived.

"But," he continued, "after having encountered and overcome almost all the varieties of human misery: then to be cast upon a boundless plain of burning sand and flinty stones, there to be famished with hunger, devoured by wild beasts or become slaves to the most merciless of creatures that wear the form of man, was surely enough to appall the stoutest heart. . . . Three or four Arabs seized me and pulled me one way and another, with so much force, that I concluded they were about to settle the dispute by making an equal distribution of my body among them. At length one of them continued his hold, and he now became my sole master. . . . and led me off to his camels, stationed at a small distance."

We are acquainted with the terrors of black slavery under the white man, which once ran rampant in the United States and some of the countries of South America. But of white slavery under the Arabs and blacks of Barbary, we know little, and most of that knowledge is found in the narratives of American seamen, from the ports and farms of our Atlantic seaboard, and privately published in limited editions of their journals, such as that of Robbins.

The impressing of our seamen by European powers into their navies, in which the British took the lead, as well as the capture and destruction of our merchant vessels in the Mediterranean, and the enslaving of their officers and crews, by the Barbary pirates, hampered our commerce and caused great loss to shipowners and American trade.

Privateers such as the eighty-ton schooner *True Blue* and the ship *Essex,* of which Capt. Lawrence Furlong[1] of Newburyport was commander and prize master respectively, were armed and sworn into the service.

On May 12, 1775, the American sloop *Unity,* under Captain Jeremiah O'Brien, cruising off Machias, Maine, captured the British armed tender *Marguerita* and lowered the first British flag hauled down at sea in the Revolution. . . . The following September 6, the armed schooner

(Continued on page 4)

(1) Captain Lawrence Furlong was the author of "The American Coast Pilot" published in 1798, the first complete mariners' guide to the navigation of the Atlantic Coast.

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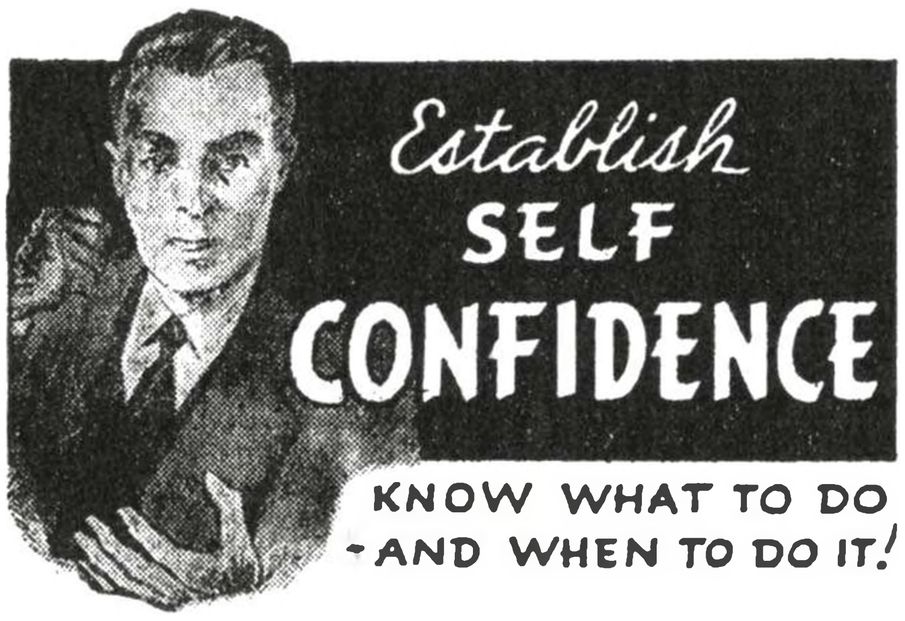

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Hannah, from Beverly, Massachusetts, commanded by Capt. Nicholson Broughton, captured a British vessel. The *Hannah,* owned by Col. John Glover, of Salem, ranks officially as the "mother" of the American navy.

The following year the Stars and Stripes flag was adopted by the Continental Congress; Old Glory was born, and fluttered from the masthead of every American ship. But a government by free men is always bought at a price. Part of that price was paid by the withdrawal of former British protection to Colonial ships and crews on the high seas. Six years later the Supreme Court of Massachusetts outlawed slavery because in the State Bill of Rights was written that far-reaching and imperishable idea: *"All men are born free and equal."*

FROM ancient times the Mediterranean has been the scene of naval strife and piracy. Men chained to the galley-thwarts have writhed under the lash of Pagan, Mohammedan and Christian. The Barbary corsairs, particularly the Algerines, scoured the sea for booty, raiding not only the Mediterranean islands, the Italian and Spanish coasts, but those of Ireland and even far-away Iceland. These wolves of the sea would descend out of the night and push inland, looting villages and carrying off defenseless inhabitants into slavery.

The object of the Barbary pirates was to seize plunder from the ships, and money by ransom of their captive crews. Robbins stated in his journal that some of the captured American sailors of the *Commerce* were sold on the public auction block to the desert Arabs, for as high as forty camels apiece, while ransom of 150 pounds sterling for a single American captive was disdainfully refused as a mere bagatelle by the more sophisticated Algerines.

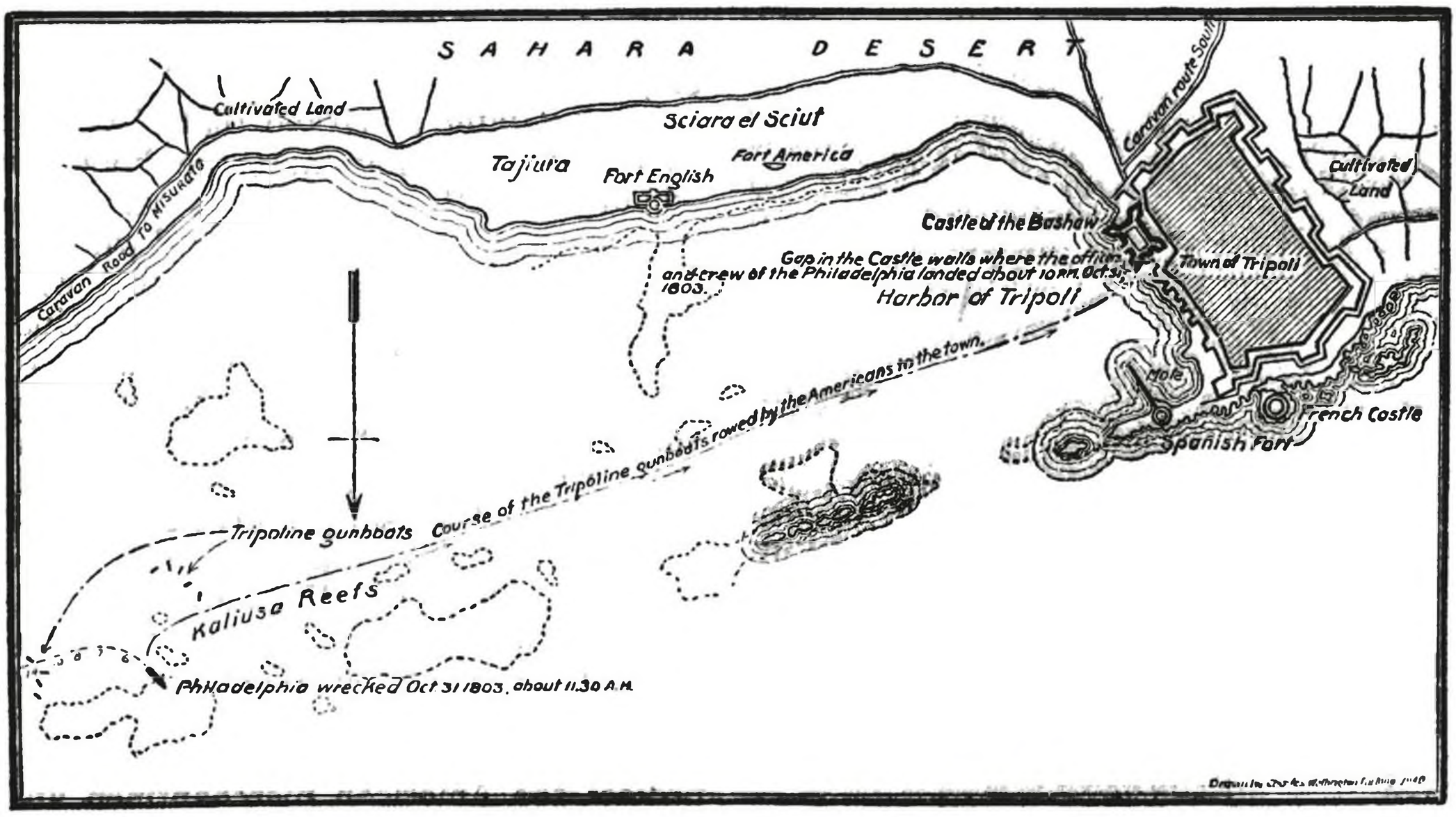
Against American protests to the enslaving of our crews by the Algerines and their exorbitant demands the Dey replied: "It has been the custom, from time immemorial, for all nations to redeem their people on the best terms they could."

Through the middle of the Sixteenth Century the power of the Barbary States was at its height, but the crushing defeat of the Turks at Lepanto in 1571, which was really the last Crusade, put a stop to their aggression in the eastern Mediterranean. From then on, their naval supremacy began to decline, and the line of the famous Barbary corsairs ceased and degenerated into a race of petty pirates. These marauders continued to infest the Mediterranean until their extermination in the Nineteenth Century.

Before the Mediterranean was freed from piracy, Christian slaves could be counted by tens of thousands in Algiers and other cities of Barbary. At the time of Washington's presidency, the great maritime powers of Europe were paying an annual tribute to the rulers of the little piratical states of Barbary. This was for freedom from molestation of their ships and crews in the Mediterranean. In fact, strange as it may seem, they had been doing this for centuries. Even England for 230 years had paid tribute, through her consuls at Algiers; and as late as 1816 English slaves, presumably captured under the flags of other countries, were ransomed in Algiers.

After the Revolution, American merchantmen could no longer claim Britain's protection on the high seas; in fact, at one time they were actually denied the use of Gibraltar. The new flag of the Americans had scarcely appeared in the Mediterranean before the pirates of Barbary knew that the ships and crews of this young, weak power beyond the seas, without a navy, were an easy prey for their galleasses, xebecs, dhows and feluccas. Attacks, particularly by the Algerines, with the Tripolines a close second, now centered on American ships, and secondly on those of Italy. The Sultan of Morocco, however, "showed a friendly disposition toward us, and claimed to have been the first sovereign to recognize the independence of the United States."

PETITIONS to induce Congress to bring relief or protection to our merchant marine in the Mediterranean seemed to fall on deaf ears. But it was the pleas that American women made to George Washington, on behalf of Barbary enslaved husbands, sons and brothers, which really initiated the movement for the freedom of the Mediterranean. It was at Mt. Vernon in 1786 that General Washington first learned from them that a number of American merchantmen had been captured by certain Barbary States, and when payment for the release of the crews was refused, these Americans were sold as slaves. Washington also learned something else: that other maritime nations, headed by England and France, paid tribute to the rulers of Barbary and the Sultan of Turkey, for freedom to sail the Mediterranean without molestation.



This prompted him in a letter to his good friend Lafayette to ask how "in such an enlightened. . . . liberal age. . . . is it possible that the great maritime powers of Europe should pay an annual tribute to the little piratical states of Barbary?"

There was present at Mt. Vernon at the time Tobias Lear, formerly Washington's private secretary, but later his private military secretary, who had been given the rank of colonel. Lear became Consul-General to Algiers in 1804, and Commissioner to Tripoli in 1805, when his actions had a deciding effect on one of the most dramatic episodes of our military history in the Mediterranean.

But Washington was soon to discover something which American merchantmen knew all too well, that *this situation was in accord with European policy*, and that France, and England in particular, privately encouraged those Islamic rovers to attack and discourage American commerce in the Mediterranean, to prevent our competing with their carrying trade.

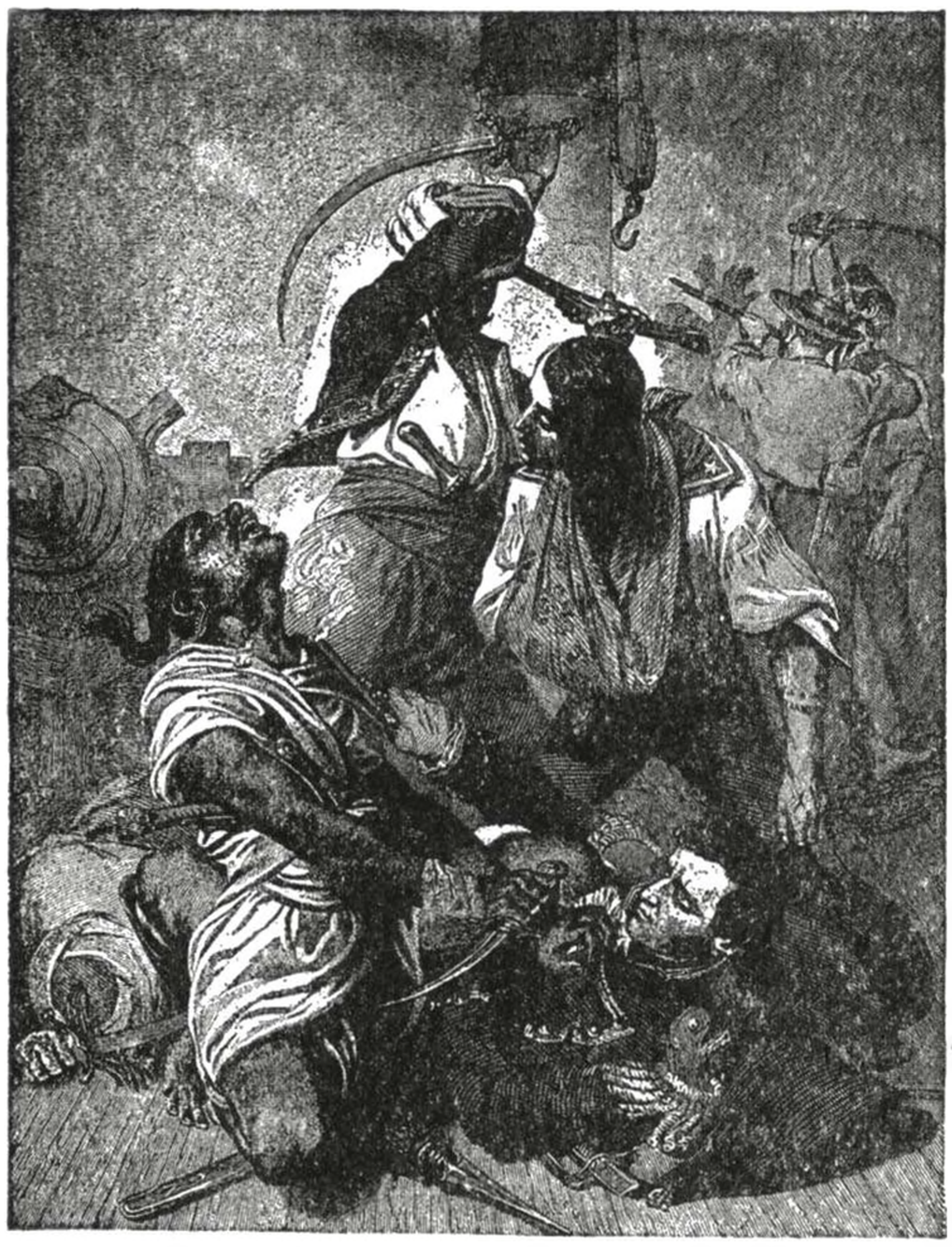
Franklin, while Minister to France in 1783, said: "I have in London heard it is a maxim among the merchants that *if there were no Algiers, it would be worth England's while to build one.*" Then he continued: "I wonder, however, that the rest of Europe do not combine to destroy those nests and secure commerce from their future piracies."

This was father to the thought which Washington expressed four years later to the Congress of the United States, when he said: "To secure respect to a neutral flag requires a naval force, organized and ready to vindicate it from insult or aggression. . . . It would seem as if our trade in the Mediterranean, without a protecting force, will always be insecure, and our citizens exposed to the calumnies from which numbers of them have just been relieved. . . . If we desire to avoid insult, we must be able to repel it; *if we desire to secure peace, one of the most powerful instruments of our rising prosperity, it must be known that we are at all times ready for war.*"

So a recommendation in Congress, "that a naval force adequate to the protection of the commerce of the United States against the Algerine corsairs ought to be provided," took form in January, 1794, and a month later that body authorized the construction of six frigates to uphold our flag and insure our merchantmen the freedom of the seas in the Mediterranean. But these vessels were only "on order," and when, in 1796, a treaty of peace with Algiers was signed, work was discontinued on three of the frigates.

In 1792 our Senate had "favored paying one hundred thousand dollars annually for peace to Algiers, Tripoli and Tunis, and forty thousand dollars ransom for the captives. It also passed resolutions stating its readiness to ratify treaties with Algiers, providing for peace, at a cost of forty thousand dollars at the outset and annual tribute of twenty-five thousand dollars."

Through the most remarkable vicissitudes of fate our envoy was unable to consummate this treaty until nearly four years later, and then, instead of the amount originally favored by the Senate that body ratified the cost and payment of nearly one million dollars, including



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Fight with corsairs on the deck of an American ship.

$525,500 for ransom of the thirteen captives, various presents, and miscellaneous expenses. Even this was exclusive of the annuity in naval stores, at an estimated value of over twenty-one thousand dollars, which later proved far too low.

A treaty with Tunis, and also with Yusuf Karamauli, Bashaw of Tripoli, was likewise ratified at considerable cost. But these treaties with Algiers, Tripoli and Tunis, consummated in 1796-'97-'98, respectively, proved unsatisfactory.

William Bainbridge, a young American naval officer, a captain at twenty-six, was given command of the frigate *George Washington*, of twenty-four guns, purchased in 1798. This was in 1800; and in the fall of the year he passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, the first United States man-of-war to enter the Mediterranean, and soon arrived at Algiers. His orders required him to deliver the payment of tribute to its Barbary ruler, a duty repugnant to any naval officer. Shortly after Bainbridge dropped anchor, the Dey demanded that the *George Washington* carry his ambassador to Constantinople, together with presents amounting from five to six million dollars, and two hundred Turkish passengers. Bainbridge protested.

"You pay me tribute," said the Dey, "by which you become my slaves. I have, therefore, a right to order you as I see proper." It was comply or incur a renewal of hostilities against United States ships and commerce. Bainbridge complied, but later remarked that if he had to deliver anything more, he hoped it would be at the mouth of a cannon.

Other troubles soon developed with the Barbary regencies, particularly with Tripoli. By the opening of the Nineteenth Century, through the violation of the previous treaties by the Barbary rulers, the United States found itself at war with those powers, but at last with a squadron of warships, ranging from the forty-four-gun flagship *President* to the twelve-gun schooner *Enterprise*, and including the thirty-six-gun frigate *Philadelphia*, all under the command of Commodore Dale.

The main duty of the squadron was to protect the American merchantmen and crews, to perform which Dale had three main objectives: to give battle to any armed vessel of the enemy on the high seas, to blockade their ports and to convoy American merchantmen. The convoy system required that American merchantmen, particularly those sailing for home, should assemble at certain Mediterranean ports, such as Alicante, Barcelona and Marseilles. From there, on certain dates, the convoy started for home. Those glorious fleets of sail stand out as one of the great pageants of history: majestic merchantmen with all sails set, the Stars and Stripes at the masthead, and their long homeward-bound pennants streaming in the wind, convoyed on flanks and rear by our stately ships of the line. Thus they bulged through the Straits of Gibraltar along the coast of Spain by that tribute-levying pirate's nest Tarifa, from which our word *tariff* is derived. Then when well out on the Atlantic, the convoy returned, and the merchantmen winged their way for home. At no time did an American Mediterranean squadron comprise more than thirty-one vessels, sixteen of which were small gunboats.

About every year our squadrons on the Mediterranean station changed flagships and commands, and were augmented or diminished, as conditions demanded. In 1803 and '04 we find Commodore Preble in command, and his flag flying from the famous *Constitution*, of forty-four guns. Captain Bainbridge was in command of the *Philadelphia*, and Chauncey of the *John Adams*, of twenty-eight guns; the rest of the squadron comprised four small brigs, a couple of large schooners, nine gunboats and two bomb vessels. Later a captured Turkish ketch renamed

the *Intrepid*, and carrying four guns, brought the total to twenty-one vessels.

Thus six-sevenths of Preble's squadron comprised small vessels of from four to sixteen guns. This was in strong contrast to the previous squadrons under Commodores Dale and Morris, made up entirely of good-sized frigates, with the one exception of the schooner *Enterprise*, mounting only twelve guns, under Lieut. Andrew Sterrett, but now commanded by Decatur, in Commodore Preble's squadron. The reason for this change in tonnage and guns was due to the many reefs and shoals which abound along the Barbary coast, particularly off the shores of Tripoli. Also because Barbarian craft, with the exception of some of the Algerine galleasses, were small, lighter-draft craft, which could maneuver and work along shore where our larger men-of-war could not safely navigate.

Our smaller craft were commanded by daring young officers who for bravery and *esprit* gave a good account of themselves, and on whose ship's lists were such famous names as Stephen Decatur, Richard Somers, James Lawrence and others. It was here in the Mediterranean that some of our most famous ships saw service: the *President*, and the *Philadelphia*, the *Chesapeake* and the *Constitution*, the *Guerrière*, the *Constellation*, the *United States* and last, the *Independence* and *Washington*, of seventy-four guns each, largest of them all. Of these historic frigates, the *Constitution* and *Constellation* are still afloat, with *Old Ironsides* now actually in commission.

OF the smaller craft, the *Enterprise* must have been a very useful little schooner, for she was kept on the Mediterranean station from the very first, in 1801, until 1806, and was brought back again when hostilities with the Algerines were renewed in 1815. These small craft fought many dual engagements. The tactics of the Arabs were to close in, lock ships with grappling-irons, let fall the long booms of their lateen sails over the enemy's deck; and swarming over them, her swarthy crews, with knives and cutlasses between teeth, boarded their enemy. The tactics of the Americans, who were better in handling ships, was to prevent this by maneuvering.

The most famous record hung up by the *Enterprise* occurred when she was once running for Malta, with Lieut. Sterrett in command. She hove in sight of a fourteen-gun Tripolitan polacca, commanded by Mahomet Sous, and carrying eighty men, an even match for the *Enterprise* of twelve guns and ninety-four men. Time and again the Moslem attempted to board, and as often Sterrett, by superior skill, out-maneuvered him; time and again choosing his position, he repeatedly raked the polacca. Twice the Tripoline Rais feigned surrender, while lowering his flag, only to seize an advantage, hoist it again and reopen fire. But after three hours of incessant firing, sometimes within pistol-shot, and after losing two-thirds of his crew in dead and wounded, the treacherous Rais finally hurled his colors into the sea and begged for quarter. There was not one casualty aboard the *Enterprise*.

Sterrett now dismantled the Tripolitan ship and stripped her of her guns. Then he allowed her crew to creep back under an old sail and spar into Tripoli. The Bashaw Yusuf Karamauli promptly had Mahomet Sous paraded through the streets on a jackass and then bastinadoed.

TRIPOLITAN ships were blockaded to the Straits of Gibraltar, but particularly off the port of Tripoli itself, the American vessels leaving it only in the inclement winter season or in a run to Malta or Syracuse for fresh water and supplies. American sailors made one landing to the east of Tripoli on an assault on some breastworks. But the port of Tripoli lay behind a long line of dangerous reefs, here jutting above the water, there disappearing just below its surface. About four miles to the eastward lay the hidden Kaliusa Reef, not then recorded on any chart. Safe behind these reefs, in his impregnable castle, reigned the despotic Yusuf Karamauli who had declared war against the United States, cut down the American flagstaff and forced our American consul, James L. Cathcart, to leave Tripoli, turning American interests into the hands of the Danish consul, Nicholas Nissen.

Yusuf and his two brothers, Hassan and Hamet, were sons of Ali Karamauli, Bashaw of Tripoli. All three were inspired by mutual, bitter jealousy. Yusuf determined to succeed his father, and when only twenty, murdered his oldest brother Hassan in 1790. Six years later, when his father died and his weaker, vacillating brother Hamet happened to be away, Yusuf got control of the army and proclaimed himself Bashaw. Hamet took refuge under the protection of the Bey of Tunis, but Yusuf held on to

Hamet's wife and children in Tripoli, as hostages. Hamet went subsequently to Malta, then to Derna in eastern Tripoli and finally retired to Egypt.

Preble tightened the blockade of Tripoli and ordered Bainbridge with the *Philadelphia* and the little *Vixen* of twelve guns, under Lieut. Commandant John Smith, to keep up a watchful cruise off that port. The *Vixen* was sent in the direction of Cape Bon to intercept, if possible, two Tripolitan vessels of war, out upon a cruise, and the *Philadelphia* maintained the blockade alone.

Just before two bells of the forenoon watch, on October 31, 1803, when the *Philadelphia* was about five leagues to the westward of Tripoli, Lieut. Porter came to Bainbridge's cabin.

"There is a strange sail, sir, standing close in shore."

Bainbridge went immediately on deck. Through his glass he made out a felucca standing before the wind to the westward and flying Tripolitan colors. The *Philadelphia* immediately gave chase to prevent the felucca from reaching Tripoli. In about two hours, as they approached nearer the shore, the *Philadelphia* began firing as she ran before the wind. This was maintained for half an hour, but Bainbridge, finding his firing at that range without effect, gave up the chase, and wearing ship a bit, bore off shore. He had been sailing in eight fathoms, and the chart showed safe water.

"Seven fathoms!" droned the leadsman —then at another heave of the lead:

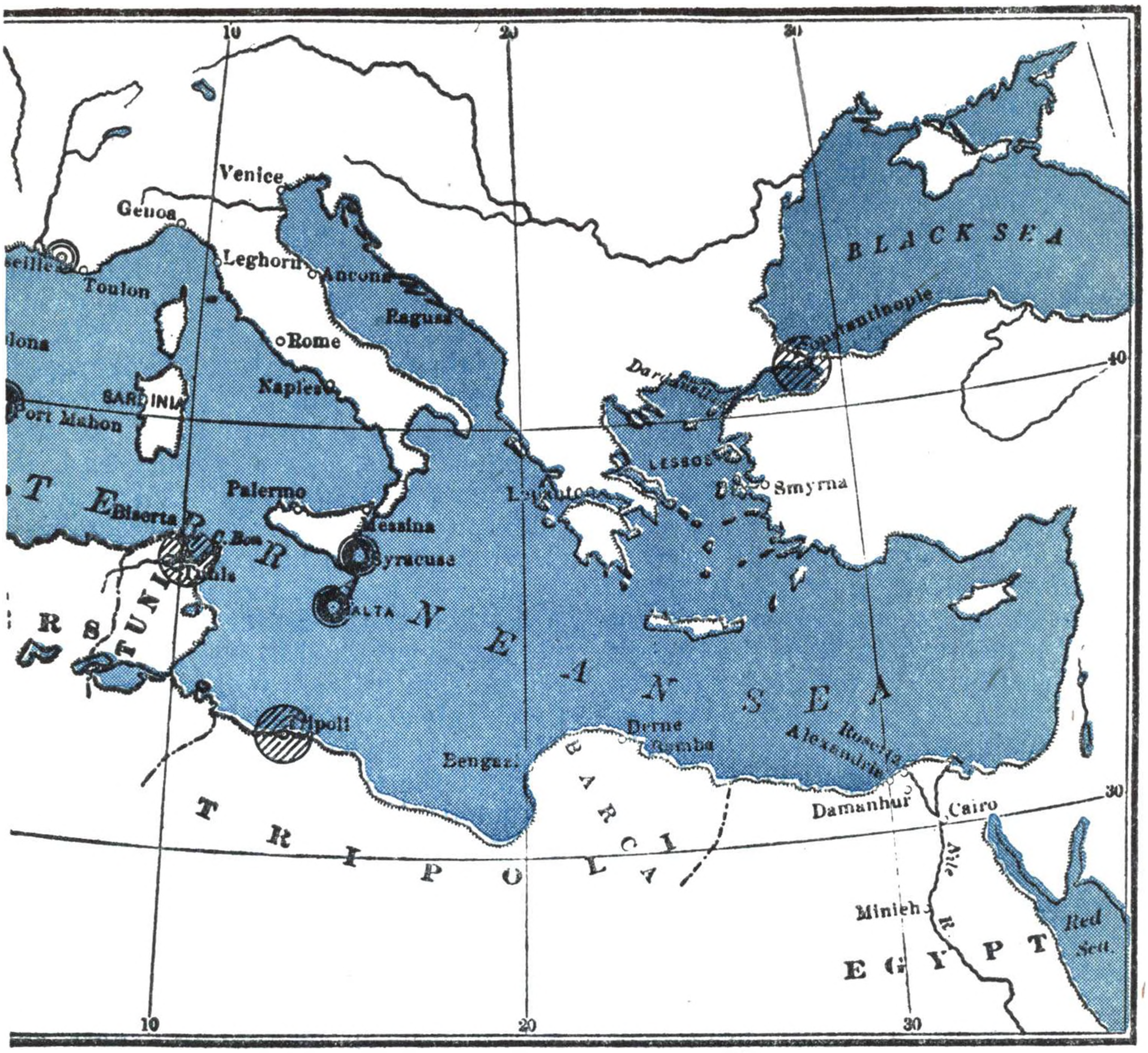
"By the mark, *six!*" he called.

"Port your helm!" ordered Bainbridge, to head the frigate more quickly out to sea. His perfectly trained crew braced the yards sharply about as the vessel answered her helm. It was too late. There was a grating sound, a terrific shock and an ominous quiver ran through the entire ship. The *Philadelphia* was aground, hung up on what proved to be the Kaliusa Reef, but where, on the best available charts, no reef was shown. The lead gave twelve feet of water forward and seventeen abaft. From a small-boat, soundings gave the greatest depth of water astern.

The *Philadelphia* lay about one and one-half miles offshore, and her predicament had been seen from Tripoli only about four and one-fourth miles along shore westward. In an incredibly short space of time (headed by the felucca she had been chasing) eight gunboats put out from Tripoli Harbor. The wind was blowing fresh, so the frigate's topgallant-sails were loosed and all sails laid aback, for it seemed that under such a heavy press of sail on the ship, she might be backed off. To lighten her bow, three anchors were cast away, and water started in the hold to weight her aft.

"Rig the pumps, bo's'un," ordered Bainbridge, "and get the fresh water overboard."

"Aye-aye, sir!" replied boatswain George Hadger. And in a few minutes the rhythmic slushing of the big pumps was spewing their precious drinking water from the springs of Pennsylvania into the scuppers. Under Thomas Moore, the ship's carpenter, even the forward water-casks were being stove in by ten of the crew. But the *Philadelphia* did not give an inch, though she now careened to larboard. Listing as she was, few of her broadside guns could now be brought to bear upon the enemy, so the guns of the entire starboard battery and those of the forward division of the port battery were hove overboard except some aft, retained to defend the ship against the oncoming gunboats, which were already firing upon the *Philadelphia*.



Ports used as rendezvous for American merchantmen.

Ports of supply used by American naval squadron during operations in Mediterranean between 1800 and 1816.

Bases of the corsairs during the early part of the 19th Century.

"Break out the stern gallery!" Bainbridge commanded. "Cast loose and provide those two stern chasers."

The two heavy guns were run into Bainbridge's cabin, and under the direction of William Sweeney, chief gunner, they were slewed round as far as possible to bear on the attacking Tripoline gunboats. But now only three guns out of her thirty-six could be brought to bear on the enemy. Even the fire of these was shortly rendered useless, because the canny Moslems took up positions on either side, just out of the line of fire of these stern guns.

As a last resort, to lighten the frigate forward, her towering foremast was cut away, and in falling, it carried the main topgallant mast with it. But all in vain; and what an hour before was a gallant ship, now lay a dismantled, defenseless wreck and surrounded by at least nine enemy gunboats, heavily manned, whose crews were armed to the teeth, and who hung like jackals about a dying lion.

It was now early afternoon. For four hours the Tripolines mercilessly poured their shot and shell at the *Philadelphia*. Fortunately they aimed at the masts and rigging, their intention being to prevent escape under sail and secure her as a prize. This was fortunate, and probably accounts for the lack of casualties among her complement of three hundred men.

As the sun lowered toward the horizon, those aboard the frigate could see the long, low skyline of the city of Tripoli, broken only by the higher stone mass of the castle of the Bashaw, and accented here and there by the graceful minarets from the Mosque of the Steps, and other mosques of the Faithful. Little specks now appeared to break off from the lower edge of the silhouette, grew larger as they turned into boats and approached the American frigate. These innumerable small craft putting out from shore were filled with men.

As the curtain of night was rung down on that day of October 31, 1803, Bainbridge knew that these wolf packs would

swarm over the *Philadelphia's* sides, to loot and rend and kill. It would be a massacre, not a fight. The odds were too much against them, so after consulting with his officers, he ordered: "Overboard all small arms! Flood the magazine! Tell the carpenter to scuttle the ship." Then, turning to Lieut. Jones, he gave the hardest order of his life:

"Mr. Jones, I am sorry, sir. *Haul down the flag.*"

All hands were mustered on the quarter deck, where Bainbridge read a clause from the articles of war, encouraged them to hope for a ransom, and instructed them to behave with fortitude and circumspection, and ordered them not to resist insults or even rough handling, which he knew must follow, on the part of the barbarous enemy, who if resisted would give no quarter. The men, after collecting their dunnage and belongings, retired to the fo'c'sle, with some of the junior officers, while Bainbridge and the senior lieutenants stood on the quarter deck.

FOR a short time the Tripolines suspectingly hesitated to board, fearing a ruse of a false surrender, which they themselves practiced. The sun was sinking behind the battlements of Tripoli as the fierce-visaged, turbaned head of a Moor peered cautiously above the bulwarks. A word to those below, then a wild scramble, as with shrill cries a motley horde of swarthy pirates, armed to the teeth, poured over the sides. Their brandished knives and scimitars glinted in the last gleams of the setting sun.

The scene that followed beggars description. There seemed to be no leader in authority; and in the pandemonium that broke loose, the plunderers not only looted the crew of their dunnage and ditty-boxes, but personal possessions and even clothes, stripping them of everything but trousers, shirts and hats. The gold epaulettes of the officers, in particular, appealed to those Oriental sons of Allah, and were torn unceremoniously from the officers' shoulders. Even their fobs and watches were seized.

William, a marine and a native of northern New York, had some pieces of gold in his vest pocket which he at first refused to give up. "But," he writes, "one of the pirates pushing the muzzle of a cocked pistol against my breast soon brought me to terms." Numerous incidents occurring during that boarding will never be recorded; but one relating to Bainbridge himself stands out.

Bainbridge, in both French and Italian, had unsuccessfully called for their leader. During a lull in the hubbub he caught a glimpse of a tall, imposing figure looking in his direction, whom he took to be their Rais. Advancing toward him, he extended the hilt of his sword in surrender.

With a swift movement the villain grasped the sword, making a vicious thrust at Bainbridge's stomach. Miraculously the point was deflected harmlessly to one side by Bainbridge's heavy belt plate, and the man drew back. He then demanded the heavy pistols and the Captain's belt, and proceeded to divest Bainbridge of his insignia, including a jeweled pin from his neckcloth.

The two men on the quarterdeck had now become the center of attention of the crowd gathered to watch in the waist of the ship below. Bainbridge was unflinchingly eying his adversary. Despoiled of his coat and neckcloth, his shirt torn open at the throat, one thought entered his mind: About his neck, suspended on a fine gold chain, hung a beautiful miniature of his wife Susan.

The gleam of gold caught the pirate's eye. With a swift movement he reached for it. But Bainbridge was still quicker. Throwing discretion to the winds, all his pent-up resentment, anger and disappointment seemed to concentrate in his muscular arms as, quick as a leopard, he seized the swarthy Moslem as he would a bundle of rags, and with superhuman strength hurled him against the rail of the ship. "The man's skull cracked like an egg, and he fell limply down on the heads of the crowd below."

BANG! went a pistol at point-blank range, but it missed its mark. Lts. Porter, Jones and Hunt started forward to his side, but in a flash their arms were pinioned behind them and bound with quickly-unwound Moslem turbans. A half-dozen corsairs now fell upon Bainbridge. Down went the first with a blow from his powerful fist, but they swarmed upon him like wolves on a muskox, too intertwined to draw their daggers. Down to the deck they went, but Bainbridge struggled to his feet, and seizing one of his assailants by his broad cloth belt, hurled him overboard.

The terrific struggle continued, down, up, down, up. Four times he struggled to his feet. What the result would have been it would be difficult to say, but for the sudden appearance aboard of a handsomely dressed figure in a brilliant red

tunic and silk scarf. Thrusting back Bainbridge's assailants, he approached the Captain, who stood panting defiantly before him. But the Moor bowed low, and turning so as to confront the others, he drew a long jeweled pistol. To the relief of Bainbridge and his officers, they realized that here was one in authority.

The crowd fell back as he beckoned Bainbridge to follow him. Led by Bainbridge, who still clutched the miniature tightly in his hand, the officers and crew were hurried into the enemy's boats. During the voyage ashore some of our men were ordered to man the oars, but the plundering of the sailors still continued, though lessened by darkness. At ten that night they arrived opposite a broad gap in the middle of the sea wall of the castle.

And here their real troubles began. The officers were landed, but as the surf made it difficult to beach the boats, the sailors were unceremoniously thrown headlong into the foaming waves, a few rods from shore, with water up to their armpits, and left to struggle or get ashore as best they could. Dripping, wet and cold, they passed between a row of armed janissaries who lined the beach and then through a spitting, cursing crowd to the castle gate. A winding, dismal passage through which they ascended led into a paved avenue within the castle. This was lined with guards armed with sabers, muskets, pistols and hatchets. A brief halt, and the *Philadelphia's* crew and officers were hurried on through various turnings and flights of stairs, at the top of which they stepped into a scene that must have caused some to imagine they had been transported into the land of the Arabian Nights. From a pitch-dark passage, lit only by the dull glow of their guards' lanterns, the disconsolate three hundred Americans stepped suddenly into a great palatial hall lit with myriad clusters of little oil lamps. The floor was of variegated marble and spread with magnificent carpets. It was a palace of the Bashaw, within his castle.

AT the farther end of the hall was a richly appointed royal divan about four feet above the floor, and inlaid with mosaic. It was covered with a great cushion of the richest velvet, fringed with gold and glittering with bespangled brilliants. On this throne, flanked by a richly clothed guard of officers, sat an imposing individual of about forty, with a long, dark beard that swept his breast. He was dressed in a long blue robe of silk embroidered with gold.

About his rotund belly was a broad diamond-studded belt which held two gold-mounted pistols and from which, by golden chains, hung a scimitar of finest Damascus steel, with a golden hilt, sheathed in a golden scabbard. On his head he wore a richly decorated white turban from which two ostrich plumes waved gracefully. In the center of the turban glistened a jeweled crescent. His manly, majestic deportment was worthy of an Oriental potentate. And such he was—the Grand Bashaw of Tripoli, Yusuf Karamauli, murderer of his brother Hassan and treacherous to his brother Hamet, whose throne he had usurped.

After the pride and curiosity of His Highness was satisfied, the Americans were led away. Bainbridge and his officers, under the immediate surveillance and responsibility of Mr. Nissen, the Danish Consul, were confined in the former American consulate.

ON Bainbridge's request, Mr. Nissen brought word of the crew, whom he said were in prison in a well-ventilated quarter of the Castle—and they were! From the Bashaw's presence, the crew were conducted to a filthy apartment in the castle, with scarcely room to turn around, where for nearly two hours they were kept in their wet clothes. Then some of the Neapolitan slaves, of whom the Bashaw had over one hundred and fifty, brought some of them old, ragged but dry clothes to put on in place of their wet ones, which were never returned. The men were then taken out on to a high balcony, almost opposite the audience hall. One side of this balcony was open to the cold winds; and here our men, many of them still in their wet clothes, were left for an endless night, chilled to the marrow, though as Mr. Nissen had been informed—in well-ventilated quarters of the castle.

This was but the beginning of nineteen dreary months of slavery and torture, during which most of them survived, a few died and some turned Mohammedan. But it was also the beginning of America's heroic fight for the freedom of the Mediterranean.

Colonel Furlong will continue his story of "Our War in the Mediterranean" in the next—the March—issue.

A France

Because this story is so timely and so impressive, we are interrupting the series "The World Was Their Stage," and offering this in its place.

"Now France will die. France is beaten. France is not immortal. France will become a little country, a far-off country to which nobody will ever pay any attention. Her voice will be halting and hoarse and no ear will ever be able to hear it."

—*Il Popolo di Roma*, Sept. 10, 1940.

WHEN the alarm came, when the first bloody spray of war blew across the low hills beside the Meuse, Robert de Baudricourt was riding down the road through the oak forest. With him rode Brother Richard, a wandering fanatic preacher whom Baudricourt was firmly escorting out of his *villenie* or district, as a public menace. Behind him clattered along fifteen men-at-arms, in armor like himself.

Brother Richard was bearded, haggard, tattered, and had wild mad eyes, but he was no whit mad; he was just another man whom the awful desolation of France had driven to strange ways. Baudricourt found him mildly interesting. The stout captain had a humorous bent, though his humor could take an extremely grim turn at times.

Scarred, rock-jawed, massive, Baudricourt had outlived one wealthy wife and married another. For twenty years he had almost daily taken death in his stride, and his stride was still firm. He was more than a mere knightly butcher. He was a practical man and was proud of the fact. This was why he now commanded Vaucouleurs, ten miles to the north, and all this district along the Meuse, for France—when there was no France.

"I warn you, doom is close upon you, enemies ring you in!" cried Brother Richard as they rode. "Short are the days of man, that his nights may be long! Cracking kinglings from their thrones, the bolts fly on to strike at innocence; babes newborn set forth in life in spasmed rage and fear!"

"Preaching hellfire helps not," Baudricourt said amiably. "That's why I'm kicking you out of my lands. Can ye see nothing except utter ruin for us all?"

"Can you?" retorted the fanatic.

Baudricourt's thin, wide lips split in a grin.

"No; but I'm not shouting it abroad in France. A defeatist, that's what you are!"

"France? *Mort salut!*" came the reply. "Such a country no longer exists. The King's dead, the Dauphin is disinherited and driven into the south, an Englishman holds Paris and is King of France. Burgundy, his ally, holds us crushed and bleeding. Why, these very lands of yours are surrounded by enemies on all sides!"

"True." Baudricourt waved his hand at the trees. "Over yonder is a brook, and Lorraine the other side of it. Germans and English are all around; but the Lilies still fly over Vaucouleurs, my good fellow."

"They'll soon fall," said Brother Richard. "The whole country is enslaved and dead and shall so remain, till all such bitterment is sweetened on the fuming mire that blood will make with tears—"

"Oh, dry up!" snapped the captain. "I'm sick of your whine."

STILL, it was all true. He was no fool, and he knew how horribly right this fanatic was.

The Valois king was dead. The Dauphin, implicated in the treacherous murder of the Duke of Burgundy, was a

Forever!

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Pen drawings by
John Richard Flanagan

"There is no king, the Dauphin is a fugitive, the knights and nobles are dead or traitors, the people are enslaved, foreigners have divided the land, an enemy king rules in Paris. France has ceased to exist."

—*Guillaume d'Orly*, 1426.

fugitive criminal holding only a little territory in the south. In this autumn of the year 1424, the English ruled in Paris, holding all the north and west; Burgundy had absorbed most of the other provinces. The French lords had largely turned traitor.

Over the entire country lay a confused welter of blood and ruin. Everywhere was massacre, treachery, assassination. The open lands were pillaged by wandering bands of mercenaries and vagrant soldiery. Law and justice had ceased; the conquerors were tyrants, looting everything that could be carried away. Even the art of war had descended to a murderous slaughter that knew no rules of chivalry or decency—for chivalry too was only a memory.

YET, amid all this horror, there was one gleam of hope, as Baudricourt well knew! The Dauphin had raised one last army. Brave help had come from Scotland, the old ally of France. Breton nobles had come to the aid of the lost cause, troops had been hired from Italy. If one battle could be gained, a little corner of the land might yet be saved from conquest. For this, Baudricourt and a few others like him still endured.

For this, he had saved his few poor villages from rapine; his peasants were not enslaved, they had cattle and harvests, they were a step above the level of beasts. His heavy sword, his heavy hand, had protected them; but he knew how close was the end. He did not deny the facts, but he could not afford to have this wandering fanatic taking the heart out of his people and his soldiers. Hence, he was escorting Brother Richard elsewhere, after his firm fashion. Everything Robert de Baudricourt did was done firmly.

"Messire!" A shout lifted from the men-at-arms. "Messire! A courier!"

Baudricourt drew rein. He saw a man galloping toward them, but knew at once it was no courier—only a peasant from the villages ahead, a peasant mounted on a scarecrow horse close to foundering.

"Messire Robert!" Great-eyed with excitement, the peasant cried out his news. "A man is in Greux, a French knight! He is hurt. He says raiders are hard after him in pursuit. I rode to warn you. . . . Thanks to the saints that I met you so soon!"

"Well done." And Baudricourt, turning calmly to Brother Richard, gave the fanatic one shove that rolled him half out of the saddle. "Dismount quickly . . . that's right. Walk on to the village ahead. It's only a mile. Rejoin us there." He beckoned the peasant. "Here, man, take this horse. Ride on to Vaucouleurs. Order the seneschal to send fifty men to meet me, and to prepare the town for siege. Have the villages been warned?"

"Yes, messire. The kine are gathered and everyone is taking to the islands."

The peasant scrambled into the saddle and spurred for Vaucouleurs. Baudricourt gestured to his men, pricked his steed, and plunged ahead at a gallop, leaving Brother Richard to trudge after.

The oak forest thinned ahead to disclose the roofs of houses; the two vil-

lages of Greux and Domrémy came into view. To the left was the broad sweep of the Meuse, splitting around several islets; and, swelled by the autumn rains, spreading out in shallow ponds beneath the hillside vineyards.

Files of cattle were splashing toward the islands, accompanied by men and women and children laden with bundles —peasants, quick to flee the bloody rapine boded by the advent of any armed men.

Baudricourt, ignoring these, pounded on into the deserted village of Greux, at full tilt.

A few belated peasants were on the run for the river. In the center of the hamlet was the village well; beside it stood a jaded horse, legs apart and head hanging, and in the saddle a man bareheaded, bandaged, most of his armor gone. A child, a village girl of twelve,

"Messire Robert! A man—a French knight! He is hurt. He says raiders are after him. I rode to warn you!"

was handing him a vessel of water from the well; she was apparently unafraid, for she was smiling up at him.

A shout of recognition burst from Baudricourt:

"Gard! Henri du Gard! By the saints, we've not met for six years! Alone?"

"Not for long," said the stranger. "Baudricourt, as I live! Watch yourself, then! A dozen riders are after me, coming fast."

BAUDRICOURT twisted about in his saddle and gestured to his sergeant.

"Jehan! Take four men, ride on, meet these gentry; bring back word of them. The rest of you take shelter among the houses and keep out of sight. You, child!" He snapped his fingers at the little girl. "Get out of here and take safety with your family."

"But, messire, I am from St. Remy's village," she said. "I have to find my younger brother; he is somewhere among the trees with the pigs and—"

"Then for God's love go find him and make yourself scarce!" broke in the captain. She turned and ran off toward the nearest trees.

Baudricourt rode up to the man on horseback and put out his hand. "Greeting, old friend! Come along, dismount from this jaded nag and—"

His words were checked, as he saw the haggard, death-white features beneath the unshaven stubble of beard.

Gard smiled faintly and shook his head.

"No use, Robert; if I got down, I'd never rise again. Dead from the waist down, and the rest of me is chilling fast. Leave me alone. Look to yourself; the enemy are after me."

Baudricourt loosened a leather bottle of wine from his own saddle, a packet of bread and cheese, and held them to the hurt man. He offered no protest; a man must have his own way when death is

upon him. The sergeant Jehan and four riders had clattered out of the village, the other men had disappeared.

"Enemy, you say?" he inquired. "What enemy? This is France!"

"Not for long," said Henri du Gard, swigging at the wine with a sigh of relief. "Ah! That's good stuff. . . . D'ye mean to say you haven't heard the news?"

"What news? How the devil are we to get news, with all pilgrimages stopped, no more peddlers coming through, all travelers waylaid by murder? What news, I ask?"

"Why, news that the pleasant land of France is no more." A grimace shook Gard; the red wine dribbled on his chin like blood. "I was with the Dauphin—a madman, disinherited, done for! We met them at Verneuil—"

"You were with the army!" cried Baudricourt eagerly. "Dear God! A battle, you say?"

"Aye. It was like Agincourt; scarcely a man escaped. Two of us got the Dauphin away. Where he is now, no one knows. The Scots were exterminated; I don't think one of them remained alive. Those English arrows were terrible! The army's gone. France is gone."

He paused to drink again, and went on.

"I'd have reached here alive, but these raiders caught me up yesterday and have been hot after me ever since. They got an arrow into me this morning; it did the work." And as he spoke, he tapped his surcoat. Then he sighed again and relaxed wearily.

Baudricourt scarcely heard. He stood stiffly, staring at nothing; this frightful news left him stunned. "Not for long!" The phrase, reiterated by Gard, was like a death-knell.

So the last hope was destroyed, France had collapsed utterly and finally!

IT had been bound to come, of course. Torn by dissension, by treachery, by internecine strife, the country had gone to pieces. Utterly decadent, it had no rulers, no strong men, no leaders. The people were pillaged, the peasants were mere savages, towns and churches were burned or plundered on all sides; it was the end of the world, as many thought. Now, with the last little hope quite gone, it was certainly the end of France.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?" Baudricourt looked up and spoke quietly.

"Nothing," replied Gard. "I'm in no pain; but I want to die like a knight in the saddle, not lying on the earth like a stricken animal."

"No messages I might send?"

"To whom? I've nothing left. My wife, my family—all destroyed by the Burgundians. My home, my castle, everything. Now I'm passing, and it's rather a relief." The hurt man smiled a little. "I'll bequeath you the task of rebuilding France, Robert."

"You rightly said that France is gone."

"Oh, that has happened before; and it will happen again!"

BAUDRICOURT ignored the words; he thought that Gard's mind must be wandering.

There was a shuffle of feet, and toward the well came Brother Richard, striding along strongly. As he approached, Baudricourt broke into a bitter laugh.

"Well, you're free to go your ways, you ranting rogue! I've other matters afoot. Look at the fellow, Henri! He preaches hellfire and utter loss—and he's right."

Brother Richard halted at the well, drank from the bucket on the coping, and gave them a look that was like a sword.

"I preach only retribution," he said, "and the consuming vengeance that the lords of life bring upon a wicked people! Who is to save France? No one. Small men in great places throw long shadows, but bulk low on the horizon; only by the sun's sinking are they made fearsome. France is lost. None can save her now. She is only a memory."

Baudricourt laughed. "The rogue has a gift of gab, Henri! You have book-learning; make him some answer. Who's to save France?"

"Every question has an answer, if one only knew it," said Henri du Gard. "Perhaps I could tell you the answer to this question, good Robert; they say that the man who has lost everything except life, and is about to lose even that, sees very clearly."

Baudricourt peered up curiously. He knew that this Henri, Baron du Gard, had lived hard and had delved into many things; student, wild roistering knight, a chivalric fellow of the old school that was now dead, Gard had queerly strong abilities. Being himself a practical man of his hands and little able to read or write, Baudricourt had always held Gard in much respect. And now he was living on, and Gard was dying!

Then, all in an instant, every thought was swept away with the clash of armor and the ringing heels of a horse. Sergeant

Jehan came riding hard, to draw rein before them.

"Messire! It is a parley. A knight called the Damoiseau de Craon and ten men-at-arms; he has halted a quarter-mile down the road. He demands permission to bring his men on here to speak with you."

"So! He demands!" Baudricourt's glance flitted about the little market-place and fastened on the village forge. It stood at the right, under two towering oaks. "Let him come, Jehan; his men are to halt yonder by the forge. You and your four men stay here by the well. Keep mounted; keep your swords loose. Go."

Jehan swung around and clattered off. Baudricourt called sharply; one of his hidden men came into sight. Baudricourt went toward him; they met and talked.

Brother Richard drank again from the well-bucket. Gard munched slowly at a crust of bread, and gulped occasionally at the wine-bottle. From somewhere over the oak forest came a thin distant sound of alarm bells from other villages; drifting across the autumn sunlight was the lowing of cattle from the river islets. Baudricourt came back, and his man vanished again from sight.

"Who's this Damoiseau de Craon?" Baudricourt growled. "I can't place him."

"A French knight in English service," said Gard. "He has a bad name for treachery, but he's an able man. Sorry I can't use a sword, Robert; afraid my strength's going."

"No need," Baudricourt rejoined. "Devil take it, I'm a good hand at bandaging wounds—"

"So am I," said Gard, smiling faintly. "Let me go my way in peace."

Baudricourt shrugged and complied. Brother Richard came to the foundered horse, took the leather wine-bottle—empty now—from Gard, filled it with water from the well-bucket, and handed it up again to the dying man. Baudricourt watched this, and wondered, because it was all done in silence, as though the tattered fanatic had read Gard's mind.

NOW they were coming, hoof-beats reëchoing from the empty houses. Jehan and his four men, riding straight across to the well and remaining there in a clump of steel. Craon, alone, full-armed but with his vizor open, more slowly approaching the well—behind, his ten men-at-arms grouping at the village smithy under the big oaks; but not dismounting as hard-riding men should. Instead, they held the saddle, waiting.

Baudricourt walked his horse forward. "A truce? I've heard of you, Craon."

"I've heard of you, Baudricourt." Craon showed white teeth in a smile, and drew rein. "Aye, a truce. . . . I want that man yonder; he's my prisoner. For ransom."

"Congratulations, messire! I thought I was dealing with the Damoiseau de Craon; pardon the error. Naturally, I failed to recognize the good God Himself!"

Craon bit his lip, then broke into a laugh. His face, framed in steel, showed long and narrow and intolerant, the pupils of his eyes surrounded by white: Cruel eyes.

"Aye, these are still your lands, I believe," he said. "Quite surprising, too; I didn't know there were any such lands left in France, with tilled fields, with real cattle and fat ones, and even the village houses unpillaged! It's a novelty, indeed!"

HIS gaze rested on the five men-at-arms, touched on Brother Richard and Gard, and came back to the steady eyes of Baudricourt. He relaxed, and spoke with sudden warmth.

"Let the man go, then; there are greater things afoot. I've come to offer you friendliness and new allegiance, Baudricourt. You've heard that the Dauphin's army was entirely destroyed at Verneuil? You know what that means."

"You flatter me," said Baudricourt. "No one has told me, as yet."

"Well, it means that you're lost, surrounded as your district is by our territory! We'll probably make a treaty with your Dauphin, leave him a little strip to rule in the south, and take the rest. England and Burgundy are now supreme in Europe; they'll be so for the next five hundred years. France is no longer a country."

"Strange!" said Baudricourt. "Her flag was flying over Vaucouleurs this morning!"

"Don't be absurd," Craon said testily. "Henry of England rules France. We've given him allegiance; half the lords of France have done so, the rest are dead. The Dauphin has been declared a criminal, and all oaths given him are dissolved. So give me your hand on it, swear to support King Henry, and you'll not be disturbed in your fief. In fact, I

With the impact of Baudricourt's blow, the steel shivered in his hand: but he felt it drive home, deep through armor and flesh.

can promise you an extension of your lands, and further rewards."

"Rewards? For what?" asked Baudricourt. "Is *reward* the proper word to use?"

Craon's face darkened. "No nonsense, Baudricourt," he said crisply. "I'm offering you security."

"Oh! This is my security." As he spoke, the captain clapped his sword-hilt. "However, I'll grant there's sense in what you say. Eh, Henri? You heard. As a practical man, should I accept?"

THEY looked at Gard. His stubbled face was very white and beaded with sweat, but he could still smile.

"Why, yes!" he replied. "I think you should, undoubtedly. However, I'll make you an offer myself, Robert. May I bid against you, Sieur de Craon?"

"If you can," said Craon curtly. His weary cruel eyes were dangerous.

Gard gestured slightly. "Perhaps, I offer you France, Baudricourt; a France that no longer exists, but that will exist none the less. She shall be yours to work upon and to upbuild. This is as certain as tomorrow's dawn."

Baudricourt frowned. He did not understand these words at all; but he resolved to humor a dying friend.

"Explain," he said. "There's no longer a France for which to fight; this is true. How, then, can France endure? Riddle me this, Henri of Gard, and I'll consider the matter."

From Brother Richard, listening, came a harsh laugh.

"Aye! Play with tricky words, but what are the facts? Evil has ridden this land too long, and retribution is come. It cannot be fended off. France is now

a place where shrinking shadows huddle at the shanks of clowns who stride the valley in which pigs wallow! Retribution has come, has come!"

"You are wrong," said Gard, his voice firming. "Look! Here come two children. Bring the girl to me, friend. Lift her up, that I may show you something."

AS they turned, they saw that the little girl who had disappeared among the trees, was returning. She held by the hand a younger child—a boy; obviously, she had found the brother whom she sought.

Brother Richard called them to him, while Baudricourt looked on frowningly, and the scornful eyes of Craon touched them all, and the five men-at-arms who sat their horses beside the well.

Brother Richard spoke to the child. She smiled, and he lifted her in his arms, and stood beside the dying horseman.

"Robert, you forget something," said Henri du Gard. "Perhaps it is something you do not know. In the days of the Gauls, France was a great nation. The Romans came, destroyed, and built again, built a greater civilization. This in turn was destroyed. France still existed. She became the home of chivalry and song and culture. This has all been wiped away today. But it cannot die. France cannot die. France is still yours, Robert, to fight for."

"I don't see why," Baudricourt said bluntly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Gard smiled at the child, and gripped his saddle-bow to steady himself.

"Why, Robert, look into the eyes of this girl! Do you see nothing there? Purity, innocence—yes, but something more. A thing that cannot perish or change, a thing that must survive all blood and tears and injustice and tor-

ment and damnation! Look in her eyes, Robert; you must see it!"

Puzzled, Baudricourt looked at the child, met her eyes, met her smile.

"Devil take me if I can see anything! Here, here!" He caught Gard's deathly face and swaying figure, urged his horse forward, and passed an arm about the hurt man's shoulders. "Lean against me, Henri—"

"Oh, my stirrups aren't broken yet!" Gard straightened a little, and his quavering voice took on strength. "Robert, you must see it, you must! The will of man to survive; the greatness of man's spirit; the thing that cannot be crushed out of existence—the ideal! The ideal, the intellectual truth—"

He slumped all of a sudden, his voice was gone, and he fell over in Baudricourt's arms. He was dead.

Brother Richard set the child down, reached up, and lowered the limp figure to the earth.

"Take those children to the islet! . . . Get out!" blared Baudricourt. "Quick, or I'll have my men prick you on your way. Quick!"

BROTHER RICHARD gave a hand to each child, and strode away with them. Baudricourt looked down at the dead man, crossed himself, and muttered a prayer. In upon it broke the voice of Craon.

"A touching scene, my dear Baudricourt. Children, a tattered rascal, a dying man! Too bad I wasted so much effort chasing him; I wouldn't have had any ransom after all, eh? Still, you and I have ceased to be impressed by death."

"He was a great man, this Henri du Gard," said Baudricourt slowly. "In his youth he did many foolish things; sometimes that makes a man wise in his later years."

Craon shrugged. "No doubt. However, he's now but a lump of clay, as we all shall be. The main thing is to reach that hopeless state as comfortably as possible, and not until it is necessary."

Baudricourt glowered at him. The man caused a savage resurgence within him, a feeling he could not help or understand.

"What are you driving at?" he growled.

"Your process of thought, if you have one," Craon retorted. "Your reason—to put it on a practical basis that you may understand, Baudricourt, your own immediate future. Are you to live or die?"

The stout captain drew down his brows.

"Is that a threat?"

Craon shrugged as he replied:

"Give me your hand, swear to hold Vaucouleurs for Henry of France! That's wisdom. It's really the only thing you can do. The roads are all closed behind you; ride forward or die!"

Baudricourt grunted. He began to see what was coming, as he had foreseen its possibility long since, and it stirred all his lurking sense of humor. A humor, one must admit, peculiar to him and assuredly of a quaintly grim aspect; but none the less, humor. A smile curved his wide lips as he looked at Craon.

"What was it he was talking about, just now? Some sort of hope for France?"

"I don't pretend to understand his ravings," Craon said disdainfully.

"Well, I don't myself; I was never much good at this sort of argument. Still, if he said it, then that's enough for me," Baudricourt declared amiably.

"Never mind all that. You have five men here; I have ten." Craon smiled thinly and touched his sword-hilt. "Even to you, the implication must be obvious. Come, don't be a stubborn fool, Baudricourt! I like you. Together, we might go far."

"Ha! You spoke the truth there!" Baudricourt grinned. "What's farther than hell?"

"Come, no nonsense!" Craon rapped out the words with sudden vehemence. "Your hand or your sword? Which shall it be?"

The stout captain affected to gape at him, round-eyed.

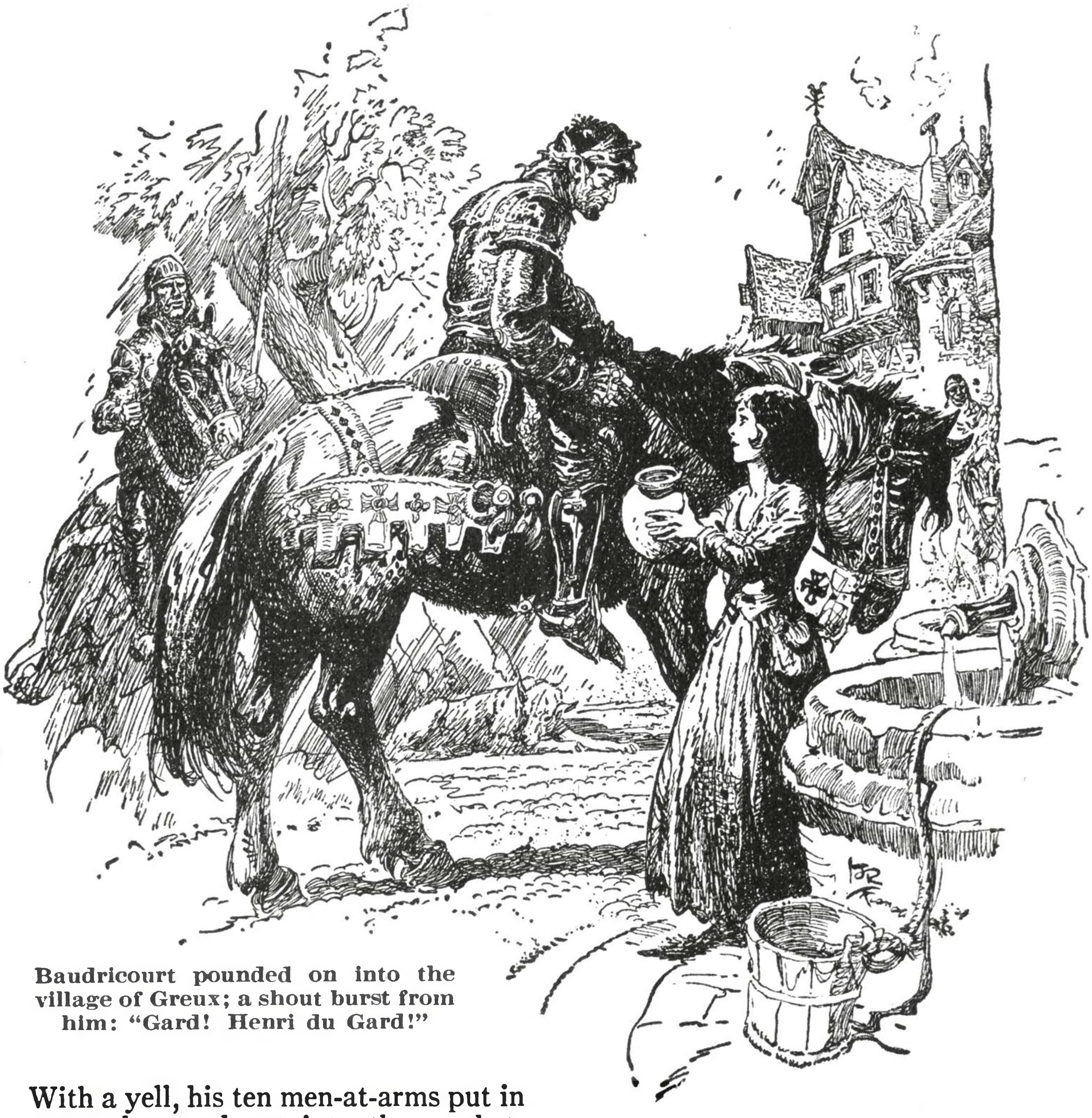
"Why, messire, you'd never break your truce? You, a noble knight, here on your pledged word?"

"Devil take you!" snarled the other. "You're caught, and you know it! I'm giving you the chance to escape with life and honor. Take it, I advise you!"

"You should know," said Baudricourt. "Your advice should be good, I admit. You swore fealty to your prince, and deserted him. You serve the enemy of your country and people; but, black with treachery as you are, you'd never break your knightly word and try to take advantage of a poor honest fellow like me!"

CRAON lost his temper. An oath escaped him. He caught at his reins and sent his horse around in one wild plunge.

"Forward!" His voice drove out at his men, while he freed the blade at his saddle. "Forward! At them, on them, no quarter!"



Baudricourt pounded on into the village of Greux; a shout burst from him: "Gard! Henri du Gard!"

With a yell, his ten men-at-arms put in spurs and surged out into the market-place. A wild laugh burst from Baudricourt. He had his own big sword cleared, and he sent his steed straight at Craon.

"Forward!" he bellowed. "For St. Remy! Forward!"

His long sword clanged on Craon's armor. Blade met blade—huge, heavy, shearing steel that must meet and parry unless a man were to be cut asunder. Here was skill, the skill of years. Craon's edge hammered at the helm of Baudricourt, and he realized he had an opponent who knew his business. The two of them were wholly engaged with each other, blinded to all around, staking life or death on eye and wrist and arm.

But they were not deafened. Those yells had suddenly turned to shouts, to shrill and panicked screams! As the ten men-at-arms came driving at the five beside the well, other men erupted from among the houses—the hidden riders, hurtling out to take the attackers in the rear, cut them to pieces.

Now welled up a clangor of steel on steel, screams of horses and men as sword and dagger bit home, oaths and shouts and groans as man and beast fought in mad frenzy about the well-coping with no quarter asked or given. And, aside from the dusty flurry of the mass, fought the two captains.

FOR once, Baudricourt had met his match, a thing that seldom happened. Almost at the first onset, he cut the reins of Craon, but the latter had trained his steed to be guided by knee and spur; the strategy was lost work. The heavy swords clashed and sparkled; twice Baudricourt reeled under blows that dented his helm, but the steel held. He hewed at the knight's armor-joints, hewed desperately and vainly, while he fended such a fury of attack as he had never before met.

Steel-sinewed as he was, the weight of armor and of sword began to tell. He

called into play all his craft, all his shrewd experience; yet time and again death missed him by a hot breath. He was failing, and knew it. Not his spirit was yielding, but his body was giving down. . . .

Then, in a moment, in the very moment of disaster, came a slim chance.

CRAON, finding himself fallen into his own trap, was a blazing madman; if this aided the frenzy of his attack, it left him unable to await certain victory. He brought down his blade, not at the man, but at the horse; the heavy edge sheared deep into the beast's neck.

And before he could free the sword, Baudricourt struck back—struck with a lift of his body in the stirrups, struck as his horse quivered and leaped in death, struck as he himself went pitching headlong. With the impact of that blow, the steel shivered in his hand; but he felt it drive home at last, deep, through armor and flesh!

Then he was down, crashing in the dust, rolling away from kicking heels and hoofs. Luckily, he was not full armed, else he had been unable to rise. He dragged himself up a little, fumbling for his dagger. His eyes cleared. There was his horse, its blood gushing, in the dust. There was Craon too, dragging in his stirrup, a shard of steel sticking out of his throat as the blood spurted. No need of the dagger now.

And here came a man running, another man—two of his own fellows, pulling him to his feet. Three or four of the enemy had broken clear and were in flight at full gallop, with half a dozen of his men pelting after them; the others were dying or dead. He had lost four men, no more, it proved.

He staggered to the well-coping and sank down there, ridding himself of the dented helm. He was farther gone than he cared to admit. Dully, he watched while the dead raiders were plundered; then, as Jehan brought up the steed of Craon, from whose body the armor was being stripped, Baudricourt nodded and smiled, and was himself.

"A good day's work, Jehan," said he, eying the horse. "A better steed than mine own, and better armor—damned good armor, in fact. Worth a small fortune—Milanese, if I'm any judge! It took all I had to give. . . . Thanks to St. Remy, the last blow won!"

"And a good sword," said Jehan, retrieving Craon's weapon. "Judging by what it did to your helm, it's a very worthy sword, messire!"

"Aye." Baudricourt hefted it with shrewd hand. "You say well. Look out for the body of my friend Henri du Gard! We must take him home for Christian burial. Cart the others out to the edge of the forest; the wolves will rid us of them tonight. Send word to the people that they can return to their villages."

He sighed and leaned back against the well-curb. He was horribly weary and a bit bruised too; even his iron body felt its hurts. His mind drifted; perhaps he had done a foolish thing this day. Perhaps it would have been better to accept what was offered, security and strength and rewards. . . .

"No, by St. Remy!" he muttered. "Gard was right. I don't know just why he was right, I don't know what the devil he saw in the child's eyes, but he was right. I swore fealty to France, and I'll keep the flag of France flying above Vaucouleurs until Satan himself comes to pull it down—and after!"

PRESENTLY he looked up. One of the villagers had come and wanted speech with him—not a man of Greux, but of the other village, named for St. Remy. Baudricourt nodded and looked at the fellow with dull gaze. His head hurt and his eyes hurt.

"Well, well, what is it?" he demanded.

"My children, messire!" came the agonized response. "I was away in the forest, came back to find everyone gone, my children not there. I have not seen them."

"Eh? Eh?" Baudricourt passed a hand across his eyes and looked again. "Why, I should know you. . . . Of course! You're Jacques, from Domremy. . . . Your children? Yes, they're safe. I sent them to the islet. The little girl—what's her name?"

"Jeanne, messire."

"Yes, I remember. A nice name, a nice name," muttered Baudricourt. "Jeanne—and you're Jacques d'Arc, of course. . . . Give me your arm, Jacques. That's right. I must be getting along home. . . . A good day's work, but I'm damned stiff all the same. . . . What he could see in her eyes, I don't know."

He mounted and rode away, mumbling. (A nice name, that of Jeanne d'Arc.)

Another of Mr. Bedford-Jones' historical dramas will appear in our next issue.

Rogues' Holiday

A light-hearted rapscallion gets more than was coming to him.

By FRANCIS COCKRELL

THE roadster poked its shining nose into Maryland and rolled pleasantly through the countryside, the young man driving it whistling cheerful little tunes up into the air for the wind to catch and bear back away from him.

At the drug-store in a tiny town he came to presently, he stopped; and as he entered, a man arose from one of the tables in the interior dimness and came forward. He was a short man, with a cherubic face, and wore a derby and a dark gray suit.

"Mr. Carster?" he inquired politely.

"Why—yes, that's right." Bradford Carster watched the other's face rather guardedly.

But he only nodded, looking up benignly. "I am Jason, sir," he said. "Having told you to inquire the way here, when Colonel Ranken was in town earlier today, he decided it might be more convenient if I remained to direct you personally. If you are ready—"

"Oh—why, sure," Brad agreed. "That was nice of him."

Outside, Jason held the door open for him and then trotted around and got in on the other side. They bowled out of town and on through more of Maryland.

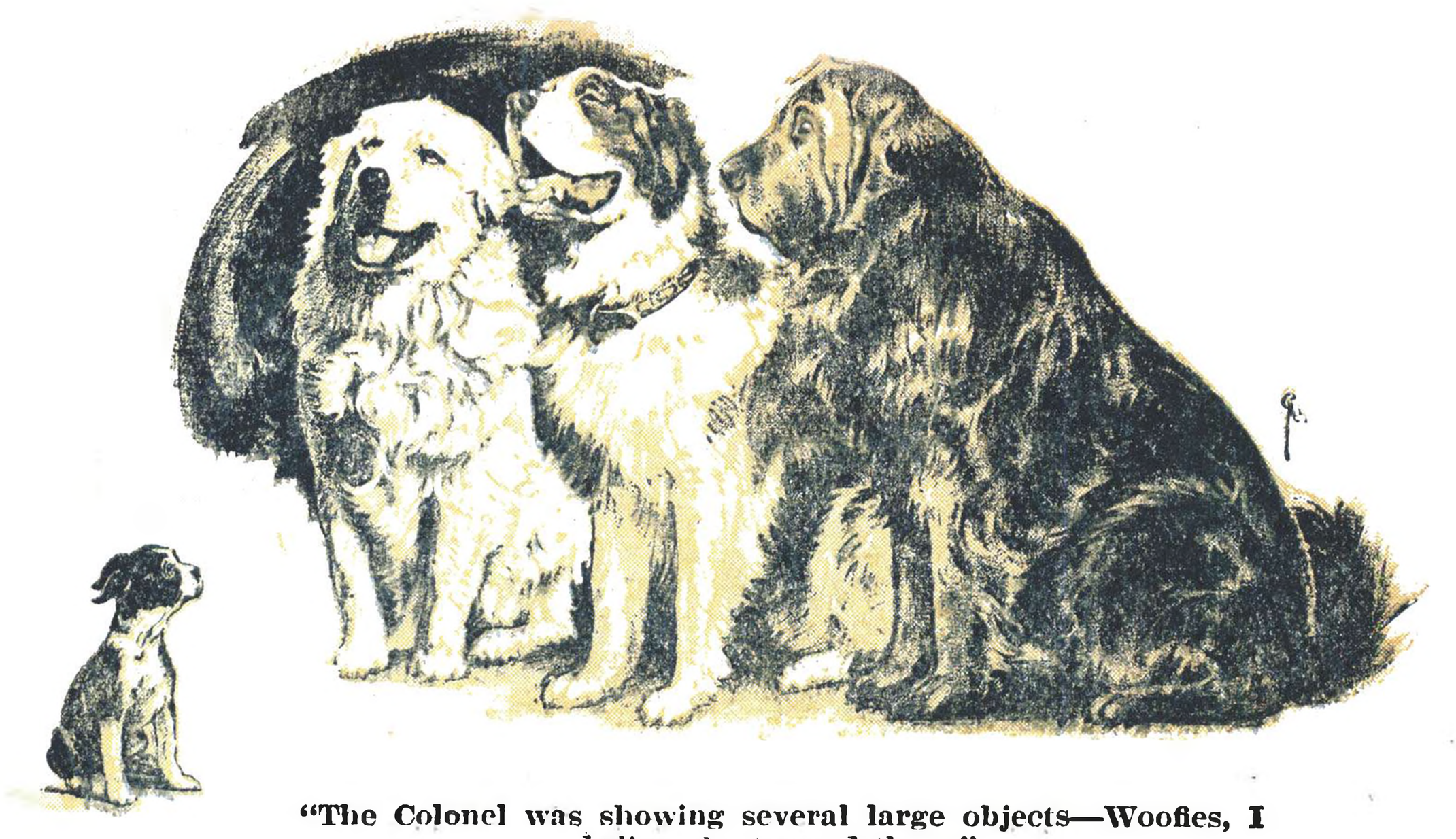
"Lovely country," Brad remarked.

"Indeed it is, sir," Jason agreed, and added a bit sourly, "if one cares for that sort of thing."

"I can take it or leave it alone," Brad said.

It was warm for late fall. Jason removed his derby and patted his brow and rehatted himself carefully before he spoke again.

"I believe," he said then, "that we have met before. Perhaps you recall it, sir? At the Caggarts' about two years ago. It seems, if memory serves me right, you were a bit of a rotter, sir."



"The Colonel was showing several large objects—Woofies, I believe he termed them."

Brad turned a look of mild indignation upon him. "Indeed?" he said coolly.

"Oh, positively, sir! Unquestionably! I was butler at the Caggarts' at the time, and I remember it quite well. You were taking young Merton at billiards. I believe you had some larger swindle stewing with old Mr. Caggart, but it is the billiards I recall most clearly. Your stroke looked so clumsy and lucky, but underneath was actually so practiced and deft. It was delightful," he said reminiscently. He gave Brad and the car an estimating glance. "Well," he said, "you seem to have been thriving since then, sir. Doing nicely, you might say, what?"

"Oh," Brad said, "I get it." Then he looked at Jason suddenly. "But it's no good, my greedy kewpie. If you think simply because I happened to be lucky at billiards once, you can blackmail me—"

"Oh, no sir!" Jason gasped. "Oh, not at all, sir! I wouldn't *think* of *that!*" He looked as aghast as if accused of grave-robbing, and terribly hurt.

"Then why bring it up?" Brad asked a bit testily. "Even if you weren't in error about me, which you are of course, why bring it up if you didn't intend—" He stopped, fixing Jason with an icy gaze. "I do hope you're not a gossip!"

"Oh, no sir!" Jason again hastily assured him. "By no means. But there *was* something I had—well, you see, sir, I thought—" He ran a finger around inside his collar before he continued: "That is, if you *had* been doing well, I thought possibly you might be considering—a valet—and that you might consider—my application, sir." Jason was regarding him with a sort of pink, anxious look.

Little crinkles formed at the corners of Brad's eyes. "I don't get it," he said. "Why me?"

"I suppose," Jason said, "that I must simply have a disreputable streak in me, sir. I don't know why, but there has always been this shady side to my nature which I cannot eradicate—always this deep, keen longing to be valet to some young gentleman not strictly on the up-and-up, but at the same time, one not an out-and-out crook, if you get the distinction, sir. Someone, in short, like yourself, sir."

"What makes you think I'm like that?" Brad asked.

"Oh, you—you just are, is all, sir. And the way you handled young Merton, for instance, taking him only for three hundred, which he could afford, even though the temptation to clean him entirely must have been great—the irritating, repulsive little twerp!"

"Hmmm," Brad said, keeping his eyes on the road.

"Probably, too," Jason added judicially, "the cinema has influenced me to a degree. Mr. Eric Blore and Mr. Ernest Cossart, particularly, when they have been gentlemen to somewhat shady gentlemen on the screen have—oh, they have seemed to be *enjoying* it so, if you see what I mean, sir! They seemed to be having such a *lovely*, exciting time, and to be such a help to their masters in their underhanded pursuits."

AFTER a moment Brad turned and looked at Jason; then he grinned. "Jason, it's a deal! You see, you sort of fill out a picture of mine, too."

Jason was delighted. "Oh, splendid!" he said. "Oh, splendid, sir!"

"By the way," Brad said, "I just met Colonel Ranken, at the dog-show. Benton Griggsby introduced us. The Colonel was showing several large objects himself—Woofies, I believe he termed them."

"Newfies, sir," Jason said. "A diminutive for Newfoundland. Not a bad dog, if one cares for bulk."

"Uh-huh," Brad said. "Anyhow, I admired the fellows, and we were soon bosom pals, and he said he had lots more, and I should come down and see them. And I said I'd love to, and he said this week-end by all means, and here I am. Is there any family," he asked, "besides the Colonel?"

"Well, sir," Jason said with some feeling, "briefly, yes."

PRETTY soon, which was about four o'clock in the afternoon, they turned in between big stone pillars. There were also many rods of those white wood fences that look so swell, green rolling fields, and at the end of a mounting drive, among a bunch of big trees on a hill, a big white house with columns across its front, and on its porch an old gentleman with a sort of curve to him, starting at his ankles and going all the way up, so that from the side he looked like half a parenthesis. He had a shock of thick silky hair, and a pair of bright but somewhat vague and oddly darting blue eyes.

"What a lay-out!" Brad murmured under his breath to Jason as he got out. He went around the car, grinning broadly, holding out his hand. "Colonel Ranken! How are you, sir?"

"Fine, dandy," Colonel Ranken said, shaking Brad's hand. "This is Millicent," he went on, as daughters began coming out of the door onto the porch. "And this is Laura, and this is Sarah, and this is Doris." These weren't just daughters, either; these were luscious-looking high-class daughters, if Brad had ever seen any, starting about thirty and working down to Doris, somewhere just past twenty.

"How do you do, how do you do, how do you do, how do you do?" said Brad. "How do you do it?" he added to the Colonel.

"Henrietta," the Colonel went on, as around the corner of the porch came a number in overalls, eating an apple, with a smudge on her nose, and hair that was loose and curly, just sort of growing out of her head, you might say, without anyone to tell it which way to grow.

"This is Bradford Carster, my dear," the Colonel said.

"Dad, where is that spray stuff?" said Henrietta.

"Unnnffh!" said Brad, weakly and unintentionally, but she looked at him then.

"Never mind the spray stuff," she murmured to her father, and reached out a hand and took one of Brad's in it, and led him toward the door. "I guess I'd better show you to your room," she said, leading him through the door, hanging onto his hand all the time and looking up at him as they went, with blue eyes as vague and bright as her father's, as she now and then took a musing nibble from the apple. . . .

Jason was helping him dress, but Brad was hardly aware of it; he stared vaguely here and there, but he couldn't see a thing except what was inside his head.

"Jason," he said, "why, Jason, that girl has got—why, she's the most—Jason, other girls simply can't—just the way she walks is—and then that look in her eyes—she's absolutely the most—why, Jason, there just isn't any question about it."

The first three or four times this had happened, Jason had contrived some reply; now he just held Brad's trousers out to him.

"Imagine," Brad breathed, "finding something like her on a farm!"

"An estate, sir," Jason corrected mildly.

"It's a farm to me," Brad said. He went to the window and stood looking out, down toward big barns where there were riding-horses and dairy cattle, and on across fields green with pasture or gold with crop to the long orchard rows. "If you raise stuff," he said, "it's a farm, and it's work."

"YOU sound rather bitter, sir," Jason said, not in a prying tone, but with an evident readiness to listen.

"I grew up on one," Brad said. "Jason," he went on, "out in Missouri, when I was a kid, I used to walk along behind those damn' mules when it was hot—daylight till dark, Jason, and heat you wouldn't believe, work you wouldn't believe—and I'd think about when I was grown up; I'd have a Rolls roadster and a manservant like you, and clothes and an easy way of living—never turn a hand, Jason, just live by my wits and let the other guy hustle and toil, bound by conventional morality. Now I've got it—I've got it all; and what happens?"

"You've made yourself as you are now —from a farm lad?" Jason asked admiringly. "Most remarkable!"

Brad shrugged. "Just keep your eyes open, go to the right places, listen to the right people, read the right things, work at it and don't try to take it too fast. It's not much of a job. But now," he repeated, "I've got it, and what happens?" And he began answering himself before Jason got his eyebrows more than halfway up in an interested look.

"I run into a girl like this," he said bitterly. "That's what. Just right now, just this very minute, with everything perfect, here comes this matchless, incredible creature. It's punishment, I guess, for being a heel, Jason, a rogue. I can't even hope for her; I can't even dream a dream. She couldn't see a guy like me; even if she could, there's nothing I could do about it. I couldn't let her throw herself away on a number like me. I tell you, Jason, it's pretty grim: fate's trumped my trick with a grisly ace."

Rather than agreeing with him, Jason seemed quite pleased about something. "There you are, sir," he said. "That's what I meant. The heart of gold beating beneath the ruthless, grasping exterior. I knew you were that way. You wouldn't swindle anyone for more than he could afford, for instance, or anyone who didn't think he was cheating you. It's that same sort of—sort of *Robin Hood* streak in you, sir, that wouldn't let you marry Miss Henrietta. Oh, most gallant, sir!"

"Hell," Brad said, "she's so wonderful, I couldn't even defraud anyone in her family! Except," he added gloomily, "possibly a few hundred for expenses, maybe."

"Of course," Jason said. . . . "There, I think that does it, sir."

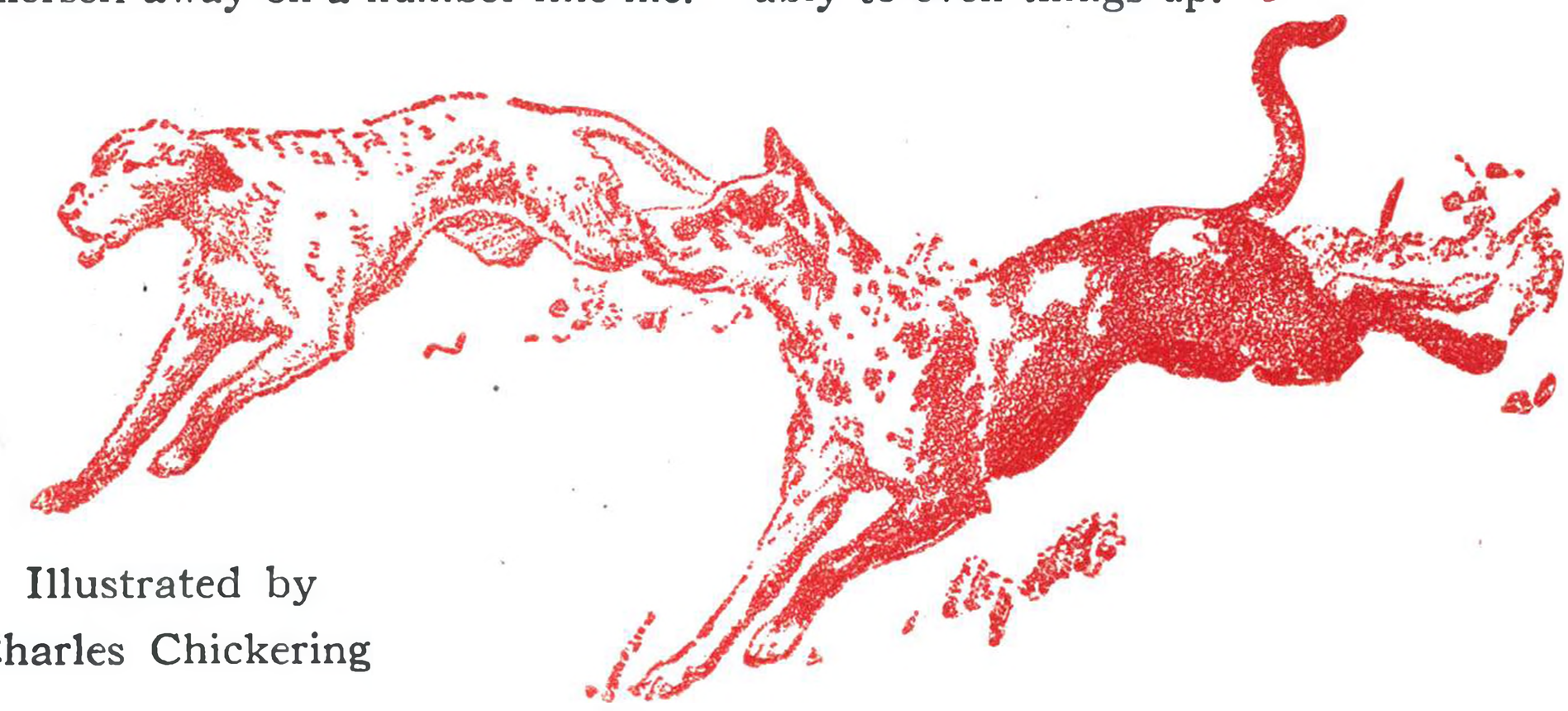
Brad stood in front of the mirror and surveyed himself. "Well," he said, "not bad for a farmer, I guess. That old unmistakable look of class, of the gentleman, anyhow, eh, Jason?"

"Oh, much more than that," Jason assured him. "No real gentleman ever looked that much like a gentleman, sir. You're better than good."

"Hmmm," Brad said. "Well—better watch me, then; don't let me get *too* good, Jason."

SWIRLING, she descended the steps; or maybe it was just that looking at her made Brad's head swirl; at any rate, the effect was of swirling, and that's what counted. Her family and the others seemed somewhat impressed also.

In addition to Colonel Ranken and the four other daughters, there were Mrs. Ranken, two brothers of Mrs. Ranken's, named Ralph and Alph, and a sprinkling of other guests, chiefly men invited probably to even things up.



Illustrated by
Charles Chickering

It was just as they were coming in from the long side porch, where they had had cocktails: She had on an evening gown of some kind of white stuff that looked sort of like fuzz or smoke or mist or something, swirling around and after her; with that beautiful, live, eager face above it, the effect was incredible. "She looks like a hot angel," Brad thought; "what do you know about that, a hot angel!"

"How nice, dear, to see you out of those overalls!" her mother said.

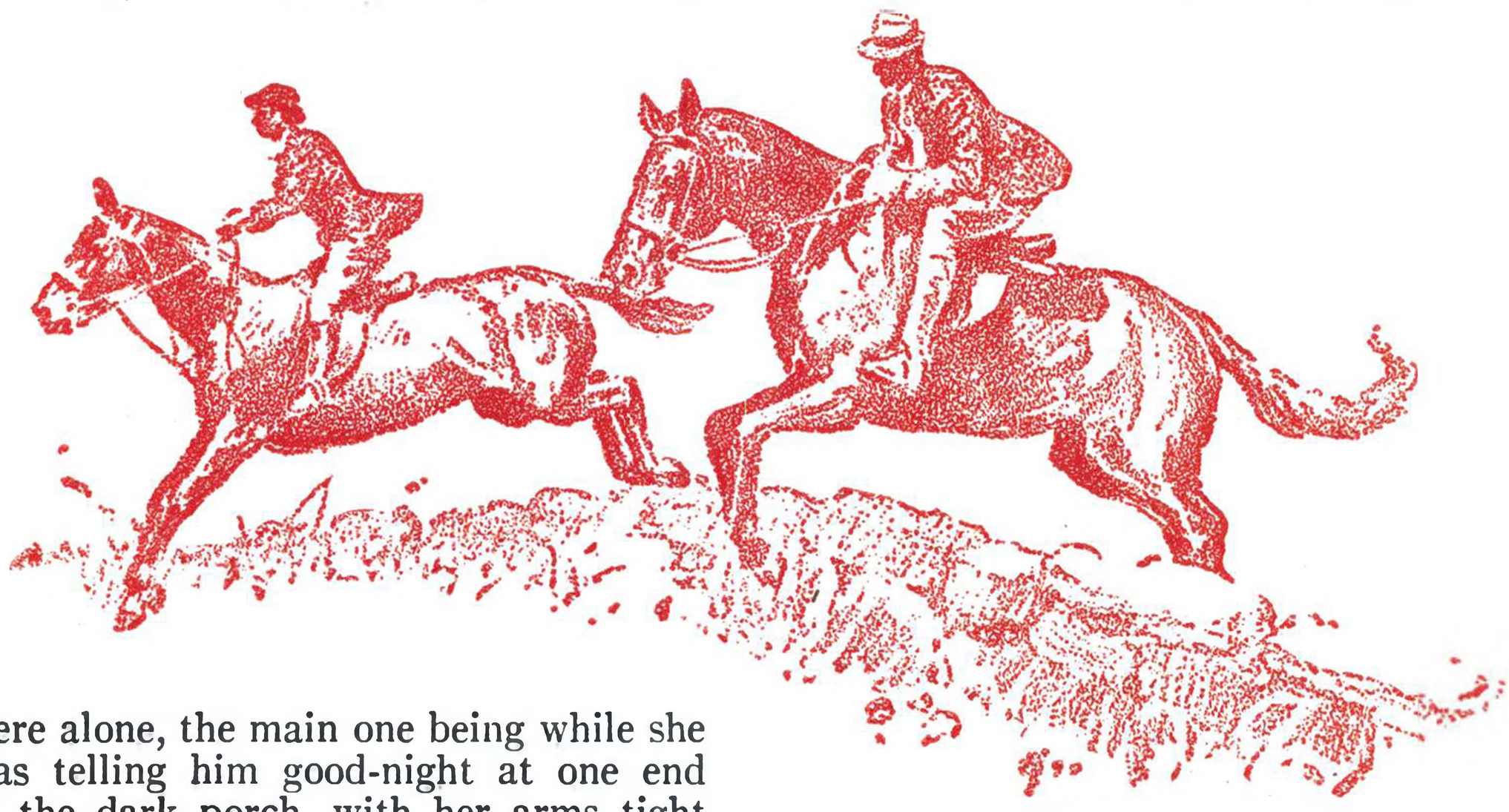
"Yes," Laura agreed, "you're no blot on the landscape, really, when tubbed a bit, *et cetera*."

Her father met her at the foot of the steps and tucked her arm through his. "Charming, my dear," he said. "Charming."

She just smiled sort of dreamily. "I thought Mr. Carster might like it," she said, slipping her hand from her father's arm and through Brad's, at which point

Brad went into an open-face long-term trance, his only retort being a muffled item which sounded as much like "*Gulunk*," as anything.

There was a good deal of sitting around and having highballs and talking and singing and dancing that night, with a flock of large dogs weaving a pattern through everything; but Brad was aware only of Henrietta, and kept as close to her as he could, which was no trouble, since she did not try to evade him practically at all. It was pretty good and close too, a couple of times, when they



were alone, the main one being while she was telling him good-night at one end of the dark porch, with her arms tight around his neck. His own arms were not waving aimlessly in the atmosphere.

"But it's hardly midnight," Brad said.

"I know, but I have to get up and milk."

"You mean cows?" Brad said. "How many?"

"About forty, but we have a machine; I just supervise."

"I'll be there," Brad said.

HE was, too, and after that they had breakfast together, and then went riding. Being Maryland, there was a good deal of riding during the day, of course, but Brad and Henrietta didn't wait for the others.

They went off with a Great Dane and an Irish wolf-hound loping along for company, and didn't get back until late for lunch. They went all over the estate, which was most considerable, and Henrietta showed him this and that. She seemed to know something about it all, but not too much.

By the time Brad went upstairs after lunch to change to his swimming-trunks, he was in a bad way. It was plain that love had knocked him kicking. He not only couldn't think of anything but Henrietta: he didn't want to think of anything but Henrietta; and besides that, she deserved it. She was like no other girl; she was all girls, in overalls, in evening dress, in riding-habit; at a dozen different times she was a dozen different girls, and every time she was just the right one, too.

Merely discovering that she existed, and thinking how sad it was he could never win her, had been bad. Now it was much worse; for now it was pretty evident that she looked on him with more than mild favor, and if she was to be saved from throwing her life away on such as he, then he was the one who would have to do the saving.

A tall order, he thought, as he went down to the pool. A wonderful chance for failure there. Things sure were ghastly.

She was sitting on the edge of the pool waiting for him, dressed in a swimming-suit which confirmed some suspicions he already had, and left nothing whatever to be desired but Henrietta.

A Newfoundland, and Great Pyrenees, both huge and almost identical, except that one was jet black and the other snow white, swam with them and chased sticks.

"Mr. Gladstone will chase me," she told him, and Brad threw her out into the pool; and sure enough Mr. Gladstone, the Newfie, swam out and took her gently by the arm and towed her to the bank, looking modestly proud and capable about it.

"He loves to save lives," she said. "We used to have to lock his father up sometimes, because he saved lives so hard no-

body could swim. And if there was a big crowd, and he couldn't keep everybody pretty well saved, he would get so worried and frantic. He almost had a nervous breakdown once."

They moved to a table under a big umbrella and had highballs with the Colonel and Ralph, watching the other daughters and the assorted young men who had just converged on the pool. Brad told the Colonel he certainly did have a stunning batch of daughters.

"You'd think some of 'em would get married, wouldn't you?" the Colonel inquired. "Sooner or later! I always try to keep a bunch of young men around handy, but it never seems to do much good. They sure eat a lot and wear a lot of clothes," he added plaintively. "Dogs are 'way cheaper."

ALPH came along and mixed himself a highball and sat down with a deep sigh. He was probably tired, the Colonel said; he ran the place. He had a talent that way.

"How you going to come out this year, Alph?"

"Under ten," Alph said proudly. "I'm sure of it."

"It's science," the Colonel said. "He's scientific."

"You mean you'll make under ten something?" Brad asked politely.

Alph looked pitying. "Lose," he said. "You don't make anything on farms if you run them right," he explained patiently. "We lose less than ten thousand this year."

"Ow!" Brad yelped. He couldn't help it; it just got him. "Why, with a lay-out as diversified as this, you ought never to lose. And with prices the way they are now—"

Alph regarded him mildly a moment and then remarked to Ralph and the Colonel: "One of those radicals, I guess. Probably wants to overthrow the Government."

But Henrietta was interested. "Are you sure?" she asked. "Really, could you *make* money on it?"

Brad shrugged. "Sure. There's no get-rich-quick about it, and there's lots of work. But people do it, you know."

"Gee," Henrietta said, "that's very interesting."

Presently she drifted off toward the house with a couple of young men and the Newfoundland following her.

"What business are you in, young radical?" Alph inquired politely.

Brad's reply was more or less automatic routine; he wasn't really thinking about it. "Well," he said, "I guess I'm looking for a job. I thought I was fixed up with some oil-stock I bought—the man was sure there was oil there. But now I just heard there isn't any oil at all. Nothing but manganese," he added sadly, "whatever that is."

"What!" Colonel Ranken squeaked. Then he quickly became very casual.

"Jason," Brad said, when Jason came in while he was dressing for dinner, "honestly, Jason, this is the damnedest family I ever saw: Alph losing dough on the farm, and all I do is just *mention* the oil-stock-manganese gag to the Colonel, and I swear it, Jason, he practically took the stuff away from me. Look!" He waved a check for twenty thousand dollars before Jason. "Can you believe it?"

"Oh, easily, sir," Jason said.

"I feel kind of guilty," Brad said. "You know."

"Not guilty enough to return the check, I trust?" Jason said anxiously.

"No, not that guilty. But guilty."

"I wouldn't worry about it, sir," Jason said. "The Colonel will never miss it."

"Maybe not. But just the same, Jason, if you're going with me, don't lie abed in the morning. I'll probably be off with the dawn." He shook his head. "I don't trust myself," he said darkly, "around that girl. No telling what I might do."

But he'd have this one more night, this final fling, these last few hours to sample ecstasy before he faded sourly into the morning mist.

It was quite a night, too. Because it was all Henrietta, as far as Brad was concerned, and *vice versa*. Others did various things: some danced; some rode in the moonlight; some sat by the pool; some played bridge; some played ping-pong; and Brad and Henrietta followed several of those pursuits too, but they were never quite sure at the time which one it was. It never seemed to matter.

There were a good many highballs involved, and no little champagne, an idea of Henrietta's with which Brad fell in readily; for though she was likely to float nearly any time, he found that when he was slightly moistened with champagne, she floated in more wondrous ways than ever.

They sat by the pool. "Kiss me," he said, "because I can't breathe when you don't. Or do."

She did. "Have some more champagne," she said.

They danced. "I'm tired," she said. "Let's go sit on the porch." They did, stopping on the way to fill their glasses.

(You had better be careful, my beautiful beauty, you better watch out; I cannot marry you, rogue that I am; but rogue that I am, I am likely to anyhow, if you don't watch out. Ah, I won't, but wall-eyed codfish, what tremendous restraint it requires not to take advantage of you!)

At a noise like "*ka-sloop,*" he turned his head to note a St. Bernard, with one neat curl of his tongue, emptying his glass.

"Hemingway is the only one that likes champagne," she said. "Isn't that funny? Come on, we'll get some more."

"Maybe we ought to play bridge," Brad suggested cautiously, "or talk to your good parents, or something. Maybe," he added tepidly.

"On a night like this?" she said. "Look at that moon." She leaned close against him, beside him, her hand in his as she stared up at the moon hanging above the pool.

"I know," Brad admitted heavily, bringing his own eyes up to it, and cringing slightly at the added romantic impact it gave everything. This was awful. It made everything so very difficult.

"We'll go for a ride," she said. "In a roadster, with the top down. Come on. I'll drive." She led him off to get some more champagne.

BRAD came downstairs peering around corners. It was barely daylight. No one else was about. He sneaked around a little and finding Jason, he worked his mouth a time or so this way and that, to sort of free it up so he could talk through it.

"Are you ready?" he asked. "I think we'd better beat it. If I hang around here any longer, I'll give her old man back the twenty grand, or no telling what."

"I've packed for both of us, sir," Jason said.

"They can get along without you all right?"

"Yes, indeed. There are plenty of other servants; more than necessary."

"All right. Bring the stuff down, and I'll be sneaking the car out."

Soon they were bowling along the highway, back toward New York. Two days ago, Brad thought, he came along here, blithe and care-free; now he went back, blind sick of everything, anything.

To Brad, she was like no other girl.

"Jason," he said dolorously, "I am a wastrel and a louse."

"Yes sir!" Jason assured him. "You certainly are!"

"You don't have to be so damned hearty about it!" Brad said. "After all, I could have been worse. I could have married her, probably. At least, I didn't marry her."

"Oh," Jason said, "but you did, sir."

There was a mile of silence.

"Oh," Brad said then; "I did, huh?" More silence. Then: "So that's what I was doing—how I happened to wake up in her room!"

Presently he turned the car around....

Six-thirty on Sunday morning was a terrible time to be up, anyhow; and when you added to that a fairish hangover and the task that now lay before him, you had a mighty bitter combination, Brad thought; and the thought was reflected in his face as he came into the breakfast-room where Henrietta had just seated herself.

She smiled at him brightly. "Hello. Have some breakfast?"

"I guess not," he muttered. "I mean—look, Henrietta, it seems that last night I sort of inadvertently wasn't watching myself, and I sort of inadvertently took advantage—well, I sort of inadvertently married you, it seems, and—"

"Inadvertently, hell!" she said, plucking a grape from a bunch on her plate. "Do you realize how much champagne I had to pour down you, plus highballs,

"Mr. Gladstone will chase me," Henrietta said; and Brad threw her out into the pool.

before you'd give in?" She popped the grape into her mouth. "Have you milked yet?"

"Henrietta," Brad said, "you don't understand. I mean, well, frankly, you see, I'm just a rascal; I go around mulcting people. I live by my wits; I have no honor, no stability. You see? I am poison. Look!" And he handed her her father's check. "I even fleeced your dear old dad; that's the kind of rotter I am. I guess," he added, "you can have it back, now. It would be kind of ill-bred to keep it now, I guess. But you can see what I'm like underneath."

"Oh, that's all right," she said. "It isn't any good. I'm the only one that can write good ones, and not for very much. We decided on me," she explained, "because I hate to write them so, and anyhow, I never can find a pen."

"Do you mean," Brad said groggily, "that that sweet, kind old gentleman gave me a phony check for my stock?"

"Well, if the stock was good," she pointed out, reasonably, "he could sell it, and make the check good. And of course if it wasn't, he didn't lose anything, did he?"

"But," Brad said, waving one hand and then the other, "but—why, Henrietta, that amounts to sharp practice! Why, that's no less than—" He stopped uncertainly. "But this place," he said, "and the way you live and—and—everything. You can't be—"

"Oh, that," she said. "You see, a brother of Dad's left him the place, and a lot of money too. But I guess we just weren't used to money, and nobody thought to watch it very close, and—well, you see? But I guess it's all right. We've still got the place, even if it is mortgaged some, and I guess we can live on it all right, can't we?"

"Live on the place?" Brad repeated weakly. "But Alph is *losing* on it. Who would—how—" He broke off, staring at her, little crinkles coming around the corners of his eyes.

HENRIETTA put a grape into her mouth, and then another. "Well," she said, "you see,—well, you did say you could make money on it, you know—and since we're married, and—and all—"

Her voice trailed off, and she watched him uncertainly, absently tucking another grape into her mouth. He just sat and stared at her through narrowed eyes.

"It was—it was lucky, wasn't it?" she tried. "Alph—I'd been trying to take over—and then you—just at this time. It was sort of like—fate, wasn't it?" A winning smile appeared on her face briefly, nervously. "Or maybe not," she murmured.

Brad spoke then, and it was in a low, grim monotone. "Of all the sneaking," he said, "of all the underhanded, dirty, low, scheming—*why*," he bellowed suddenly, "you just lured me into marrying you, so you'd have somebody to run your old farm! Of all the mean—you don't love me—and here I was feeling sorry, guilty, thinking I had—"

He rose suddenly and shoved his chair back. "Well, if you think I'm going to be patsy for a bunch of screwballs, you've got another think coming, snookums. If you think I'll run your old farm, you're nuts. I don't like farms! I hate farms! And furthermore, you certainly have

played a hell of a snide trick on an innocent, trusting heart. "Why," he finished chokingly, "you—you *deceived* me!"

And with this crushing indictment, he spun on his heel and stalked out the door, out onto the porch, down the steps and around to the roadster. He got in and bellowed for Jason.

In a moment Jason came, carrying two more suitcases.

"I guess you'll have to sit in the rumble, Jason," Henrietta said.

"Yes, madam," Jason answered respectfully.

She got in beside Brad.

"Get out of here," he ordered grimly. "You don't love me, and you just married me because—"

"Hush," she said. "Of course I love you. Besides, how do I know you can farm? All I have is your word for it. Maybe you can't farm at all. It didn't hurt anything to try, did it? . . . Well, let's go."

Now Brad had his eyes squinted up again, staring at her. "You mean," he said finally, "you mean you're sure 'nough intending to go off with me now, not knowing where I'm headed, or what we'll be doing, or how we'll be living, or anything?"

"Well, for heaven's sake, Brad," she said, "I married you, didn't I? Whither thou goest I shall go. You know, that kind of stuff. What did you expect?"

For a few moments he just sat there. It was kind of hard to get, right away. This was his wife. This strange, marvelous, unpredictable kid was his wife!

SHE wasn't unpredictable, though, or strange, once you caught on. Merely marvelous. She simply knew what she wanted, and she went straight ahead after it; and if it didn't cost anything, fine; and if it did, she was ready to pay. It sure put him on the rack, though.

He sighed heavily and stared off across the fields.

Then he turned suddenly and leveled a finger at her. "I'll tell you one thing," he said. "There's going to be plenty of changes made around here; there'll be lots less servants and farmhands, and a couple of uncles learning to run tractors, and some work and less frivolity. Farming isn't something you can do in your spare time, see! And if I—" Suddenly he stopped, and a look of agony crossed his face. "Oh, Lordy, Lordy," he moaned, "just think of it—all my life ahead of me, running a farm! And it's so *big* and —and *farmy*. Damn it, it just doesn't seem fair."

"You run along and milk," Henrietta said soothingly, "and then you'll feel better."

"*Me* milk!" he said. "What about you? Why don't—"

"Run along, now," she said. "I'm sick of milking. After all, why do you think I married you?" She kissed him lightly on the tip of the nose.

BRAD was looking at her again with that uncertain squint; but before he spoke, Jason coughed.

"I hope you'll understand, sir," he said, "if, under the circumstances, I should—uh—resign soon. A card-sharp of my acquaintance has made me an attractive offer; and while he has by no means your—"

"*Jason!*" Brad wailed. "Jason, don't *you* desert me! Here I am with a hangover, Jason, and my whole world crumbling on my head; marrying a lazy wife, and eleven hundred acres to farm, and no dough and two nutty uncles, and four sisters to marry off, and I don't know what all! Jason," he implored piteously, "leave me *something* from the wreckage of my dreams. Don't *you* quit me!"

Jason's cherubic face became a field for warring emotions; it was pink, as if with great pressure behind it.

"Oh, go on, Jason," Henrietta said. "Be a sport. He's a nice guy."

"One must admit," Jason said, "he makes a stirring plea."

"Look, Jason," Brad urged wildly, "we'll think of something. Some oil swindle—we'll salt the land—or we'll raise horses—all kinds of low practice is possible in horse-trading. We'll be *unspeakable*, Jason. I *promise*."

"Well," Jason said reluctantly, "we might *try* it, sir. You do make it sound attractive."

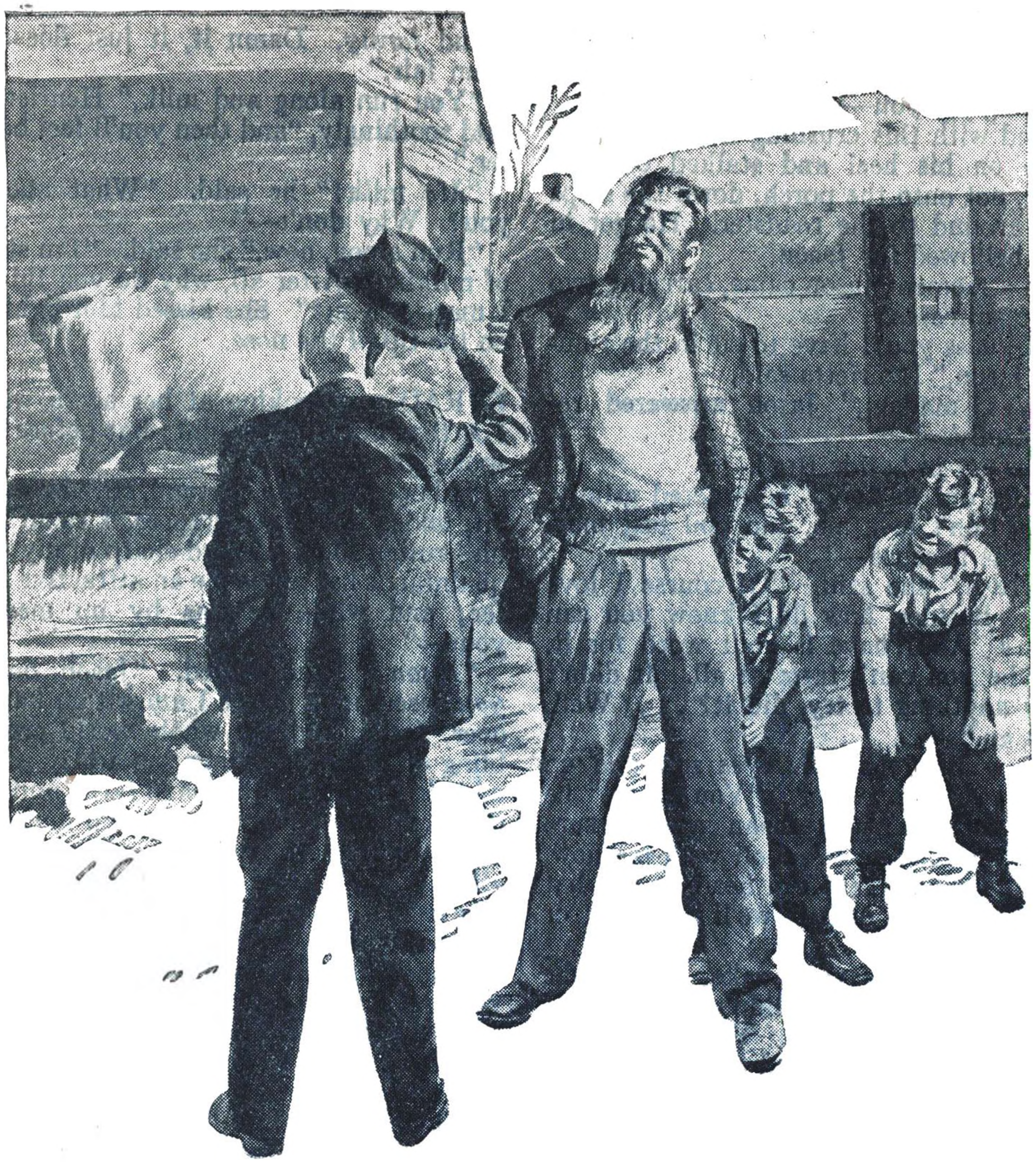
Brad relaxed. "Ah," he said. "Well, that's *some* better." He got out of the car. His hangover seemed not quite so bad.

"Mrs. Carster," he said firmly, "I expect you to see that my breakfast is waiting for me when I come in. A large, field-hand's breakfast," he added.

"Yes, darling," Henrietta agreed contentedly.

Brad decided that his hangover was in fact practically gone. He straightened up a little.

"Jason," he said briskly, "my stool and bucket! It's time to milk."



The Invisible

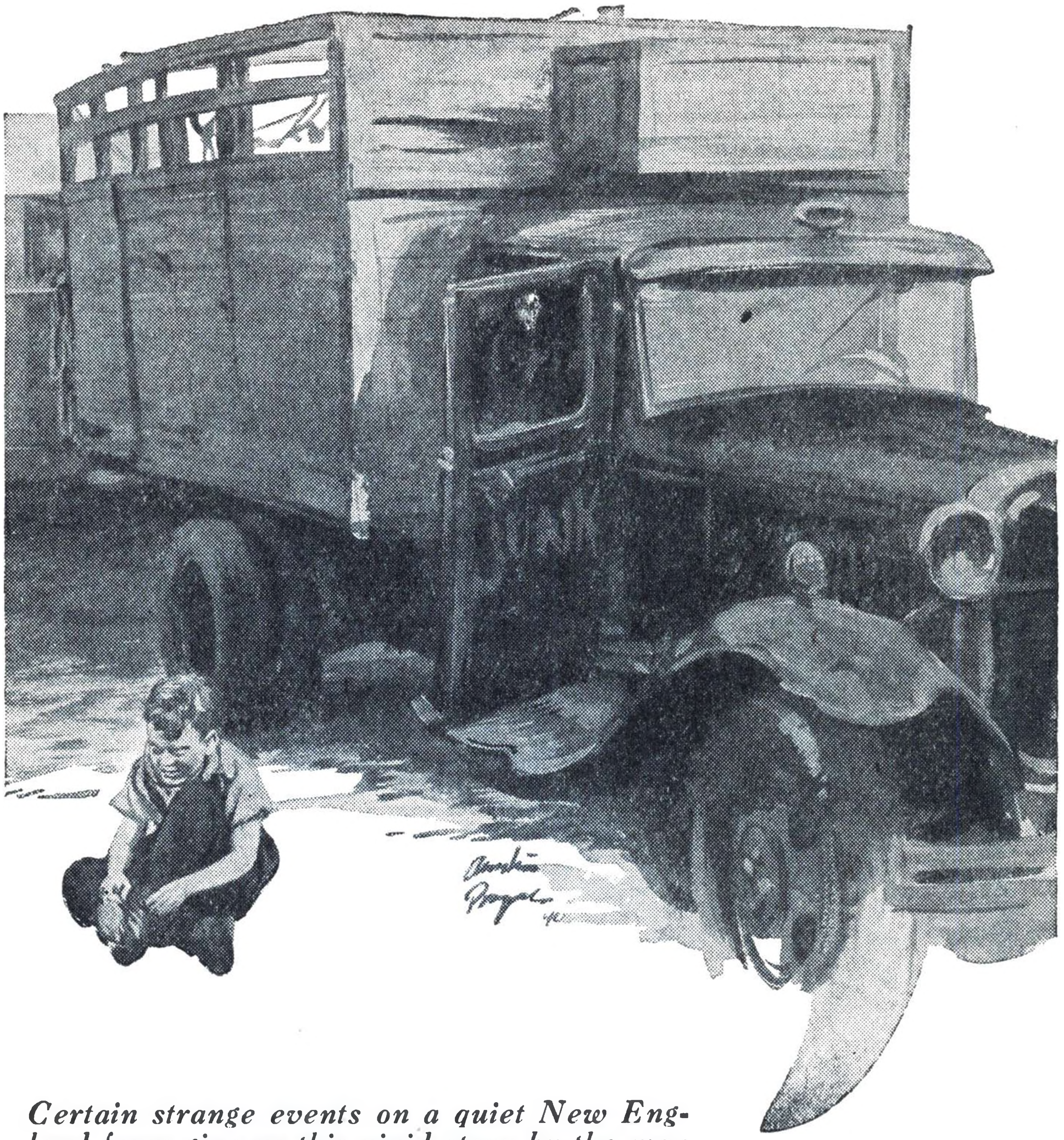
HE came in midsummer, a portable godsend riding in a truck. His *entr'acte* music was the tinny cacophony of cocoa-cans strung up for bells. Compared to his baying basso, the fabulous voice of Stentor the herald was but an effeminate lisping. And when he climbed down from his cab and stalked across my lawn, he towered over me, his beard waving in the breeze.

"Old iron, sir? Rags, feathers, lead pipe?" And when I did not reply directly, he added *sotto voce*, coming nearer: "Or practically any dam' kind o' thing you can't use and want shet of."

So I told him about the beds in my bushes. . . .

This fifty-acre farm of mine on Mudge Mountain has been a mixed blessing these many years since I inherited title. Largely it has lain idle and running to underbrush, though some years I have rented out grazing privileges. I have scarcely used the place save to come up for a week or two in summer-time, as much to escape the heroic good intentions of Sarah Snogget, my housekeeper, as to recapture moments of my almost-forgotten youth.

A few years ago I leased the place to an enterprising citizen who turned it into



Certain strange events on a quiet New England farm give us this vivid story by the man who wrote "The Mummy of Phineas Clough."

Wife

By
FULTON GRANT

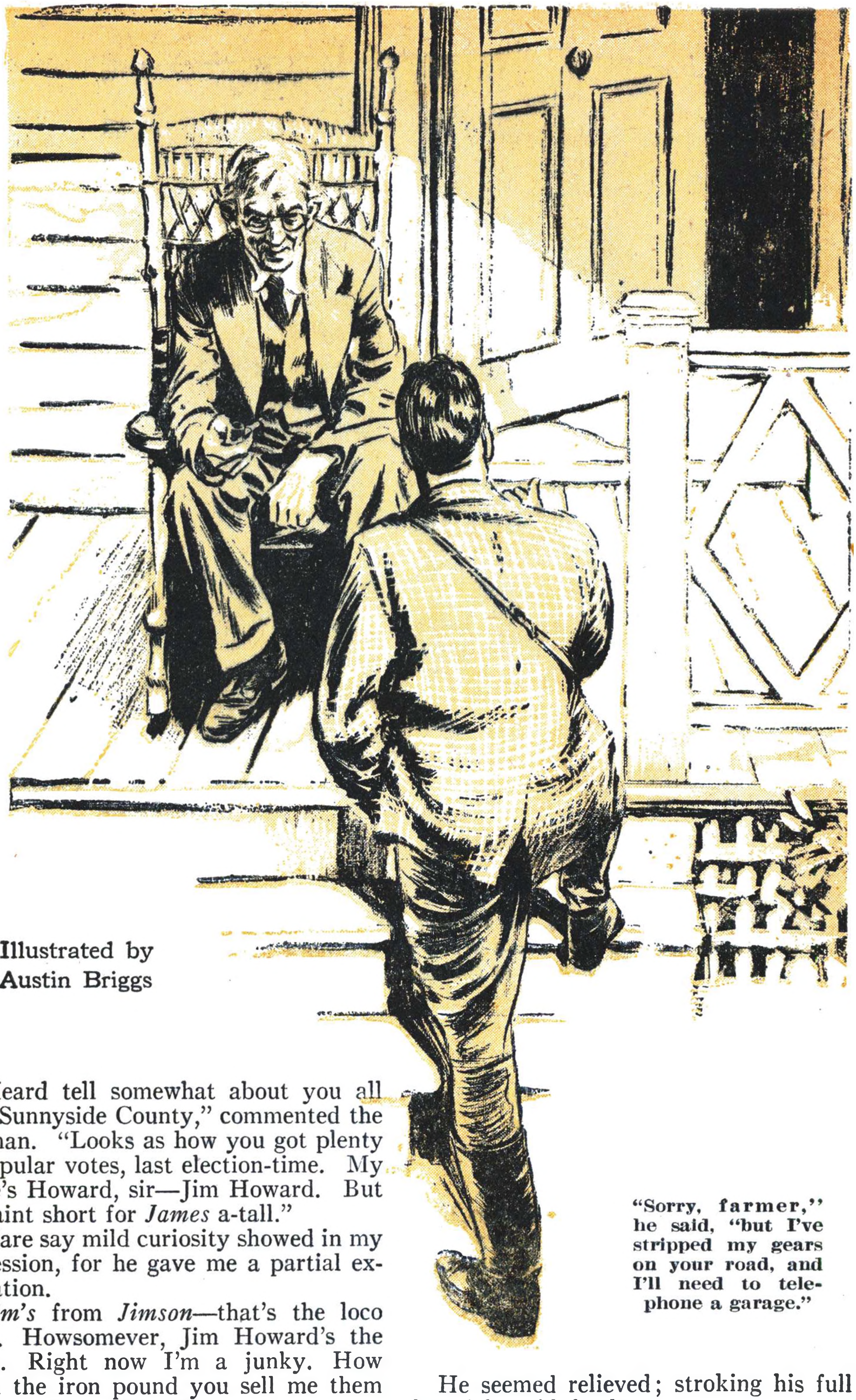
a dude ranch. Dudes came in droves, but the "ranch" was a financial failure and the citizen broke his lease and vanished without paying me for the use of my property. When next I summered up here, I discovered that the absconding citizen, ere he departed, had disposed of the iron bedsteads in which the dudes had slept, by the simple device of dumping them into the gullies and underbrush around my farmhouse.

BEDS intruded everywhere! My new neighbors, the young Warrens, complained that when they picked wild raspberries on my place, the ripest and best were sure to be hiding deep behind a rusty bedspring enmeshed in the bush. A hired hand barked his shins and even broke his ankle tripping over unseen iron corners. I cut my own fingers and peeled my knuckles on hidden beds, until in the rather slangy words of Zelda Warren, those beds were "getting into my hair."

The junkman grinned at my account.

"Say, them dudes must've done some pretty fancy kind o' sleepin', to've busted them beds so's they had to toss 'em out. By the by, sir, you're Squire Bray?"

I admitted my identity.



Illustrated by
Austin Briggs

"Heard tell somewhat about you all over Sunnyside County," commented the big man. "Looks as how you got plenty of popular votes, last election-time. My name's Howard, sir—Jim Howard. But *Jim* aint short for *James* a-tall."

I dare say mild curiosity showed in my expression, for he gave me a partial explanation.

"*Jim's* from *Jimson*—that's the loco weed. Howsomever, Jim Howard's the name. Right now I'm a junky. How much the iron pound you sell me them beds for, Squire Bray?"

I told him he could have them for the taking, but he did not approve of that.

"I don't beg from no man, squire."

I insisted that the beds constituted a menace for whose riddance I would gladly have paid fair money anyhow.

"Sorry, farmer," he said, "but I've stripped my gears on your road, and I'll need to telephone a garage."

He seemed relieved; stroking his full beard, he said slowly:

"That's honest and fair, squire. Folks about here says you're a hard man, but square—and believe they got you right. Well, sir, you'll find Jim Howard pays his debts. Want I should start in to de-bed this place right away?"

I did and said as much; and the junkman thrust two fingers into his mouth and whistled a magic note. Magic, because at its shrill abracadabra, out popped three fabulous little creatures from the truck—none would have stood higher than my waist; all wore fantastic costumes which seemed to have been cut out of cast-off trousers sewn at the top; and all were dirty beyond human concept. It was the rim of grime about their faces, in fact, which gave the illusion of beards on their chins—and hence that of elves, gnomes, leprechauns or other Little People of myth and song.

Down from the truck, however, the little people proved to be entirely human. They galloped across my yard emitting wild infantile cries of glee. They clustered about giant Jim, tugging at his trousers and yelping at his shins like a pack of happy terriers.

He roared at them in mock anger,

"Hush yer din now, ye muddy brats, and listen! Squire Bray says there's a ton of old iron in them bushes that he will give us. Go and find it whilst I fetch in the chariot."

And they scampered off with yells of joy and whoops of childish excitement.

"Them," explained Jim Howard, "is the Seven Dwarfs—three of 'em, that is. I never did complete the whole set." Then he added, as though in apology for this whimsy: "Dwarfs! Ellen, she says that's but a silly idea, when they made her *Snow White.*"

"Ellen?" My curiosity was less polite than piquant. "Then you have an older daughter?"

I fancied a shadow crossed his face.

"My wife," he said, almost like a challenge. Then abruptly he turned away and strode to his truck.

I COULD not know, of course, that the coming and going of Jim Howard was to be but an interim in some Divine Pattern which would weave them all irrevocably into my life-skein and me into theirs. I could not know that this chance incident was but a prelude to tragedy. And so I thought no more of the junkman then, other than to store him away in my memory as an oddity which might make for a bit of amusing conversation when I next should meet my neighbors the Daniel Warrens.

Yet three days later it was that the truck came rumbling into my drive again, followed by a miraculous trailer which was followed by a despondent Jersey heifer, to which was tied a goat-cart in which rode the precious Dwarfs.

"Squire," announced Jim Howard, "we are your debtors. I sold them beds for ten dollars the ton, but I spent all the money for the needs o' livin'. If it suits ye, though, we'll squat on your land somewheres in a corner which ye don't use, and we'll work off our owin'. Jim Howard always pays his debts."

NOW, there was a complex code. You may imagine my surprise.

I protested that he owed me nothing at all. I told him that I would be only a fortnight up on my mountain farm, and that under the circumstances I had no need of a man to help me work it. I told him, moreover, that I was no farmer at all, and that I planned some day to clean up the place and sell it to the first fair buyer.

I might better have saved my breath.

Jim Howard had come with the fixed purpose of settling on my land and working for me. Short of rudeness I had no words adequate to refuse him; so the Howard tribe hauled their trailer, cow and baggage to my southwest hayfield, planted a miraculous garden and dug in for an indefinite period.

The "Howard influence" upon my mode of living was prompt and positive. Its effect was that I did not return to Bart Corners until late fall, and that I became a practicing farmer, like it or not.

"Now I hand-dug ye a garden, and another for me. All they'll need is the plantin'. And I plowed ye ten acre o' land to grow alfalfa on. I got a book says there's profit in alfalfa. The State will pay for the inoculation, besides. Good tilth is straight from Almighty God, sir. Better'n gold, too. 'Tis a wicked sin to let this place run wild altogether."

When I tried mildly to protest that I had no need nor intention of farming the land, he struck from another angle.

"Take this here porch, squire. Them uprights won't last the winter. The sills is rotted out. There's a colony o' termites which don't pay ye rent money, too. Give a year, and it won't be safe. You talk o' sellin'; you watch out, or you won't have no house to sell! Looks like me an' the Dwarfs has a spot o' carpenterin' to fix things so's they'll stay put awhile."

And so I was bullied and browbeaten into rejuvenating my place. I remained,

therefore, to supervise work which otherwise I might have postponed for yet another year and doubtless still another.

I saw little of the Howards beyond the hours of actual work, and I knew little of how they lived in their trailer-homestead, save that the gardens grew amazingly and produced enough for all of us. Jim proved a fair carpenter and handy at repairs. The Dwarfs helped him at his work like tiny eager genii of a well-rubbed lamp, accomplishing between the three of them the daily work of a grown man. There was smoke from the stove-pipe of the home-made trailer, and the evening wind blew odors of good cooking to whet my appetite and curiosity about the squatters. Other than this, however, I saw, knew and learned little of them.

What puzzled me a little was the fact that, despite Jim's mention of his Ellen, I saw no woman around the trailer, and none came to visit me—which was, I thought, a little strange. Once I killed two fat pullets and gave one to Jim for his dinner. He thanked me courteously enough, but made no report as to how his wife liked the chicken. Cooking was done, clothes washed and hung to dry, the children cared for, and life lived in the trailer—yet nary sign of a woman was to be seen at the Howards'.

MY friendly neighbor and competent gossip Zelda Warren came to call one afternoon, bringing samples of home-made jams and a jug of new honey. She was a breathless, likable, vital young tyrant who usurped my kitchen, chased me to my veranda chair, made tea in my own kettle and played hostess to me in my own house once weekly. She chattered at me like a bright magpie and gave me gossip for gossip, as was her habit.

"And what," she tossed at me as she poured tea, "does the Squire of Bart Corners think of this trailer housewife, Mrs. Howard?"

I had to admit that I had never seen the woman at all; and Mrs. Warren demanded:

"And are you so sure there is one, squire? Is a Mrs. Howard, I mean?"

I mentioned the incident in which Jim Howard spoke of his Ellen. She made a droll face.

"There's an old Greek myth, I remember, about a fellow who wore a helmet of invisibility. Do you suppose Mrs. Howard has such a gadget?" I saw she was pulling my leg, and I begged her to get to the point of what was on her mind. She did at once, and she was serious.

"Well, squire, the characters in this mystery are a giant handy-man who moves in on you and works for you in spite of you. He lives in a trailer on your own land. There are three brats he calls his Dwarfs—all doing men's chores in defiance of the child-labor act. Now the other day my curiosity about the kind of a woman who would marry into that kind of a life got the better of me, so I put on a clean frock and went over to make a polite neighborly call on her."

"Well?"

"Well, they didn't exactly drive me away from the trailer with guns, but they made it plain that I wasn't wanted there, and I couldn't even get a peek inside. I saw just enough, though, to convince my feminine intuition that there isn't any Mrs. Howard at all—not a woman on the place. Now what do you think of that, Amos Bray, Esquire?"

"I think," I said, teasing her a little, "that you are a disappointed though very charming young busybody, Zelda Warren."

She accepted my barb prettily and flung me a smile.

"*Touché!*" she said. "And busybody if you like. I confess there's nothing that fascinates me more than a good snoopy mystery when it's about my neighbors. And there is a mystery in your big ex-junkman and his strictly invisible wife."

"Tosh!" I said.

"Daniel thinks so too."

Now I have respect for Warren—a writer of plays, and once an investigator; I knew him to be a man of considerable insight into the ways of humans, and so for the first time I thought seriously of the business.

"Just what," I asked her, "does he think?"

"He isn't sure, but he feels he has seen your Jim Howard before—and that he wasn't a junkman."

A DAY or so later a car of expensive foreign make rolled into my driveway, introducing the next element in this drama.

Jim Howard and his Dwarfs having quit for the day, I was alone that evening, and so it was I who answered the clatter of my front-door knocker.

The gentleman who stood there was a comely fellow, handsome in a faintly dissipated way. His shirt was open at the neck; his riding-breeches had never been astride a horse; his tweed jacket was a trifle loud for good taste; and yet he had a distinguished air about him, too. What struck me most was the man's smile, which was a good one, albeit practiced and artificial, and his manner of being accustomed to getting what he liked by use of the smile. He carried a wooden box or kit slung over one shoulder on a strap.

"Good evening, farmer," he said. (That patronizing use of the word antagonized me at once.) "I hope I've not disturbed you. What I wanted was to ask permission to drive up to that hill of yours and make some sketches."

He referred to the rise of ground half a mile or so from my house which is the high point of Mudge Mountain, and which I call the "pinnacle." Now, I care not who rides, swims fishes or walks on my unused farmland, so long as they have the decency to ask me first, and so I told him that he could, for all I might object, risk life and limb by driving that pretty machine over the treacherous rock road to the pinnacle.

"Sketches?" I repeated. "You're an artist, sir?"

His smile expanded a notch, if possible. He shook his head.

"Thank you, but no—not really an artist. Only a dabbling amateur, I fear. A would-be. By profession I'm an actor. Dunne is the name—Cyril Dunne. It is just possible that you may have seen me in something—that is, if you ever get to the theater in New York."

He held out a democratic hand for an humble farmer to shake, although he did not ask my own name in return. Moreover he played this little scene with just the proper air of casual unconcern, and with no boasting or hint that for any American but the most illiterate it would be inconceivable not to have heard of Cyril Dunne. But I am too old to be impressed by great names, and so I let it go at that, and told him to paint all he might please, probably convincing him that I was but a mere clod who had never heard of the theater, much less of a Cyril Dunne.

So off he went, and it was just as his car lumbered away from my door that I saw the woman sitting in it.

A piquant beauty—a shade too hard, perhaps, but emphatic as a diamond. Her hair was dark, not black but of deep chestnut. Her skin was strikingly white. There was about the woman a vividness which left upon me an impression far deeper than that given me by her cavalier Cyril Dunne, for all his great name and histrionic smile.

The two, it turned out, did not remain long at the pinnacle. I had eaten my supper and was enjoying my pipe, when I heard the roar of a laboring motor. Presently it stopped, and Cyril Dunne came to my kitchen steps.

"Sorry, farmer," he said, using that damnable form of address again, "but I fear I'm a bad penny, despite good intentions. I've turned up this time because I've stripped my gears on your road, and I'll need to telephone a garage—if you will permit me."

I showed him the telephone-stand, and he added, reaching for it:

"And I'll gladly pay you for a bite to eat. You see, I'm not alone. There is a lady with me in the car. She's—ah—a bit fatigued, and—"

His gesture was eloquent enough to produce the desired effect. He used my phone to call Breen's Garage in Bart Corners, and I sat them down and gave them a solid if plain supper. An old bachelor gets to be something of a cook.

BUT—fate dictated that Zelda Warren should visit me, followed ten minutes later by her playwright husband Daniel, who burst in with his enthusiastic vitality oozing from every pore. When Zelda met the involuntary guests, I fancied I caught a slight flush rising to her ears as she shook hands with Cyril Dunne; and I thought, also, that even the Broadway hero exhibited a slight suggestion of having forgotten his carefully studied lines. And then came Warren, following his wife after running an errand to town. There was no doubt at all that he knew Dunne. They greeted each other, a little

stiffly but each endeavoring to conceal a hint of surprise and—was it animosity?

What of the lady? Her name, I learned, was Mrs. Oliphant. Just that, without explanation or commentary. She was, I gathered immediately, an actress, though not celebrated. Dunne did not explain her, either; and not even that incorrigible gossip Zelda Warren chose to pry into reasons why a Mrs. Oliphant should be wandering in the Berkshires with a theatrical star who had a flair for oil paint.

ZELDA did not like the woman; that was evident. Hardly more than a girl, Mrs. Oliphant seemed, and quite as beautiful as I had thought her in my first glimpse. And yet there was an effort at sophistication which did not compare favorably at all with the naturalness of Mrs. Warren and the romantic enthusiasms of her husband. She spoke seldom, however, and yet there was almost invariably a barb in what she said, even with her escort Cyril Dunne.

It was a time when the actor employed that hideous form of address to me, calling me "farmer," that she cut in:

"But Squire Bray is no farmer—are you, squire? I can see that easily enough. You're just an escapist like the rest of us. Real farmers are the only people left who aren't trying to get away from something—themselves most of all. They don't play golf and sit all night in stuffy night-clubs and spend their daytime living in abeyance until they can finish their job and escape from it. They're the only people who seem to have any fun just living. You're escaping from something too, aren't you, Squire Bray?"

I squirmed at that, for it was no less than the truth—albeit an intrusion on the part of a woman whom I had never seen before and might, I began to hope then, never see again. It had not occurred to me that I was escaping anything beyond the domineering of good Mrs. Snogget, my housekeeper; and I writhed under the poignancy of this woman's probing.

"Devil take the girl!" I thought. "Who is she to meddle in the lives of strangers, or dissect them publicly?"

But I let it pass.

Now Mrs. Warren, as I intimated, did not seem favorably impressed by the Oliphant woman. Still, Zelda is a competent soul; and shielding her dislike smartly, she became solicitous for Mrs. Oliphant, even dragging the woman upstairs to my guest-rooms for a feminine chat and a nose-powdering. It was while they were up there that the evening had its climax.

I had produced a bottle of good hard cider and had opened a box of what I call my "political" cigars and was passing them to the two men, when my kitchen door burst open and I saw Jim Howard's huge body loom in the doorway, his red beard flaming in the lamplight.

"Squire!" he boomed out. "It's the one I call Grumpy—he's sick with fever. I wonder could I—"

He stopped there, his mouth agape, and I saw that he had noticed my guest. His eyes were focused on Cyril Dunne with an expression in them which, it seemed strangely to me, combined fear and resentment and perhaps primitive hate.

Not understanding, but knowing that Jim Howard was an odd sort anyhow, I excused myself before the pause was obvious and led the man back to the kitchen.

"I'll phone Dr. Bradley," I told him. "Why didn't you let me know earlier? I've aspirin here, and quinine. Take them back and try to get his temperature down without waiting for the doctor. Have you a thermometer?"

He scarcely listened. His eyes had not left the door to my sitting-room. His voice, somehow, was changed—quieter, lacking in that rich countryman's coarseness and colloquialism as he demanded:

"Who is that man in there?"

I brushed away this irrelevance:

"A man called Dunne. . . . Now you'd better try the quinine if the temperature is very high. If it's not down in half an hour, put the boy in a cold tub. And you can bring him over here to sleep in a real bed, if he can be moved, Jim. That trailer's no place for sick people. Bring Mrs. Howard too, if you like. She'll want to stay by him, I'm sure."

I got no reply at all to that. He was backing out of the door, holding the medicine and the thermometer in his hands, and I saw that he was too overwrought to talk.

WHEN he had gone I rejoined the others, explaining about my man's sick boy. Actor Dunne was superficially if politely sympathetic; Daniel Warren was genuinely concerned. When the ladies came downstairs and Zelda Warren learned of the trouble, she behaved as a generous, friendly woman would. She hurried out and went over to the trailer to help nurse the child.

"And don't you dare to think," she whispered to me at the door, "that it's just my curiosity about the invisible Mrs. Howard, either!"

Breen's garage telephoned that, due to trouble with their wrecking-car, they could not come for Dunne's machine that night—which created a somewhat unconventional situation. I own no car. Neither do the Warrens. Moreover, there is no hotel or rooming-house within fifteen miles where they might spend the night. So I extended an invitation to them to spend the night under my roof.

Mrs. Oliphant could not refrain from some sidelong dart in which she termed me a "proper chaperon." Dunne was grateful, but a shade too profuse in his thanks. Dan Warren shook hands and withdrew, taking me by the arm to the door. He paused on the step and asked me, oddly:

"By the way, squire, do you know who it is you're keeping for the night?"

"You mean Cyril Dunne, the actor? Surely—"

"I mean," he said, "Cyril Dunne, the Devil's *avant-garde*."

Then he left.

"He was talking to that portrait as though she were really there."

I SEEMED fated to get little sleep that night.

Mrs. Oliphant used the big colonial bedroom which I have kept intact with the original furnishings of Ezekiel Bray, my great-great-grandfather, who built the place in the 1700's. Dunne was made comfortable in a room down the upper hallway near my own. I had turned out the lights and was ready to go to bed myself when Dr. Bradley's car drove up, returning to town.

"That boy's all right," he informed me. "Not so much thanks to your quinine as in spite of it—pretty rough medicine for a young chap his age! However, it was only a touch of influenza, and he'll do now. Mrs. Warren seems a handy nurse, by the way. What I came to tell you is more about the father. If I read the signs right, he's the sick one—mentally, I mean."

"Jim Howard's an odd character, but his mind's all right," I said.

"Possibly it is now, but it won't be if he keeps on brooding. Also, you'd better take those people out of that trailer wagon, Amos. They'll die of it. Why don't you give them the house when you go back to Bart Corners? Seems a likable enough fellow, this Howard. But he'll break down, living there. Needs a woman, I'd say. And a comfortable home—for the youngsters anyhow. And he needs company. Psychiatry's not much in my line, Amos, but I'll gamble that fellow's got troubles tucked away behind his beard somewhere. Make a good man to have around your place, too. Ever see the library he carries about?"

I told him I'd never been in the trailer.

"Greek books—Latin books—lots of fine classics. Quite a French library, too—mostly Molière, Racine and Hugo's plays. Never knew you had an intellectual hired man out here. Bit of a rarity, isn't it?"

He departed before I could express my own amazement.

Again I was starting for bed, when my telephone rang. I tiptoed past Mrs. Oliphant's room, and heard Cyril Dunne snoring lustily in his room—which gave me to speculate on whether his admiring Broadway audiences were acquainted with his nocturnal histrionics—and I went downstairs again.

It was Zelda Warren on the telephone.

"I need to talk to you, Squire Bray," she said. "Dan is all against it, but he's gone to bed now and can't protest. Will you step out and meet me at the end of our road? It might be rather important."

So I wrapped myself in an overcoat and slipped out, prepared for any contingency, and thinking that the sick boy

might have had a relapse. I was not prepared, however, for what Mrs. Warren had to say out there in the dark. . . .

"I saw the invisible Mrs. Howard, squire," were her first words; and I felt a twinge of resentment at being kept from my bed to hear any such idle gossip. Perhaps I was just a trifle testy in my tone as I replied:

"Interesting. Now perhaps in the morning if you—"

"Please, squire!" she broke in on me, and I saw she was quite upset. "I didn't bring you out here just to say that. I'm trying to tell you that there really *isn't* any Mrs. Howard. She's only a portrait hanging in his trailer."

"A painting?"

"Of the Mrs. Oliphant who is at your house, and it's signed by Cyril Dunne."

I stared at her.

"Eh? How's that?"

She nodded slowly, and the implication of it all came to me with a rush.

"Good God!" I said.

"That trailer is full of tragedy, squire. Reeks of it. You can't imagine the atmosphere—those three kids, the Dwarfs, as he calls them, doing all the housework, almost, and Jim Howard doing the laundry and cooking. It's pathetic. It makes my heart ache. And then that portrait hanging there like the household goddess, the *lares et penates*—and the big man sitting there by the sick boy's cot, staring at it and muttering—you could almost say *praying* to it!"

"Come now, he—"

"He was talking to her just as though she were really there. He's a sick man, this Jim Howard. Dr. Bradley noticed it too. Something's on his mind—something sudden and new—as though it had just happened tonight. Tell me, did he see Mrs. Oliphant when he came to your house?"

I said no, and remarked that Mrs. Oliphant had been upstairs with her at the time, adding:

"But you don't mean that this Mrs. Oliphant is really Mrs. Howard—that she may have left him for—Dunne?"

"I don't mean anything, definitely. But it *could* be that. . . . You don't know Cyril Dunne. He's a devil, a satyr, a—

She could not move away, even if she would: he took her gently by the shoulder, pulling her close to him.

he's not a nice person, squire. He leaves a trail of women behind him like fallen petals. Daniel knows him—and hates him. I had an experience with him once—well, never mind that. And then this Mrs. Oliphant is—well, she's a witch—without a broomstick. I know her type only too well. *She'd* fall for Cyril, never fear."

"Never mind that," I said, meaning to be chivalrous. "On the face of it, she couldn't be Mrs. Howard—the mother of three children, one of them ten years old. She's barely twenty-five."

"I know, but she's something to him, or she wouldn't hang on his trailer wall, would she, painted by Cyril Dunne?"

"And how would a man of Dunne's world have contact with the wife of a man of Jim Howard's world? Obviously, Mrs. Oliphant is a woman of culture, whether you like her or not. Even if Jim Howard reads Greek and Latin and the French dramatists, like Lincoln reading law by candlelight—"

"We don't know anything about this Jim Howard, squire. Dan is sure he's seen him some place, and he has the same feeling about Mrs. Oliphant. I think I have too—maybe with the Angora cats at a fair, with long white whiskers."

"Cat, yourself!" I said with feeble good humor. "She seems nice enough to me—a little hard, but all right."

"Well, I'll not argue. I'm trying to tell you that I have an intimation of tragedy. I wish they weren't anywhere in the neighborhood. Don't let Jim Howard see her, squire. Get them out of your house before he comes over in the

morning. Do something—get them away before—"

"Before what?"

"I'm sure I can't imagine, but—something unpleasant. I like Jim Howard. I can't stand to see him hurt. If you had seen him mumbling at that portrait—"

"Very well," I promised her, remembering Jim's odd behavior at the sight of Dunne, "I'll do what I can. Now you go back home and to bed."

And I walked with her to her door.

I COULD not, as it happened, get Dunne and Mrs. Oliphant out of my house in the early morning; nor could I prevent the inevitable from taking place.

Dunne was up at daybreak, his sketch-box and easel under his arm, striding off to make a sketch from the pinnacle of Mudge Mountain, where he had driven last night. There was no way that I could, decently, stop him. There had, moreover, been no sign from the colonial bedroom, and I knew that Mrs. Oliphant must be sleeping late. I could not, obviously, go in and wake her. I did make an effort to get Charles Breen on the telephone at seven o'clock and urge him to send a mechanic up as early as possible; but that effort was futile, as it later proved.

There was nothing unnatural in the fact that Jim Howard was not busy with his chores at six in the morning, for I knew he must have had a tiresome vigil over the sick boy, and I remembered the odd comment of Dr. Bradley in speaking of Jim the night before. And so the morning passed until nearly ten o'clock—when the explosion came.

There were loud voices in my backyard. Through the kitchen door I saw the two men, Dunne and Jim Howard, the one tall and graceful in his costly tweeds, the other taller, heavier and in disarray, towering over the actor in a stance that plainly betrayed anger. Impulsively I stepped out and went toward them. But I had hardly passed the pumphouse, when I saw I was too late. Jim Howard's fist flailed like a medieval mace—and struck Dunne in the face.

Dunne was down. I shouted. They did not heed me. The actor was on his feet in an instant, and a fight was on.

One would scarcely expect to discover a skilled boxer in a man like Cyril Dunne, and yet he turned out to be one. Jim Howard was something of a Hercules in brute force, and his shaggy appearance suggested that the fury of a wild animal might lurk in him. And yet as I stood there, impotent and frightened, it was evident that Dunne was the master, not my burly junkman.

He was theatrical, naturally. He put a sardonic smile on his lips as he sent a swift left to the big man's head, bouncing nimbly back out of reach of those terrible paws before Jim could set himself.

"You always were a lout and a fool, Oliphant," I heard Dunne snarl. "You've asked for this, and by God you'll get it." Then he hurled himself at the bigger man in a flurry of blows that literally cut Jim's face to pieces.

Oliphant—*Oliphant?* In my confused brain the connection was not clear at once, and presently the excitement of the fight itself drove away all chance of association.

Dunne proved not only skillful but strong enough too. Jim's face and head was taking severe punishment, but he seemed making no effort to avoid the blows, save to give slightly backward now and then when Dunne's fist threatened to blind his eyes. Only once did he lash out with his fist, catching Dunne full on the mouth and sending him sprawling on his back in the mud. But the actor was up again, and once more the one-sided show went on.

Suddenly Jim Howard took one step forward. His hands opened and reached, clawlike. Blows rained on his face, but he shrugged them away. Then his reaching hand caught Dunne's arm and closed on it. There the tide turned.

SLOWLY, inexorably, Howard bent the actor's arm. His other hand found a shoulder and I could see the huge muscles ripple along the gripping arm. In another instant the big man had closed in and had his great weight on the actor, pressing him down. They fell together, Howard on top.

I cried out then. Howard's hands were on Dunne's throat, and the actor's head was yielding under their pressure.

"Don't!" I yelled. "For God's sake, don't do it, Jim!" I was terrified at the sight of murder being committed before my eyes.

A strange grin—not a pleasant thing to see—came on Jim Howard's bearded face then, and I heard him mutter, as though to himself:

"Junky Jim Howard—he always pays his debts."

Then Dunne's head snapped back, and I thought the end had come.

There was a soft swishing beside me, and a gentle voice spoke one brief word.

"Jim!" said the voice. *"Jim!"*

The big man's hands relaxed their hold. He lifted his head and stared at Mrs. Oliphant as Moses may have lifted his eyes to God in the burning bush.

"Don't, Jim," she said. "It isn't what you think."

And then the strangest bit of this history took place.

Jim Howard got up from the prostrate body of Dunne. His great length unfolded, and he stood straight, an immense man. He took a step toward Mrs. Oliphant and held her eyes with his. It seemed as though she could not move away from him, even if she would. He reached out with a huge bloodied hand and took her gently by the shoulder, pulling her close to him. And then, without a word, he compelled her away, shielding her with his great arm, his mighty strength leading her down the little patch which led to the trailer.

THE Warrens had asked me to dinner; and now, over the coffee, Daniel was talking.

"Not," he was saying, "that I'm one to go about sniffing other people's troubles . . . Zelda handles that department for the family."

She flung him a playful scowl.

"Men," she said, "make me sick. If they have curiosity, they call it 'being humanely interested in fellow creatures.' But when a woman has it, they call it snooping."

I halted this by-play.

"Come now, Daniel was telling us about Jim Howard and Mrs. Oliphant. Do you really mean he wasn't what he pretended to be at all, but an actor?"

"A rather good character actor, in fact, but never likely to get famous. Probably that's partly why she left him. But of course the—"

"You mean Mrs. Oliphant was Mrs.—"

"Oliphant. Jim Howard is Jimson Oliphant of the Toppeq Players company—or was up to a year or so ago. I had a feeling all along that I had seen him somewhere. The beard was a good disguise, in this case. He did well in the hired-man scene in 'The Farmer in the Dell,' remember, Zelda? I dare say he got his colloquial chatter and lines out of that part. And when he quit the theater and changed his skin, so to speak, it all came in handy to make him into a Jim Howard, the junkman."

"And the beard," Zelda put in.

Zelda's husband ignored her. "As to Ellen Oliphant, she used to be Ellen Bower—a stage-struck youngster who did bits and nothing more. She did the housemaid in that play, too. That's where Oliphant met her. They were married when it closed. Being years older than she, it all made Broadway gossip. The girl was smart but not very sweet, I thought—"

"Smart and cheap!"—from Zelda.

"She didn't give up the stage when they married. She had a small part in my play, 'Other Men's Wives,' I remember. Dunne played the lead in it, you know. He's rather a hand at conquering ingénues—has a reputation for it, to say the least."

"The *very* least," commented Zelda.

"I fancy he painted her portrait—he has used that gag before, to my knowledge. Anyhow, the play closed with scandal in the air, and pretty soon Ellen left Oliphant and was seen with Dunne, although I don't believe she ran off with Dunne in the vulgar meaning of that term. At least she was still doing small parts last winter."

"And Howard?" I asked.

"He took it all very badly. He was an odd number, anyhow. Had been married once before, but his wife died, and I suppose he was caught by Ellen on what is commonly called 'the bounce.' He wanted home and children and solidarity. He even adopted three orphan brats out of an asylum."

"The Dwarfs?"

DANIEL nodded. "That was partly why Ellen quit him, so it's said."

"Not to mention the blandishments of dear Cyril?"

"I was trying not to mention them. What I'm getting at is that Oliphant quit the stage right after she left him. But from what I hear, Oliphant has always known that he was limited as an actor. He had a yearning for farm-life and the land."

"So he took the Dwarfs with him and went in for it."

"I don't know much about that, but it seems to fit."

"Well, what about them now? Dunne got patched up and went back yesterday, but he went alone. Do you think Mrs. Oliphant will stay with her husband?" I asked.

"She just might, at that. She'll never be an actress, and I think she knows it.

If I were writing them into a play, I'd have her stay with him and complete the set of Dwarfs."

"Then your play would be a flop. The leopard—nor any other feline creature—can't change her spots. Things like that don't really happen in life."

Daniel Warren had been staring out of the window as he talked, and now he gestured in the direction of my house as he said:

"Well, something's about to happen in life right now, my dear wife and severest critic. I can see them coming across the fields right now, both of them, and from the way they're walking together, they've got a purpose. Suppose we send the Squire home now to find out what their purpose is? The rôle of sexagenarian Cupid suits him pretty well."

And so I got to my own side door as Jim the junkman was in the act of knocking on it.

He had changed overnight. He had trimmed off half his beard and whipped it into dignity. He had on clothes whose cut was not new but which had been scarcely worn. Also he had his big arm on the shoulder of that pale young woman, into whose eyes I saw a new light had dawned, a new sweetness. And Jim spoke to me without any trace of his country-man's accent in his voice:

"There is an apology due you, squire, for the scene I put on here yesterday. I am really sorry—even although I am a much happier man by it, today."

While I dismissed his apology with a wave of the hand, Ellen Oliphant reminded him softly:

"That wasn't all you came to say, Jim."

"No," he said, as much to me as to her, "I came to apply for a job."

"A job?"

"A family job—for all of us—Ellen, the Dwarfs and me. I'd like to have the job of caretaker on this farm for the winter, sir. At no salary—it isn't the money, sir. And if you will allow me a percentage, I think I could scrape some profit out of the place—now, since you aren't going to sell."

"The job," I said, "is yours. But I can afford a moderate salary."

He grinned queerly and relapsed into his rôle of Junky Jim Howard, using the characteristic lingo as he replied:

"Thank ye kindly, squire, but there's a debt to pay, and Jim Howard always pays his owin's, sir—seems as though."

Next month begins a great new series, by the author of "A Million for John Destiny."

Readers'

FROM A PILOT

Hello Mate:

This stuff is sort of out of my line—writing letters, I mean. But for the last several years I've enjoyed your book so much that I've just got to hand you one of those verbal bouquets.

Almost all the lads in our squadron read this book, and that proves it is a good book! If anyone could get these guys to sit and read a story—they've performed a miracle!

Personally, I am glad that your book doesn't overdo the love angles in the stories. I realize they are necessary and I like them moderate—thanks for not letting them get "slushy."

I don't believe it would hurt to have a few pages set aside to give brief biographies of the authors and artists who write and draw for you. (Yep, I sure enjoy the pictures, too!)

The best story in my opinion was "A Million for John J. Destiny." I like the jungle stories too, slightly better than the other types.

Well, now that I've had my little say, I'll obligingly fold up. Good luck, and put in a good word for H. Bedford-Jones.

Norman Zeisloft
Langley Field, Va.

ARE OUR AUTHORS WOMEN-HATERS?

As a woman reader of Blue Book (oh, yes, there are quite a few of us) I want to protest against your heroines.

Your fictional heroes are grand—women still like adventurous men. But the women don't have any reality at all. They are apparently just thrown in like a sack of candy as a reward to the hero for being such a nice brave fellow.

Are your authors afraid of women—or women-haters? Do they say to themselves: "Well, I suppose I'll have to put a woman in this story—and, gosh, how I dread it!"

Thelma Clark
Richburg, N. Y.

NEWS-STAND DISPLAY

I wish to protest a change of Blue Book format as suggested by H. B. F. of Warren, Pa. The logic of his argument relating to news-stand sales cannot be denied. However, I suspect that the large format and slick paper of "high class" magazines serve advertising purposes rather than reader interests. I find a large size unwieldy, and the glare of "shiny" paper is especially undesirable. Please don't solve news-stand display problems at the expense of your regular readers. I am not concerned with details such as length of stories, etc. All I want is that each paragraph be interesting and entertaining.

Forum*

One suggestion: I'd like to see a new series similar to "Free Lances of Diplomacy."

O. M. Davidson, Jr.
Ged, Louisiana

FOR LONG NIGHTS AT SEA

You have asked for my thoughts: Well, I owe them to you anyhow and have meant to give them to you for a long time. Your Blue Book is a very old and much valued friend and my only squawk is that I have to wait a whole month for it.

Please don't change it any more, for your last addition of the book-length novel just about rounded out a perfectly balanced man's magazine. Your authors and illustrators are all that anyone can ask for to fill up those long nights at sea, for you see I am at sea eighteen days at a time. (Intercoastal, American Hawaiian Lines.)

H. Bedford-Jones, Fulton Grant, Gordon Keyne—all four stars, to say nothing of the grand old Peter B.,—all of them. And when Stoops stops making your covers—well, then leave it blank.

"A Million for John J. Destiny" was certainly outstanding; "The World Was Their Stage," H. Bedford-Jones, invaluable. Marmur, Yates, Dinsmore, Ken Perkins, Dwyer—none of them or any of the rest could write a dry story if they tried. I buy all the better magazines before I shove off, but I get more value for my money from Blue Book than any other six. . . . All praise and not a squawk, but I'm saying just what I think.

C. B. Snow
Trenton, N.J.

FROM A FAR-AWAY READER

Have been a constant reader of "Blue" from way-back days when one of the regular features was written by that clever late-lamented Clarence Herbert New—"The Diplomatic Free Lances." (Would that you could revive such another series for these similarly stirring times—and couldn't H. Bedford-Jones do the job?) Yes, I would like two or three novelettes per issue. Do I vote for the complete novel? In the slanguage of one of my grandsons: "Too right, I do!" My preference in themes: Sword and Buckler (historical) romances; secret service stories; Western action. I abominate sex and problem stories—and compliment the Blue on its clean and healthy tone all the way through, its generous allowance of pages—and also on its clear type and well-printed turnout.

I like tales of U. S. A. business enterprises, pioneering of the States, the Revolution period, red Indian adventures, sabotage and anti-Fifth Column activities, political plots and intrigues and anti-gangster stories. To these ends I keenly enjoy the contributions of Gordon Keyne, Robert R. Mill, James Francis Dwyer, H. Bedford-Jones, Raymond Spears, Jackson Gregory, Peter Kyne, Max Brand.

You have a gifted atelier of illustrators and artists. That September cover by always-acceptable Herbert Morton Stoops is a corker. You have corraled an unusual pen-pencil-and-brush operator in Percy Leason. Then there are Flanagan, Sisley, Briggs and Soderberg.

Tom L. Mills
Fielding, New Zealand

AN ONLY CRITICISM

Magazines come and go, some undergoing much "face-lifting" during their brief period of existence, in an effort to retain the public taste. A few, however, are so well-fashioned in the beginning as to render changes unnecessary. Blue Book, together with one or two other periodicals, has succeeded in keeping up with the times without losing its original identity.

Sometime ago I wondered why, with the recent trend to picture magazines and digests, Blue Book was able to survive, and put it down to the fact that it has something not to be found in any other magazine—a complete digest of superior-type fiction.

A glance at any news-stand will show the vast amount of pulp magazines for sale, each of which appears to specialize—in action, love, adventure, the weird and fantastic, or Western. None, however, combines all these ingredients into one complete whole so effectively as does "Blue Book," and therein lies the secret of its continued popularity.

In a world upset by war and treachery, we cannot have too many stories throwing light on the dangers of the European situation and its possible consequences to America, so keep on with your tales of Nazi domination and all it portends. Give us, too, the refreshing and satisfying book-length novels which are a regular feature. An only criticism would be in the inclusion of too many stories dealing with the early centuries of foreign lands. America itself is so rich in tradition and adventure that Blue Book could confine its contents to our own shores and never run out of material.

Harold B. Will
Bottineau, North Dakota

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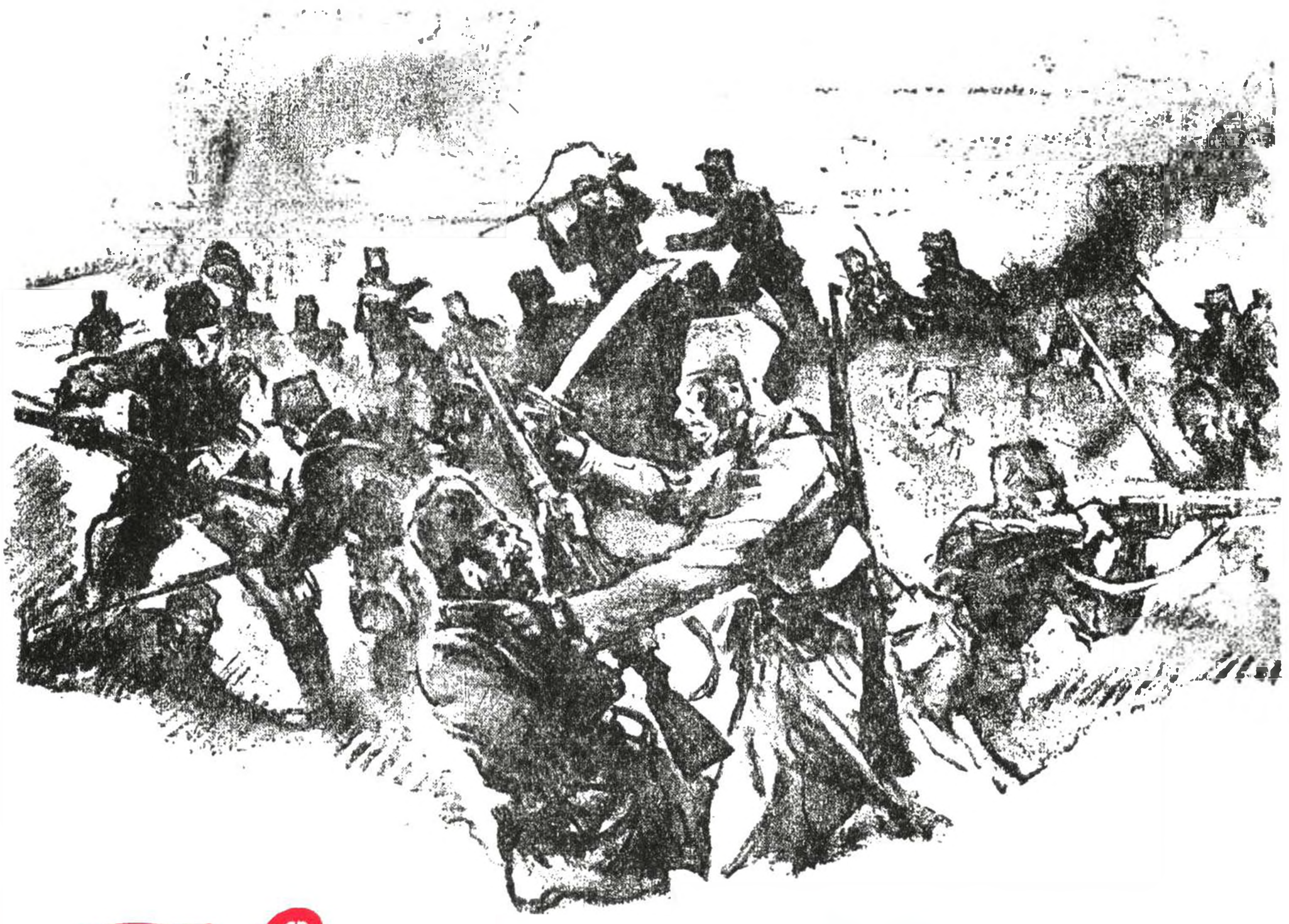
*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the half-dozen or so we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all of them will become the property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed to: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

The response to our invitation has been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves. We therefore wish here to thank the many other readers who have written to us.



Heat of Battle

HE reached the front line at early dusk, arriving with the rations and ammunition. . . . Deafened and dazed by a bombardment that had continued almost without breaks for some one hundred hours, the survivors of the Fifth Foreign Legion Company stared at him with astonishment. They were about thirty, all that was left of the two hundred who had landed at Cape Helles four days before. They were genuine Legionnaires, tough professional soldiers of the prewar, North African species, ordinary journeymen of strife. Most of them had worn out hobnails in Morocco and Tonkin; a few dated back to Dahomey and Madagascar. They had seen all kinds of officers come into their corps, and knew at once that this one was a phenomenon.

He stood very erect, staring down the tumbled length of the trench. In fact, it was simply a deep ditch hastily dug in the crumbling soil, almost at random, three to six feet in width, a chaos of sandbags.

It almost vanished, in spots, where the big shells from the Turks' coast defense batteries, firing across the Dardanelles from the Asiatic side, had dropped. There had been little time to arrange ordinary sanitation; and on the level ground above, the dead had been piled like cordwood to give the living fighting-room. The broiling heat of the Eastern sun brought up the smells.

"Is this the Fifth Company, Legion?"

"Yes, Lieutenant," several men assured him.

"Who's in charge here?"

"I am, I guess, Lieutenant."

Corporal Eyckman rose and saluted. He was the ranking survivor, hence acting as captain. He was a tall, bony Alsatian, nearing forty, with a hawk's face above drooping sandy mustaches. His record was on his chest for all to see, an array of multicolored ribbons.

"A corporal? I'm beginning to understand all this—" The officer indicated the trench. "I'm Lieutenant Mareuil, to command this company."

Eyckman wanted to explain that in that case, the Lieutenant could command the battalion as well: all the officers had been knocked out on the way up, the hundred odd men remaining being led by

Illustrated by
Grattan Condon

A short novelette of the old Foreign Legion and its share in the savage Dardanelles campaign during the first World War.

By GEORGES SURDEZ

an *adjudant*, a senior sergeant; and that the Turks, having killed nine hundred or so out of one thousand, were evidently bent on wiping out what was left—that they had attacked five times in the past two hours. He had no time.

"Attention!" Mareuil barked.

Pulled erect by discipline, the men rose wearily, many of them leaning against the sides of the trench. It was true that they were Legionnaires; but days without sleep, without hot food, almost without water, had affected them. Their hands were raw from handling hot rifles. Dust had caked thickly on their sweating faces, so that when they blinked, the clean lids made a pinkish flutter against the earthy masks. Many of them were wounded and showed bloody bandages on head or arms.

THEIR new chief stared at them, and they in turn looked at him. In his natty tailored khaki, in his shiny leather puttees, with a brand-new képi on his skull, he seemed like an apparition from another world. In fact, he had come from another world, the beach where the Allied troops were landing, all the way up to them through Atchi Baba Nulla and the communication-trenches.

"I'm from the Colonial Infantry," he announced brusquely.

They knew that, from his collar tabs. They also knew that he was a veteran, from the medals he wore. He was a big, handsome man, with a tanned, hard face, small, regular features and a clipped black mustache.

"I'm from the Colonial Infantry," he repeated. "I have commanded Senegalese, Malgasy and Tonkinese. But you're the seediest outfit that ever fell to my lot." His jaws snapped: "Attention—stand away from the sides. The first thing to do is to clean out this sty. We may not stay here long, but I want this clean while we are here."

"We have had no time to—" Eyckman protested.

"The Turks annoyed you, eh? What did you expect them to do? I want these bays cleared of all dirt at once. Everyone except the sentries actually needed, fall to."

The men grumbled under their breath, but started to work, with their trenching tools. They had no better equipment, for the keynote of everything in this Dardanelles venture seemed to be muddling improvisation.

"Lieutenant—" the corporal began.

"You're not exempt. Get to work."

Eyckman obeyed. And as he had expected, the moment dirt started to fly over the parapet, the activity invited the enemy's attention. A furious fusillade broke out from the Turkish trench; Mausers cracked endlessly; the air above the trench was alive with deadly metal. The sentries opened fire; the others dropped their tools and ran for the loopholes.

Mareuil caught the nearest man as he passed, flung him back. His voice cut through the din: "Keep working, keep working! I'm in command here, and give the orders. Have you forgotten what an officer looks like?"

The soldiers picked up their tools. They eyed the new arrival with hatred. What was wrong with him? Why did he want to call attention to their particular sector? Before long, the field-batteries of the Turks would start pouring shells on their position, to halt suspicious movements.

Mareuil went to a loophole between two sand-bags, peered awhile. Evidently, what he saw did not satisfy him, for he rested both hands on the upper sand-bags, hoisted himself up. And he remained there for some time, képi cocked

on his right ear, with the bullets flying about him. The Turks were not more than three hundred yards away. Whatever his faults, the new man was not timid!

The first seventy-seven shell fell very near, followed by a second, a third. Mareuil casually slid to the floor of the trench, dusting his tunic, on which dirt had spattered.

"Lots of stiffs up there," he told the corporal.

"Sure. We tried to get over last night; and all day long, they've been trying to get here. Hard guys to lick—"

"They're self-respecting soldiers, that's all," Mareuil declared. "A few more bags over here. . . . That's the idea. Deepen this traverse—you and you—get going!"

His long legs took him along the trench swiftly; he was everywhere. From time to time he would halt by Eyckman's side and ask him questions, jotting the answers down in his notebook: "Who's on our right? Zouaves? Good. On our left? Right. Naturally, you haven't a plan of the sector ready? All right, didn't expect you to."

"They're coming," a sentry called.

The Legionnaires, scarcely halting in their tasks, looked at the Lieutenant. Damn him, they could play that game too, and show him they waited for orders! He half-smiled, allowed fifteen seconds to pass, then snapped: "Drop tools! Everyone to the loopholes." He caught at Eyckman's sleeve: "Have you a rifle for me?"

There were rifles by the dozen. From Colonial habit, the Legionnaires recovered all rifles and ammunition, although in this show the enemy was unlikely to pick up the stuff. The Legionnaires opened fire, slowly, with method. They had been taught not to waste cartridges.

Like them, Mareuil peered into the twilight and emptied his magazine.

THE enemy poured into sight, like swarming insects. As the distance was short, they broke into a run. At once the comforting *tack-tack* of machine-guns came from the right, where a Zouave section of gunners was entrenched. The rifle-bullets, the bursts from the guns, split the advancing line of Turks into separate fragments that flowed together again, dislocated, frittered in a spray of crouching, running figures which dwindled rapidly.

Each Legionnaire had several loaded rifles propped ready for use. As soon as one grew too hot to handle, he picked up another. It was almost impossible for an experienced man to miss at the range. The Turks fell in tens, in fifties, mowed down by the horizontal sheets of invisible metal sprayed on them. But they kept pouring out, big chaps in gray, in new companies, fresh battalions, surging out of the dark earth into the twilight glow, speeding toward death.

Through the uproar cut the sound of human voices, the encouraging cries of the officers, the clamor of the charging, fanatic troopers: *"Allah—Allah—Allah!"*

Then seventy-five batteries started to bark furiously; the ground was blooming with explosions. But for some seconds it seemed that nothing could stop those Turks. Mareuil's voice was heard:

"At the signal, fix bayonets and get up there to meet them."

AND they saw him, those who had time to glance in his direction, place a whistle between his teeth. His face was set, tense, but showed a certain grim calm. There was courage in the fellow, and intense pride of leadership. Isolated Turks were being dropped in the barbed wire, when unexpectedly the human wave receded, curled back rapidly, dipped into the soil again. For thirty seconds longer, the shells plopped on the neutral stretch, churning earth, dead and dying men.

"Cease firing!" Mareuil called.

The men leaned against the side of the trench, breathing hard. Then all reached for their canteens. The Lieutenant's voice shook them: "Sentries, keep your posts. Others, back to work."

The Legionnaires were reaching the limits of human endurance. Everything was losing reality; they moved, fought and worked like somnambulists. Corporal Eyckman, whose lean body was hardened by eighteen years of soldiering, nevertheless could not control a grunt of protest.

"What's that, Corporal?"

"We're worn out, Lieutenant. No sleep for—"

"What do you expect me to do? Kiss you?" Mareuil shrugged. "You're soldiers, and you're doing your job." He grinned amusedly: "Come on, Legion!"

Night had fallen completely, yet he kept them working, groping about, widening the trench here, mending a breach there. The solid discipline of the Legion was cracking. It had been hard enough to fight, to see one's comrades killed off

one after the other; but to be driven like coolies between attacks was too much.

"He's got it in for us," a man mumbled.

"He won't last long at this rate," the next one added.

Yet when his wide silhouette loomed out of the darkness near by, they were silent, plied pick or shovel grimly. At last he called halt: "Too dark to work." But as they started to disperse, to seek some spot where they could stretch out to sleep, he added: "Corporal—the roll."

Eyckman called out the names, then reported: "Twenty-seven privates, one corporal, Lieutenant."

"I counted thirty men when I arrived, Corporal."

"Yes, Lieutenant. But since, two have been killed."

"I know. I simply wanted you to report correctly."

A murmur came out of the night. The others had heard. Perhaps Mareuil had intended them to hear. Two men were dead who had been alive when he had arrived. And all they meant to him was itemization in the report!

"You swine!" a man shouted.

"If the man who said that will come out where I can see him," Mareuil retorted, "I'll be glad to make it a personal matter!" He waited a few seconds, and the pounding of the British cannon south of Krithia shook the night. "You are tired; you are uncomfortable; you are getting killed. That is your lot as soldiers. I don't go in for hysterical self-pity."

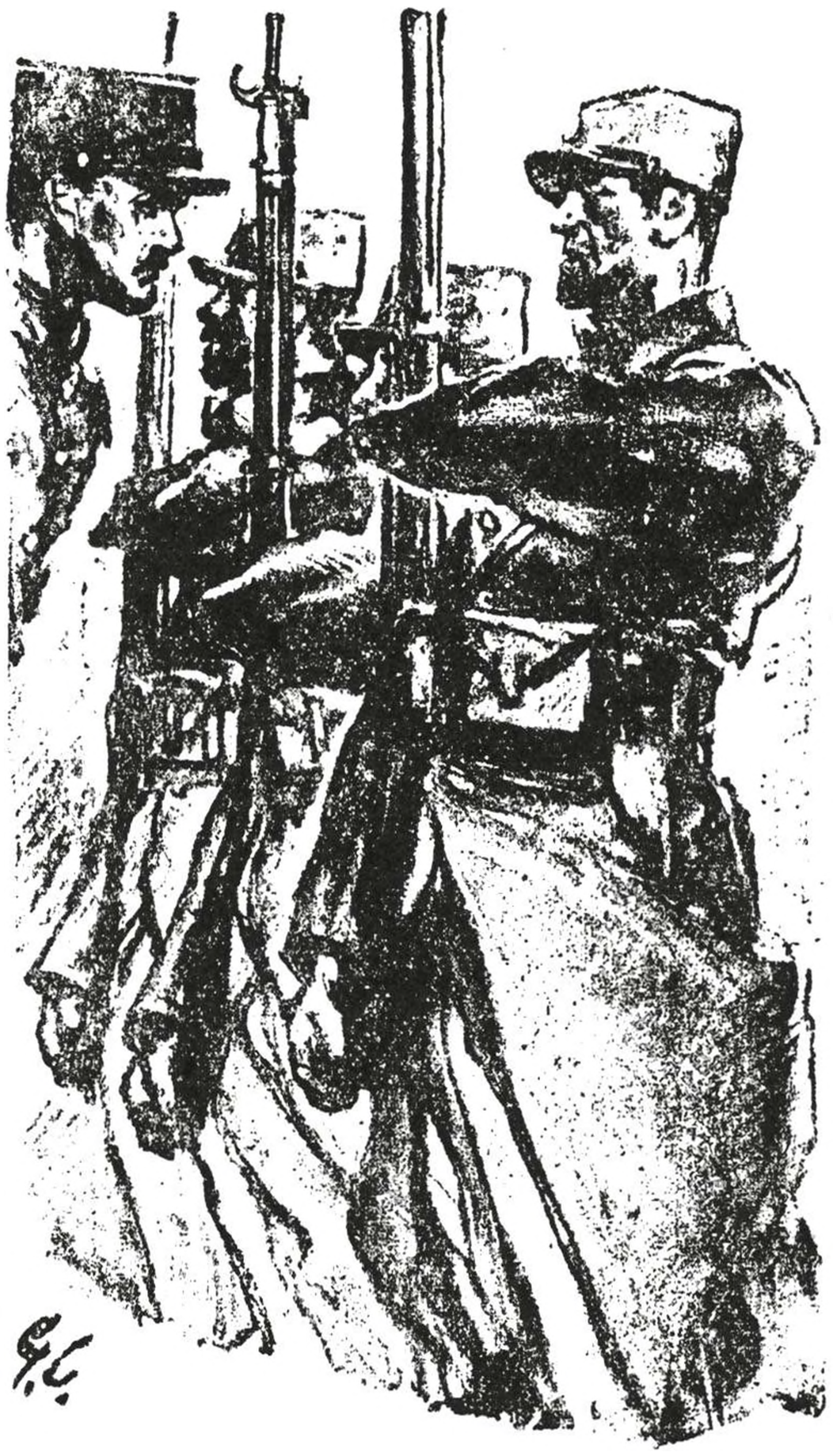
"You just got here!"

"This isn't the only place where there is war; the French front is hard at times, as well." Mareuil stood in the entrance to a traverse, addressing the men in the long bay: "As long as we are in the lines, a man is no more than a piece of material. I would act and talk differently at a funeral parade. But for myself—" He started shouting: "If I get croaked, use me as a sand-bag—I don't ask for tears!

"To the guy who insulted me when unseen: You're a triple-swine. Dismiss."

For some time he strode up and down the length of trenches held by his company, by his company of twenty-eight men. Twice, explosions dusted him with fine dirt; the concussion of a third made him crouch. Then he squatted between two sand-bags and appeared to go to sleep. And perhaps he did sleep, in that catastrophic turmoil.

"He's crazy," one Legionnaire said to the man nearest him.



His inspection was thorough. . . . He dribbled punishments as he paced down the line.

"Maybe. Or he's getting the jump on us. He's a slob, but he has guts."

"He won't live long," the first resumed darkly.

"None of us will."

There were no dugouts, no holes to creep into. The men huddled at the bottom of the trench, knees to chin, and napped. Around them, for a circle of miles, the formidable concert continued. Coast-defense cannon slung exploding missiles into the camp around Seddul Bahr; the warships sped armor-piercing projectiles against earthworks. The field artillery was active on both sides. From the northwest, at intervals, thudded the characteristic reports of four-point-sevens, as a British destroyer shelled the Turkish reinforcements marching to the lines. Near by, at every bullet-impact, there was a prolonged, tenuous vibration, the disturbed flies rising in clouds.

"Alerte, aux armes!"

The Turks were attacking again. As the men stumbled to the parapet, red rockets streaked the sky. A curtain of steel dropped behind the French trench

"If that's the way you feel, take it this way."

to cut off retreat, while the retaliation barrage stormed over the Turkish positions. The enemy ran up through the explosions.

"Fix bayonets! At them!"

Mareuil was first over the top. The Legionnaires scrambled out behind him, fired standing, like hunters potting rabbits. Then the Anatolian infantrymen closed in, bayonets leveled. The Lieutenant's revolver spat twice, three times; then he clubbed with the barrel at a man who clutched him about the waist, after missing a lunge. Another Turk, a tall fellow, reversed his Mauser, started to swing, but a Legionnaire leaped forward, kicked him in the groin, drove a bayonet through his throat as he bent over with the pain.

"They're scramming—"

The brief hand-to-hand combat was already over. The enemy had no way of knowing how close he was to success, how few men really opposed him. Thirty seconds later, all were panting inside the trench, all but those fallen.

"Two dead, one wounded, one missing, Lieutenant!" Eyckman reported.

"Thank you, Corporal. Legionnaire Rammon?"

"Present, Lieutenant."

"It was you who saved my hide, up there?" Mareuil demanded.

"Yes, Lieutenant. It was I, also, who called you a swine."

"Ah? You have changed your mind since, then?"

"No, Lieutenant. I helped the officer—" There was a pause; then the rest came clearly, deliberately: "Not the swine."

"The officer thanks you, Rammon." There was a chuckle from Mareuil: "As for the swine, you can kiss its foot."

The Legionnaires laughed, Rammon with them. For the moment, animosity was forgotten. They were about to disperse when Mareuil called them back: "Six guys out with tools. There's a cave-in over there. Six others to place new wire."

"Lieutenant, we—"

"An order cannot be protested until executed. Get going."

To do him justice, Mareuil took the riskier job, went out with the wire-mending gang. Naturally, as this entailed some noise, the Turks turned loose with their Mausers, and before long one of their machine-guns started its regular, rhythmic *tack-tack*, closer and closer.

"Down!" Mareuil ordered suddenly. They crouched against the soil, and the machine-gun swept lead above them, some of it clacking and humming against the metal strands. "Up, get to work!"

The Legionnaires obeyed.

One fact was sure: Mareuil knew his job; his months of active service on the Western Front counted. Colonial infantryman or not, he was as cool, as brave as a Legion officer. They were realizing that he had not issued one useless order, had shared their dangers. In those moments they came close to liking him.

The Legion Battalion was taken out of the line next day.

At the camp in Vermesh Fountain Ravine, it was reorganized with reinforcements just landed. A Legion captain took command of the outfit; most of the formation received officers from the Corps, real Legionnaires. But Mareuil, at his own request, was maintained at the head of the Fifth Company.

What was left of the old gang, those who had seen him in action, were willing to forgive and forget. Their first reports to the new arrivals were favorable. But the Lieutenant refused this tacit offer of an armistice, and was eager to prove that he felt no affection for them. He called for an inspection of arms, clothing and equipment not half an hour after fresh stuff had been issued.

"You are Legionnaires, and I expect you to live up to your own standards."

His inspection was as thorough as any they had ever faced in barracks. Nothing escaped him. He counted the handkerchiefs, reserve-ration tins, cartridges, even the hobnails on the boots. And he dribbled punishments as he paced down the line.

"Two days' special punishment—two days. Dirty buttons—two days. . . . Rusty bayonet scabbard—two days."

Practically all the survivors were punished. Even Eyckman, promoted to sergeant, did not escape: "Sloppiest non-commissioned officer I've laid eyes on," Mareuil announced. "Have those chevrons stitched on properly by night, or I'll see that you lose them."

Promoted, cited and decorated for valor, owner of the Military Medal, Sergeant Eyckman felt humiliated. He put on a bold front.

"If my Lieutenant will give me a tailor's address—"

"I have no sense of humor while on duty, sergeant," Mareuil told him: "Two days' special fatigue."

PUNISHED men, of course, were allowed no freedom, lost privileges dear to soldiers, such as buying wine. And while members of the other companies loafed, the Fifth worked. Mareuil saw to that. He "volunteered" them for any chore available. They drew water, carried it; they toted ammunition-boxes to and fro; they marched a couple of kilometers to help gunners prepare an emplacement. And as the battalion was on duty to carry supplies to the front during the evening hours, they had to march then also.

Mareuil appeared to be constructed of whalebone stretched on steel. In supervising the scattered working-parties, he covered many miles, from dawn to past midnight. And despite the heat, the dust, he contrived to look fresh and clean. From his Colonial regiment he had imported an orderly, Taraorey, better known as Koko—an enormous Negro, light in color, swift and silent as a panther. Those among the Legionnaires who had dreamed of possible retaliation by stealing the officer's belongings, hesitated: Koko always had a knife handy, a *coupe-coupe*, twenty-odd inches of steel honed to a razor's edge.

Naturally, the captain commanding noticed very soon that something was wrong in the Fifth Company. But trained, efficient officers were growing scarce at Gallipoli. Moreover, Mareuil had a fine record in France, had been wounded twice.

Kitchen gossip, as rife in the Dardanelles' camps as elsewhere, claimed that Captain Jobard had tried to interfere. That he had spoken to Mareuil, asking for the motive of his severity.

"I am taking them in hand with a purpose, Captain. They have been hard pressed, true. But there is a certain lack of discipline, an informal, casual fashion of obeying orders, that I do not like."

"Under campaign conditions such as these, my friend, one may relax rules."

"I do not believe so, Captain."

The Captain might have done something about the situation if Mareuil had *sent* men to work. But he *led* them, which was quite another thing. At times he even worked side by side with his Legionnaires, stripped to his undershirt, giving the example of endurance and industry.

During the rare lulls, when the men expected to settle down to loaf, he would call the company out for drill. His contention was that some of the men did not even know how to salute properly. He was right—many of them sought to escape saluting him.

The annoying factor, from the Legionnaires' point of view, was that he was considered, outside the battalion, as an energetic, capable officer. His constant nagging had made his company one of the neatest, most orderly in the expedition, and they were selected out of turn to supply detachments for honor guards, funeral services, additional chores.

Life in the company was a hell, under that murderous sun, with the constant shelling. The food was poor, mostly hardtack and tinned beef, and the wine scarcely deserved the name. By the time the barrels arrived, the fluid was diluted to pinkish water.

THE worst came when the battalion attacked. Mareuil, a very demon in action, led his sections to their objective promptly, stopping only when well in advance of the other companies, in the Turkish second line. The Fifth as a whole was complimented officially, and he was given a citation! Even the Captain could do no less than to shake his hand publicly, and congratulate him on a good job.

Back at the rear, he was as harsh as before. By that time the men hated him

openly. And being Legionnaires, they started balking him in the hundred ways that professional soldiers know. Supplies vanished—cartridges, blankets, water-tins—and always in some mysterious fashion, when the responsibility could not be pinned to any one man. Mareuil stormed, questioned man after man—to be met with wondering, blank glances.

"He'll crack, make a mistake," his men said hopefully. "We have him going." In their hatred for this martinet, for this tyrant, they forgot the hardships, the horrors of their surroundings.

The motivation for Mareuil's behavior in the Legion suddenly became known. Until then all had believed him simply a tough man with a sadistic turn of mind. But an old fellow, arriving from the base at Tenedos, looked at him long and earnestly, muttering:

"I've seen him somewhere."

AND within a day of that, everyone seemed to identify Mareuil at the same time. He had, in his own opinion, good reason to detest the Legion.

Twelve or thirteen years before, he had come to Indo-China as a sub-lieutenant of Tonkinese *Tirailleurs*. He was then under twenty-one, almost straight from school. And he had been placed in charge of a fortified village on the Chinese border. Naturally, he had felt important, confident of quick promotion: a command in a dangerous zone, first thing!

Unluckily for him, a small detachment of Legionnaires, in charge of a sergeant, had come to the village to rest, after an expedition against the Black Flags. To a green sub-lieutenant, Legionnaires were not different from Marine Infantry. He had assigned them to quarters and forgotten them.

All would have been well normally. But the Legion detachment was suddenly seized with a spell of collective *cafard*. The men got drunk, the sergeant also. When dawn broke, half of the village was a spread of smoldering ashes; women had been molested, stores looted, and two native civilians killed. The opposition press in Paris had enlarged on the episode, common enough in primitive countries during conquest.

The repression and punishment had been hard. Three of the Legionnaires, identified as murderers, went to hard labor for twenty years. Ten more, including the sergeant, who lost his chevrons, were sent to the Disciplinary Company. The rest drew from thirty days to three months in jail.

Mareuil, although not a Legion officer, had been technically in charge, responsible, and faced a court-martial. While he received no actual punishment, the findings of the court were humiliating:

"Sub-Lieutenant Mareuil revealed a complete inability to cope with the situation. He showed a sad lack of initiative, energy and military authority. Owing to his youth and inexperience, the court dismisses him with an official blame."

This was written down in his record. So he had vegetated as a sub-lieutenant for eleven long years, being skipped on promotion-lists. The war had given him a chance to show what he could do; he had made the most of it, attained a full lieutenancy at last. But his brooding hatred, nurtured in silence for those long, long years, had flowered when opportunity offered.

Mareuil was making sure that he would not be accused again of lack of energy, initiative or authority. He kept the men so tired that they had no chance to develop cravings.

The knowledge that they were bearing unjust treatment for something others had done many years before made the Legionnaires more impatient. Mareuil was warned, both officially and in private, by his Legion colleagues. But the more he was warned, the more stubborn he grew.

The situation became unbearable.

ONE day, in punishment for some fancied sin, Mareuil announced that the rum and wine would not be issued that day. This brought open rebellion; men refused to work. Mareuil, who did not tolerate protest or insubordination, was already reaching for his revolver when Captain Jobard appeared suddenly.

"What is wrong here?"

Matters had gone too far to be ignored. The company was solidly united against its officer. Wisely, Jobard maintained the punishment, until further notice, and led Mareuil aside.

"I don't want to disavow you openly, Lieutenant. But you know how the men are about wine. And they're really entitled to double rations, as they do special work. My advice is to relent. You're an excellent officer; you have as fine a company as even you could wish. They respect a man who can draw back from an unjust, hasty decision."

"The order sticks, Captain," Mareuil said, clenching his jaws.

"In that case, I shall ask that you be replaced."

"I shall demand a hearing, Captain."

"This is scarcely the time or place for such quarrels," Jobard said sadly. He indicated the sprawling camp down the hill: "Enough trouble from the enemy without this dissension among ourselves. Moreover, a friendly word: The General commanding served in the Legion for years, and will undoubtedly investigate fully before blaming us. Come, have some sense."

"The punishment was just, and I hold to it, Captain."

"Very well."

Jobard walked away. The Legionnaires had marched away, according to Jobard's order. Mareuil joined them near the beach, where they were shifting a pile of supplies from the open to a shed. They did not stop as he came up, watched him quietly as he stripped off his tunic. He saw that they were waiting for a word from him, and he knew that Captain Jobard was right: if he relented, they were men enough to drop the matter. But although his brain could formulate the thought, he could not bring his tongue to utter the words.

Within himself, he had come to admire the men. They had faults, grievous faults, the faults that had interrupted his career. But they were men's faults, soldiers' faults. Their endurance, courage and devotion to duty had stirred him. He felt that with diplomatic handling, he could win them. But that would have been admitting defeat.

At first they were grimly silent. Then they started conversations, some of them none too subtle, ridiculing him; and they applied names to him that no one would have fancied compliments. At first he pretended not to hear; then his temper rose, and he glared at the speakers. Hostility was almost open; everyone knew something was about to happen.

It was Legionnaire Rammon who precipitated a scene. Mareuil had cited him for saving his life, had treated him with more friendliness than others. So he had at heart to prove that he was solidary with the rest, did not seek special favors. He had been murmuring like the others.

Mareuil turned suddenly and read his lips.

"Legionnaire Rammon!"

"Lieutenant?" responded Rammon.

"That's the second time you've used that word to me. I forgot it the first time. You remember why. But you will apologize now—"

Rammon, a solid, short chap of about thirty, grew a bit pale, the tan standing out like paint on his skin as the blood left his face. Close to a hundred of his comrades were watching him. He was no longer himself, an individual, but he was the company.

"I have nothing to apologize for, Lieutenant."

"You deny calling me a swine?"

"I don't deny anything, Lieutenant."

"Forget my rank." Mareuil held out his bare arms. "You see no stripes on them, do you? I want an apology, man to man!"

"No."

Mareuil stepped toward him. In his anger, he forgot certain deep-rooted factors in the men's minds: Rammon was

strong, muscular, but he was half a head shorter, probably twenty pounds lighter, than his officer. If he had quailed, stepped back, Mareuil would have come to himself. But he held his ground, with a defiant stare, and said:

"I warn you, if you sock me, I'll sock back!"

And a clamor of approval rose from the others. For a moment the two stood face to face, under the downpour of sunlight; then Mareuil's control snapped completely. He had been under severe nervous tension for days, and the blow was a release. His clenched fist struck Rammon squarely on the left eye.

The result was beyond his wish. The blow not only knocked the private down, but the knuckles gashed the brow and cheek. Rammon rolled to his knees, tried to rise, then sank back on all fours, blood flowing freely from the cuts. His friends, who had expected a fight, had seen only a brutal execution.

THEIR representative had been brought down, put out of action, by a single punch. Instantly the Legionnaires decided Mareuil was not only a brute, but a coward. He was bigger than Rammon; he had awed him with his officer's prestige. . . . The scene that followed was indescribable.

The whole detachment surged forward, shouting threats. The Lieutenant stood his ground for a second; then even his iron nerve snapped, and he backed toward the packing-case on which he had left his tunic and pistol-holster. His fingers had closed around the butt when Eyckman and two other sergeants linked arms and made a haven for him.

"Get out of our way! You swine! You slob! I've got a special bullet for you. . . . Me too! . . . Wait until we get in the front lines again. . . . A bullet for you. . . . Swine! . . . Kill him!"

A Danish private, well over six feet, pawed at Mareuil over the sergeants' shoulders, waving a tanned fist the size of a coconut: "Me—I fight you! Me—me—"

The scandal grew; men of other units came on the run—teamsters, artillerymen, marines. They knew only that an officer had struck a private; they joined in the howling. Then an officer, a Major, rode his horse through the mob: "Disperse at once! Disperse at once! Come on—get going!" And the next moment a detachment of Zouaves approached at the double, with fixed bayonets.

At that moment Eyckman had a bright thought: he told Mareuil to climb over the case and get to the other side of the pile of supplies. "It'll save a mess, Lieutenant. Please!"

Bewildered, smiling faintly for the sake of appearance, the officer obeyed. He felt very foolish, very uneasy. And one unselfish concern tormented him: how badly had he hurt Rammon? He was in the clear when the Major rode to his side, dismounted and walked along, leading his horse by the bridle.

"You'd better identify the mutineers now," he said.

"No mutiny." Mareuil shook his head. "My fault: I lost my temper and struck a man. That'll probably mean my demotion."

"I don't think so." The Major's voice was sad. "There are too many incidents of the sort. The men's nerves are getting raw, with this constant bombardment. No one is safe for one minute, anywhere on this place, day or night. Reinforcements are few—and any day the Turks may get enough men to massacre us. . . . But an officer should keep calm."

After that, Mareuil faced several unpleasant interviews: First, there was the question of possible charges, of a court-martial. But Rammon, although he had been struck while on duty, flatly refused to make a complaint. Then there was the call upon the military police, to quash matters completely.

By night Mareuil was out of the Foreign Legion, assigned to a company of Senegalese. His departure from the company's camp was accomplished in silence; the men pretended not to see him, not to see Koko and his black helpers as they moved his belongings. No one came forward to shake his hand, to wish him well.

IT was the following morning that Captain Jobard rode in to see him. "We're going up for our turn in the line tonight, Mareuil. Something worries me, you know. I am informed that certain threats are being made against you."

"I know, Captain. Each man has a special bullet for me. They told me." And the Lieutenant smiled grimly.

"Whatever you may think of our chaps, they don't threaten for fun. My concern is not merely for you, Mareuil. I want to avoid a worse mess for all of us. Avoid your old company." Jobard shrugged. "They can hate as long and as hard as you do."

Weeks passed—long weeks of fighting.

Two men rushed him, and tore the gun from his hand.

The Legion battalion on Gallipoli was decimated and reformed. Captain Jobard was killed, other officers killed or wounded. From Moudros came new men who, gathered around the nucleus of survivors, carried on the fight. Mareuil led his Senegalese as well as he had led Legionnaires. He was a soldier, not a philosopher, and it did not puzzle him that his blacks shouted *"Allah!"* as they charged, quite as loudly as the Turks.

The Sick Man of Europe, the Horrible Turk, held off the armies of two great, healthy nations. Through the neck of the sack formed by the peninsula, new divisions poured, new cannon. The first nine days after the landing had cost the Allies eight thousand men, the Turks fourteen thousand. But what followed dwarfed those appalling figures. A fortnight later, in a single attack against the Australian positions, the enemy dropped ten thousand men. A truce had to be agreed upon to bury the dead rotting in the sun.

In London, the Minister who was responsible for the expedition was replaced by another; but while ministers lost their jobs, brave men from Great Britain and her Dominions, from India, from France, from her African Colonies, white, brown, black, lost their lives. Hospital ships bore away cargoes of mangled, crippled soldiers; brave men died by the thousand, by lead and steel, by sickness beneath the torrid sun. Thousands more were shaken by fevers, melted to skeletons by dysentery.

And across the seas came fleets of great vessels bearing fresh men. The first divisions of Kitchener's Army, insufficiently trained, unseasoned, landed and fought and died.

"Get results, we must have results."

A great attack was planned. On a July morning, at thirty minutes after four, a terrifying bombardment started. The Allies' land-batteries, the big guns on the warships, pounded away for three hours, hurled seventy thousand shells, metal and explosive by the ton. Then the infantry charged.

The Fifty-second British Division headed for Krithia; the two French Divisions holding the left of the front headed for the head of Kerevez Dere. Colonials and Senegalese, Zouaves and Legionnaires, Marines and Line infantry, all participated in the show. All hoped that this time the Turks would be smashed, driven back, that the road to Constantinople would be opened.

The first line of Turkish trenches had been crushed out of existence, but the

The Lieutenant's revolver spat; a Turk reversed his Mauser, and started to swing.

second line held. It was occupied by the crack troops of the Fourth Division. The sinister *tack-tack* of machine-guns met the advancing French, mowed them down in rows. They kept on. Bayonets and grenades cleared the defenders out—and the third line held. . . .

The combat raged all day and all night, between those men who would not halt and those who would not yield. Bits of trenches were taken, lost, retaken, lost, retaken, seven, eight, nine times. But the flood of the Allies was fed from the scanty reservoir of men at the tip of the peninsula; while from all parts of the Ottoman realm, reserve troops rushed to replace the fallen.

It availed nothing to kill three or four for one, when two appeared to replace each man lost. The ruins of ancient Troy shook with the thunder of battle hotter than that sung by Homer.

At daybreak, deafened and dazed by the bombardment, the survivors of the Fifth Foreign Legion Company huddled in shell-holes, hugging the ground. They were a few more than sixty, of whom a full fifteen had landed with the original formation, eleven weeks before. There are men who seem to bear charmed lives. Eyckman was one. He wore the slender gold-braid of *adjudant*, and was once more ranking survivor. Rammon was another.

A runner arrived with the message: "Attack and occupy fortlet at seven- thirty. Two rockets to indicate success. General attack seven-forty-five."

Eyckman looked at the position. The distance was not great, not over one hundred and fifty yards. The fortlet hardly deserved the name; it was an earthwork forming a flanking salient in the line. It was necessary to take it to keep its machine-guns from enfilading the advance.

AT seven-twenty-five, the Turks laid down a barrage on the French trench. Shells rained everywhere—heavy stuff. Whenever a man showed himself, the enemy started firing, rifles and machine-guns. It seemed that nothing could live ten seconds on that stretch of land. But the order had come, and in a few minutes Eyckman would give the signal, they would pull their bodies into the open, rush on with the bayonet.

"Ready?" Another minute passed. Eyckman lifted his hand: "*Allons-y.*"

They leaped out and started to run, crouching low. Machine-guns found them instantly, and the entire left section was knocked out almost at once. A shell-burst killed two men in the center of the line. Eyckman was thrown down by the explosion. The others faltered, halted, then turned and leaped back into shelter. The commander crawled back.

"Come on," he ordered. Then he pleaded: "Come on, come on—we can't stay here—"

The Legionnaires did not move.

"It's no use, Chief," one of them replied. "It's suicide. Even if we got there, we are not enough to clean the dump out. We'll all get killed for nothing."

"What difference does that make to you?" Eyckman demanded. He saw they were sullen, determined. "All right—if that's the way you feel, take it this way!" And he aimed his pistol at the spokesman: "What do you say? Here or up there? One—two—"

Two men rushed at him from behind, tore the gun from his hand. He raved and struck them with his fists. He felt his brain snapping: He was a Legion chief; they were Legionnaires; and they were refusing to go where he ordered! He battered at them like a madman for some seconds, then grew calmer and started to weep, tears streaking his dirty face.

"Listen, the general attack will start, and a lot of guys will be killed because of you—"

"Give us water," a man retorted. "I don't want to die thirsty."

"Right. Give us water!"

Eyckman had no water to give them. He looked at his watch: it was seven-thirty-seven. The Turkish barrage had lengthened, skipped their position, to strike at the communication-trenches, probably stuffed with troops. In eight short minutes, the attack would start, and the storming parties would be ripped into from the flank by the machine-guns in the fortlet. He made his decision: if he was not in the place by the time the attack was launched, he would blow his brains out.

What else could he do? He could not go back and say that Legionnaires had refused to die!

"Is this the Fifth Company, Legion?"

All turned toward the voice, which had slashed through the din. Mareuil stood at a bend in the trench, looking at them. Behind him loomed the giant black, Koko, rifle slung, the long blade in his hand. All the Legionnaires knew him, for even the new men had had him pointed out. All knew the story of the feud.

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Who's in charge?"

"I am."

"What's holding you up?"

When no one answered, Mareuil understood, and a smile of scorn appeared on his lips: "Dogging it, eh? And so you're Legionnaires?" He waved his bandaged left hand in derision: "You know, I've been waiting to see this. I thought that was the trouble, and asked leave to come over and see it. Makes me happy, to see a lot of you guys deflated at last. I'm not in charge; I have no order to give you. But I am going over there, and you can watch me."

He walked down the trench, found a slope easy to ascend. The next instant, he was standing on the parapet, in full sight, with the Negro at his side. He looked at them, still smiling.

"Captain Jobard, who died like a man, told me that every member of this company had a special bullet saved for me. I'm not asking the impossible—you're not men who shoot in front. But I am going out there, and you can all have a chance at my back." He started to laugh: "And you see, my back is not so easy to hit—the Turks are trying it."

It was true. He and the Senegalese were outlined against the sky and supplied targets for a hundred rifles. And both kept on their feet, unscathed, as if invulnerable. They were standing still where racing men could not hope to live. Mareuil spat to one side, casually.

"So long, Legionnaires!"

And he strode away.

Eyckman opened his mouth to give an order that was no longer needed. He was almost the last man in the trench. In thirty seconds, the detachment was in the broken wire before the Turkish trench, flinging grenades. The defenders poured out to meet them. It was the sixth time in twenty-four hours that the Legionnaires fought hand-to-hand with their foes.

MAREUIL ran right into the heat of the battle. At his side, Koko wielded the heavy blade. The Turks held bravely, for they were sturdy, experienced men from a good regiment, some of them as fair as Saxons, others almost as dark as the Negro. An officer with a green sash crossing his chest, wearing an astrakhan bonnet on which an enameled badge glistened, directed them. He had a narrow-bladed parade-sword, which he used with considerable skill.

The French Lieutenant headed for him, lifting the revolver. But his gun was empty, or he had no time to squeeze the trigger. Two sword-blows struck him almost at once, one on the forehead, the other a lunge through the breast. The Turk cleared his blade and faced Koko, who showed his teeth, severed the Turk's

wrist with a first swing, opened his face from cheek to brows with the next.

Then, as the Negro bent to lift his chief, a Turk planted a bayonet in his loins, another fired point-blank into his skull. Eyckman, standing clear of the thickest mêlée, picked them both off with his pistol. The next moment, the Legionnaires were sliding into the conquered position.

It was seven-forty-four; the Legion was on schedule.

MAREUIL was convalescing at Moudros two months later; his wounds had healed, and he was due to leave for Salonika with a Colonial Regiment. Promoted to captain, officer in the Legion of Honor, he was now satisfied with his progress. When he encountered old friends, who remembered his former hatred of Legionnaires and grew cautious when the Legion was mentioned, he honestly wondered at their conduct. He had forgotten that, for some twelve years, such references had brought his bitter comments.

One of his regrets was that he had had no chance to speak to the Legionnaires of the Fifth after the storming of the fortlet. The words he had used had been chosen deliberately to whip them into a surge of energy, into a final effort. He felt he had insulted weary, spent soldiers, who must hate him the more for it.

"I defied them," he thought often. "Called them too cowardly to shoot me from the front. If one of them ever locates me somewhere and plugs me, I won't be able to blame him."

One morning, an orderly told him: "Captain, the March Regiment of Africa is here, to embark for the Balkans. You used to serve in that outfit, didn't you, with the Legion Battalion? If you want to see them, they're not a mile away, in camp."

Mareuil reddened. "I don't know anyone there now—practically all who were in the battalion have been killed." But a strange longing gripped him, and he walked over to look at them from a distance. They had been issued new uniforms, helmets, but they retained their unmistakable silhouettes. They were soldiers, warriors, and Mareuil grew sad to think that of all their officers he was the only one who could not find a friendly hand among them.

The afternoon of the same day, an orderly informed him that an officer was outside the hospital grounds, asking for him. Mareuil went to meet him, without even asking the name. There were ten or fifteen people who dropped by thus, to take walks with him.

Soldiers were lined up beside the road, wearing blue sashes over their khaki: Legionnaires. A sub-lieutenant stepped forward, came to attention, saluted.

"Fifth Company, Legion—Captain."

It was Eyckman, a different Eyckman, in a brand-new officer's uniform, his chest displaying crosses and medals. A few days' rest, and good food, had filled out his face; his drooping mustache had been clipped.

"On duty, Lieutenant?" Mareuil asked him, refrained a first impulse to shake hands. He did not want to have his hand scorned before a hundred and fifty men. "By the way, sincere congratulations."

Eyckman stepped back, pivoted, drew his sword, his brand-new sword: "Company, attention! Present—arms!"

The bayoneted rifles jerked upright, forward, the steel tips shone rigidly in the sun. Two drums, two bugles, played a call. And Captain Mareuil looked back at the gateway, then up and down the road, to see who was honored. Save for a group of orderlies watching from some distance, he was alone.

Eyckman faced him again, saluted him with the sword.

"Company, load rifles!"

The breeches opened, clacked shut again with one single sound.

"Captain, at the storming of Ali-Tabiey, you reminded the Fifth Company of a vow made concerning you. That each member of the company had a special bullet spared for you. Legionnaires never fail their word. You shall get the bullets due you."

The old, defiant smile flashed on Mareuil's face. Of course, he did not believe that they had come to shoot him down openly.

But he suspected some plan that was meant to embarras and humiliate him.

"You are too kind, Lieutenant," he retorted.

"Special detail, forward—march! .... Halt!"

Five men had left the formation, stepped off six paces before coming to a halt. Four of them presented arms, the fifth, in the middle, carried a small flag, a sort of company marker, the staff of which was surmounted by a gilded crescent. It was obviously a trophy captured from the Turks. The cloth was scarlet, but little of it showed as it was covered with a queer, glittering ornamentation of metal.

The flag-bearer was Legionnaire Rammon, the survivor of all attacks and all perils, who carried only one scar away from the Dardanelles: a scar made by a chief's knuckles.

By this time, there was a crowd watching the ceremony. Eyckman stepped toward the flag, lifted the cloth by one corner, to spread it. Mareuil saw that it was almost covered with rifle cartridges, each one set in a small socket, as in a bandoleer.

"We have brought you those bullets, Captain, as promised. A souvenir of your old company."

Mareuil understood that they did not intend to humiliate him. And he understood also what they left unspoken: They had guessed his real motive in coming to show them the way, the morning of the attack. His jaw started to quiver, he sought to force words through his contracting throat.

"Too many, Lieutenant; the company never mustered so many men."

"Never at one time, Captain." Eyckman paused, then resumed: "But that many passed through our ranks while you were in command. There is no mistake. Each one of these cartridges has the name, rank and matriculation number of its donor." Eyckman plucked one of the metal cylinders from its socket: "For instance, this is mine."

Mareuil read the inscription neatly engraved on the brass:

"Eyckman, Michel, 1068.
"Corporal, Sergeant, Adjudant, Lieutenant.

"And here is another, Captain.

"Karlsen, Oscar, 5794.
"First-Class Legionnaire. Killed in action."

Mareuil remembered Karlsen, the big Dane who had challenged him to fight that afternoon, after he had knocked down Rammon. The man had died days before the storming of the little fort, and Mareuil understood that the Fifth Company considered itself solidary beyond life, beyond death.

Rammon had placed the trophy in the Captain's hands; he and the honor guard had stepped back into formation.

Mareuil shook hands with Eyckman, tried to speak, to express the thoughts overwhelming him. He could not; his eyes were wet, his voice out of control.

"Illegal use of ammunition," he whispered. "I could have you all court-martialed."

Sub-Lieutenant Eyckman grinned.

"Shoulder arms! Right—face! Forward—march!" He called out the orders, then trotted to take the lead, as the drums beat a rhythm.

On far-away campaigns,
When we face fever and fire,
We forget with all our pains
Death that forgets us never—

Then the buglers twirled their instruments on high, polished metal shimmered in the sun, and the blaring notes of the chorus throbbed out.

"Tiens, voilà du boudin—voilà du boudin."

The March of the Legion died away. In the distance, a compact mass of khaki receded. But Mareuil knew his destiny was marked out from now on; that he was one of their own. Somewhere, he would lead those men again.

Another Legion story by Georges Surdez will appear in an early issue.

A memorable story of the English immigrant pioneers who formed the Albert Martin Handcart Company and trudged across the continent to Utah.

Plums for

THE younger missionary said: "It's going to be an early winter." His companion added: "You're lucky if the snow don't catch you before you get through the Black Hills."

They were on their way to the new city which the Latter Day Saints had built in the valley by the Great Salt Lake; they had put in two years across the seas on their mission, and they were eager to get back home on that warm September noontide when they overtook the Albert Martin Handcart Company in the Nebraska river-bottom. By the time they had passed the long line of two-wheeled carts, with the men panting in pairs between the shafts, the women and children trudging along behind, anxiety had increased their eagerness. Their eyes were troubled as they looked down from the seat of the spring-wagon into the sun-burned face of the man who was leading these poverty-stricken converts on foot to distant Zion.

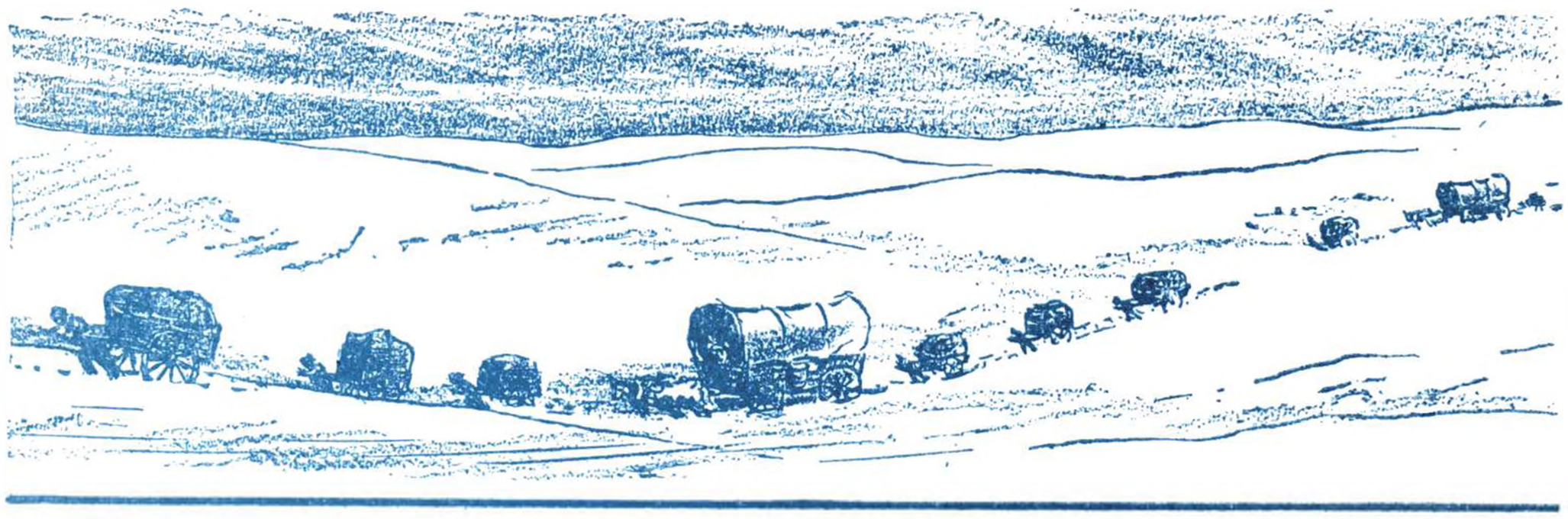
Albert Martin's eyes were holding the same worry; and before he answered them, he glanced around cautiously, lest some of these followers might be near enough to overhear. The carts were coming through the checkered light and shade of elms and basswoods; the shrieking of wheels on ungreased wooden axles rose above the trees like a shrill complaint.

"They're doing the best they can," he said, "but they're English folks, and most of 'em are from factory towns. It was late in July before they pulled out from Iowa City."

Some of the women had fallen out to gather wild plums, and Margaret was among them. She heard the voices of Albert Martin and the missionaries from the thicket where she was standing, but she did not catch the words.

The branches of the wild plum trees sank beneath their burdens of purple fruit, enframing her. Her hair and eyes were dark, her cheeks were dusky from more than five hundred miles of prairie sun and wind; her lips were rich and warm. . . . A large-limbed girl with full breasts and wide shoulders, looping her skirt to her knees to hold the plums which she had gathered—you would not think, if you had seen her, that she had never looked down a wider vista than a dingy street six months ago. She was a vision of rich fruitfulness—and she was in the thrall of a vision, the daydream of a girl who has come into womanhood. She saw herself, standing as now, under branches laden with purple fruit, but the trees were far from here, and they were arranged in ordered rows. Ever since she was a little girl, nursing four sickly geraniums in tin cans on a narrow window-ledge, she had been taken with such dreams, though they had always been vague; but this one was as clearly outlined, distinct in color, as a painted picture: Herself standing among rows of plum trees in full fruit. And the trees were in Zion, beside the Great Salt Lake beyond the mountains. There were children around her, and the man who had given them to her was beside her. He was fair-haired and tall; he was handsome, and he was burgeoning with the strength of youth.

GATHERING up the reins, the older missionary said: "We'll be in Salt Lake by October Conference. We'll tell the brethren, and they'll send back help."



Zion

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

He touched the horses with the whip, and the spring-wagon rattled away. The warm noontide passed, and it vanished across the Nebraska prairie's western rim. Where the Overland Trail bisected the enormous circle of level grasslands, the handcart company followed the setting sun toward distant Zion.

The men were dragging the two-wheeled carts; they went in pairs, breasting the cross-pieces which spanned the shafts, and the sweat stood out in drops on their foreheads. When they forded one of the shallow streams, whose timbered fringes flaunted patches of gold and scarlet where the early frosts had touched the leaves, the women fell in behind to help them up the brief steep rise on the western side. Several covered wagons and a half dozen milch-cows followed in the rear. The screaming of the wheels hovered over the bronze prairie, streaked with goldenrod and wild asters; it drowned the remote clamor of wild geese which were fleeing southward before the oncoming winter.

MARGARET'S father said: "I do feel my strength is coming back, girl. The cart pulls more easy-like."

"You're looking better, Father," she told him. "The red is in your cheeks today."

She was pressing her breast against the cross-piece which spanned the narrow shafts; her brown hands clenched the polished hickory; she strode beside the little man as if she were not conscious of the clumsy cart and its top-heavy load. The dust had mellowed her brown dress to a gray tan; the flimsy skirt clung to her limbs, revealing the fullness of their splendor. And as she glanced at the worn face with the two hectic patches on the thin cheeks, her thoughts went back to smoky streets. She remembered the close-hung walls of factories and the sour grass which was the only thing that would consent to grow upon her mother's grave; the bearded Mormon missionary preaching of Brigham Young's revelations and the Promised Land, in a little room where a dozen pallid men and women crouched on two hard benches.

BESIDE a prairie lake, bordered with tall reeds which whispered to the evening breeze, they camped that night. The men managed to find enough wood for decent fires. When the supper was over, the women brought plums and passed them around. After the others had fallen asleep, Margaret searched in the faint light of the dying embers for the pits of the plums. She gathered enough to fill a huge blue kerchief; she knotted the kerchief into a tight bundle and thrust it into a corner of her handcart. Then she stole back to her blankets, walking on tiptoe as a girl does when she is keeping her own intimate secrets; and she lay down on the tough prairie sod to think long thoughts of that warm noontide, to see herself again, as she had then, standing between the ranks of trees whose branches were bending to their loads of purple fruit, with her children around her and the man who had given them to her beside her, fair-haired and tall, filled with the strength of youth.

The mellow sunlight was bathing the wide prairie when the line of handcarts started into the West the next morning. The voices of men and women and the

thin treble of children rose above the shrieking of the wheels; they were singing, "O Zion, Lovely Zion," and as she glanced at her father's white face, it occurred to her, a tardy premonition, passing swiftly as warnings so often pass the young, that perhaps he would never see Zion.

Late in the day low sand-hills broke the evenness of the horizon's rim ahead of them; and a few days after that they were trudging below the banks of dunes which were no higher than the swells on a stormy sea. The transition from the prairie to the Great Plains was as imperceptible as the waning of a sick man's strength.

Then they discovered that they were walking over a harsh wide plain, where the bleaching headboards of graves stood like mile-posts beside the trail. One afternoon Margaret saw Laramie Peak against the skyline, blanched with fresh snow; and that night she awoke to hear her father's coughing through the drone of a bitter gale sweeping down from the northwest. She got up and took from her bed its best blanket; and while she was tucking it around him, she heard the long-drawn howl of a buffalo-wolf. There was a skim of snow on the ground when she crept from her scanty covers in the gray twilight of the dawn; her fingers were numb with cold, and she was shivering so violently that she had hard work kindling the fire of buffalo-chips. The carts were beginning to pull out by the time she went to the whitened mound where her father was lying and laid her hand upon his shoulder; he did not stir—it seemed to her at first that he was not breathing; and it took her so long to rouse him that the others were almost out of sight before she had her load stowed away and started on the trail.

THAT day, and during the gray days thereafter, while the Albert Martin Handcart Company was struggling through the steep ravines and over the wind-swept red bluffs on the southern fringe of the Black Hills, she strode alone between the shafts, and her father staggered along behind. On the bitter morning when they came down to the lowlands, approaching the last crossing of the Platte, she carried him from his blankets, laid him on the load and wrapped the covers about him; and because she was what she was, she did not give a thought to the added weight during the weary hours that followed, while she was panting through the loose sand, pressing her full breasts against the cross-bar. She had been made to bear such burdens; their acceptance was as natural as the vision which had come to her in the wild-plum thicket on a warm noontide weeks ago. And that was as natural as life itself.

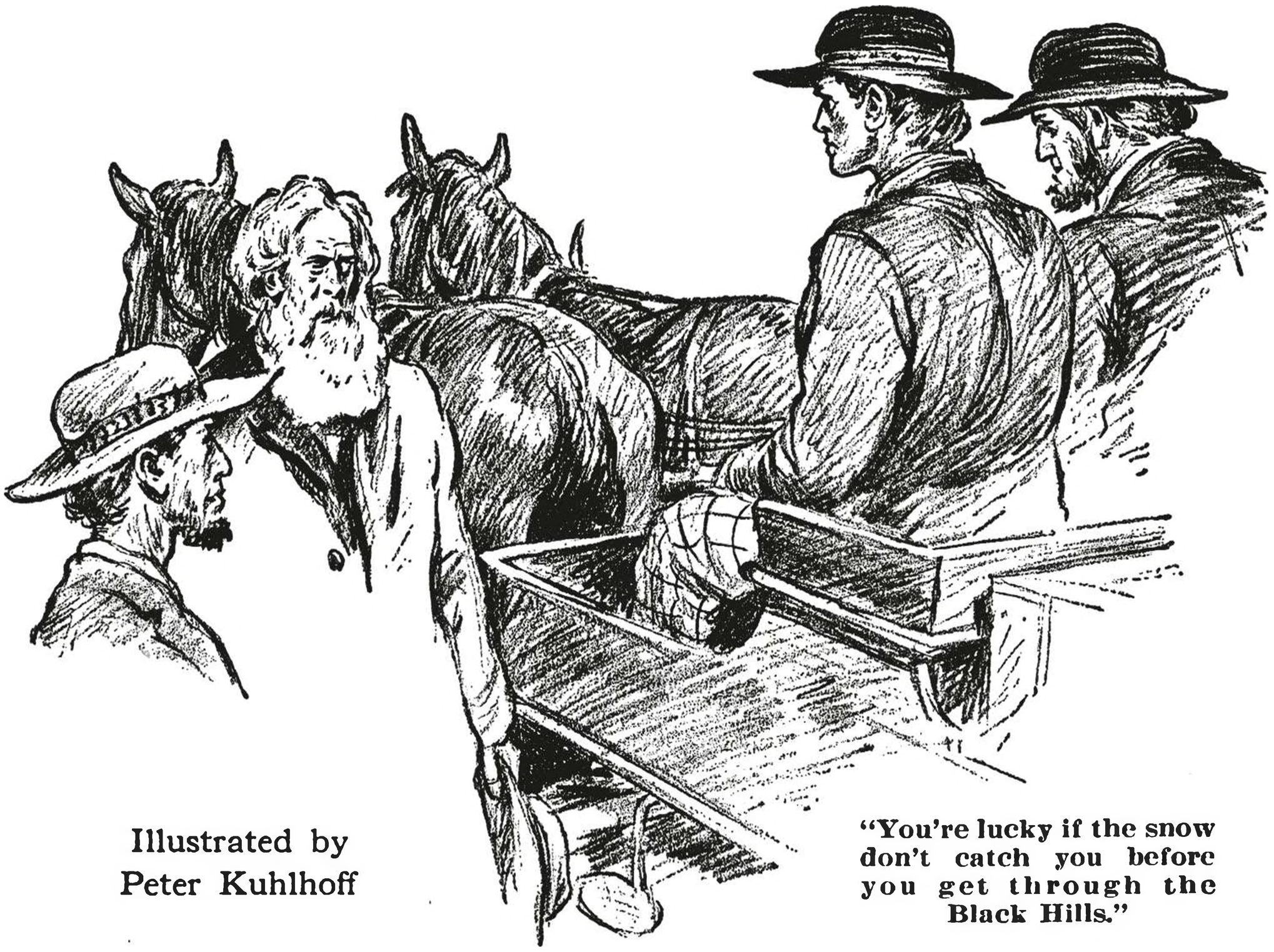
ON the night of the first snow, the oxen had stampeded; the cows now were drawing the covered wagons; there was no milk for the children, and the daily ration had been diminished to a double handful of flour for every able-bodied man. The women got only half as much, and it never occurred to Margaret to protest when she was handed her small allotment. But the lack of food was bringing weakness; and the weakness was bringing a curious detachment. It seemed to her, that day, as if the others were not there. She was not conscious of the shrieking of the wheels; and when the man before her fell between the shafts and crawled off the trail, she passed him without seeing him. . . .

There was a grove of cottonwoods beside the river, and several fires were flaring there in the dusk, when Margaret came into camp. Her body was racked with weariness, and her arms were like lead, but it was no trouble to lift her father's slight form from the load and lay him down.

It snowed during the night; by morning it was blowing hard, and the wind was driving a white fog of flakes before it; the fog eddied upon the open flatlands and the sharp-nosed bluffs beyond were dull white against the lowering clouds. Outside the grove of cottonwoods, where the bank fell away to a sandbar, several men were digging a long grave, and six still forms lay on the heap of sand beside the trench. The sides of the river were lined with ice; the thin sheets of ice were cracking loudly, dissolving into a multitude of little cakes as the first handcarts started to make the ford. The gravediggers looked up at the sound of a girl's voice and saw Margaret standing before them, holding her father's body in her arms.

"I want one of you to pray for him," she said. "Pray that he reaches Zion."

She stood there while they covered the bodies and heaped boulders on the low mound to keep the wolves away.



Illustrated by
Peter Kuhlhoff

"You're lucky if the snow don't catch you before you get through the Black Hills."

She listened to the prayer which one of the elders made, and then she went back into the cottonwoods.

A few minutes later she came forth, breasting the cross-bar between the cart's shafts; she dragged the cart down the bank and waded out into the current, where masses of slush ice floated, half-submerged. The men watched her climb the farther bank; the wind was whipping her dripping skirt against her body, and she vanished in a whirling cloud of snow. . . .

Sometimes, when she thought of her father's death, she tried to understand why it had brought so little of sorrow's pain to her. She did not realize how strong a comfort she was finding in the knowledge that he was no longer walking this weary road, and had found a shortcut to Zion. She did not remember the burden which had been lifted from her shoulders. But there was, in these bleak days and bitter nights, a memory that did abide. It was in her mind when she awakened every morning, and it stayed before her during the long hours while she was dragging the handcart up the slow hills beside the Sweetwater: the picture of fruit-laden trees, herself among them and her children. And always the man who had given her those children, fair-haired, handsome and tall. . . . It had become a deeper thing than her religion. It was a part of her. She was as sure of its fulfillment as if it had already come to pass.

The storm which had begun on the night when her father died, hung on. By the end of the week nearly two feet of snow was lying on the level, and there were places where the wind had piled the drifts to the height of a tall man's waist. The weakened cattle were not able to keep up; the wagons were lost somewhere behind. Now the members of the Albert Martin Handcart Company no longer united in camp when night came; they gathered in little groups and lay down beside the trail wherever darkness found them. But every evening, before Margaret wrapped her blankets around her, she went to her cart and groped in the box until her fingers touched the bundle of plum-pits, to make sure that it was there.

IT was on the ninth day after the last crossing of the Platte that she came upon Paul Stone.

There had been forty of them huddled in a bunch of willows under a rim-rock bluff the night before, and the men had made a great fire of driftwood, for the Sweetwater took a sharp bend here, and many logs had lodged against the bank. The flank of the bluff had given them a lee, and the flames had licked the placid air all night long. But in the morning there were thirteen dead lying wrapped in their tattered blankets.

And when Margaret started up the trail, it was as if her limbs did not belong to her, as if they were dead weights like the cart which she was dragging.

The road passed into wide treeless uplands, stippled with clumps of sage-brush; the little clusters of sage had caught the drifting snow, and the plateau was like a pallid sea broken into sharp swells by the driving gale. Always the gale came from the hidden pass in the west, where the waters of the continent divided; it kept striving to drive her back; it whipped her skirts against her legs; it flung the powdered snow into her face.

IT was as if time had ceased; she did not know whether it was morning or afternoon, when she felt something lurching against the cart, and looked around to learn what had caused the shock. The powdered snow was blinding her, and she would not have discovered him if she had not heard his voice then. It was so faint that it barely reached her through the humming of the storm; it was as husky as the rustling of dry leaves in a wind. She dashed the snow from her eyes and caught sight of him as he was disappearing in the fog of driven flakes. Then the same thing that had made her forget her father's weight upon the load, the thing that had caused her to nurse those sick geraniums in tin cans on a window-sill when she was a little girl, that had brought to her the vision in the wild-plum thicket, took command of her once more. She dropped the cross-bar and slipped out from between the shafts; she ran to him, and she threw her arm around him just in time to save him from pitching forward into the gathering drifts.

A lank man in a tattered overcoat, his head was wrapped in a scarf which he had made from sacking; he was incredibly gaunt; there was a thin fringe of beard ringing his face; there were white patches of frostbite above the beard; his eyes were so deeply sunken that they seemed to have disappeared. A mockery of a man, and his voice was but little better than a whisper:

"Thank God you came!"

She picked him up; and weak though she was, she hardly felt the weight of him in her arms. She carried him to the handcart and wrapped him in her blankets, just as she had wrapped her father one morning; it seemed a long, long time ago. She laid him on the load, and she went on.

It was the last that she remembered, thrusting her body against the cross-bar, pressing forward against the blizzard. The thing that drove her was

His voice was little better than a whisper: "Thank God you came!"

stronger than herself; it was so strong that when the land began to break and the trail turned down to the crossing of the river, she was not conscious of the storm, of the cold that was biting her body, of the snow that blinded her eyes. She thought that she was standing among the plum trees, with her children and the man whom she loved beside her.

And so her body did the things which it did while her mind was far away. The bank which led down to the Sweetwater was steep; there were some rocks which jutted through the snow that clogged the trail. The cart descended to the water with a rush, and overturned. And when she tried to right it, she saw that one of the wheels was dished. Paul Stone was lying beside the wreck. She stopped long enough to retrieve the plum-pits in the litter of camp utensils before she picked him up; and she clung to the precious bundle while she waded through the stream with his lank form cradled in her arms. Her fingers were still clenching the pits when she sank down beside the road a few minutes later. She wrapped her arms around him, and pressed her body close to him to give him some of its warmth.

THE younger missionary announced: "They're dead, these two."

He stood with his broad back to the storm, beside the covered wagon, and his companion looked down from the driver's seat through the fog of snow upon the still forms. Somewhere behind them other canvas-covered wagons were hidden in the blizzard; they were coming slowly down the trail out of the west, twenty stout teams and forty men, the rescue expedition which the two missionaries had promised Albert Martin on that noonday in the river-bottom. It was more than three weeks since they had set forth from the valley beside the Great Salt Lake.

The older missionary wrapped the reins around the brake-handle; then he climbed down from the wagon seat, and as he stood there gazing at the two who lay so still in the drift, he caught sight of the bundle in the girl's clenched hand. He bent down and pulled off his mitten; he fingered the cloth.

"Feels like plum-pits," he said. And then: "She's living, all right. So's her man."

They lifted the two into the wagon-bed. There was a little stove under the canvas cover. The older missionary resumed his seat and picked up the reins, and the younger man remained in the rear to minister to the rescued pair while his companion drove on.

WHEN Margaret came back to the world which she had been so near to leaving for all time, there were a dozen others in the wagon, and she was lying beside Paul Stone. As soon as she was able to move unaided, she took over the task of nursing him. It was slow work; the team was plodding westward again before he opened his eyes; the horses were setting back against the frost-rimed breeching on the down-grade beyond South Pass on the day when he was able to sit up with the help of her arm around him. And during the days which had intervened she had served that rack of skin and bones, as women serve their helpless men against the stealthy assaults of Death. It was, as it had been when she had watered the sickly plants on the window-sill, as it had been when she had tended her father on the trail; but there was something which made this battle appeal to her more strongly than those others had. And when she saw that it was won, the triumph left her in the possession of greater tenderness than she had ever known.

The line of covered wagons crossed the wind-swept flats; it followed the winding trail over hills where twisted cedars stood out darkly against the snow; it crossed Green River on the ferry among floating ice-cakes and came into the cañons of the Wasatch.

To Margaret it all seemed as natural as if she had always known that it was coming—as if it had been prearranged ever since she could remember, on that afternoon when the teams were descending Emigration Cañon, and Paul Stone asked her to be his wife. It seemed so natural that she did not pay any attention to the others who were huddled around them in the wagon; it was as if those gaunt-faced men and women were not there.

There had been a chinook wind the week before, one of those moist, warm breezes which help to make the winters kinder in the inter-mountain country than they are in the broken lands of the Continental Divide. The snow had melted in the Salt Lake Valley, and the wide plain lay below them, golden in the sunshine; the two of them got to their feet, and they

stood behind the driver's seat, she with an arm around him, gazing down at last at Zion.

He was so weak that he could not stand long in the lurching wagon. The skin was still tight over the bones, and his face was like a mask which has shrunken; his shoulders drooped, and his body was but little more than a skeleton—a travesty of a man! And when she fondled the bundle of plum-pits that evening after she had promised to marry him, the vision of the trees in ordered ranks with purple fruit weighing down their limbs returned to her; she saw herself among them—but that was all she saw. . . .

Nature moves slowly, and the changes come so imperceptibly that oftentimes one is not sensible of what has taken place until long afterward. A Mormon bishop in the ward where the newly married couple lived told his people, one Sunday that winter, of a revelation which had come to him; and as a result of his tidings, an exploring expedition went forth from the Salt Lake Valley into the mild, warm southlands near the Colorado River, which the Latter Day Saints have since named Dixie. Paul Stone went with them as a teamster.

So it happened that, on a balmy day in April, Margaret was making garden alone in the ten-acre patch at the northern edge of Salt Lake City, which had been allotted to her and her husband. And when the sun was at its warmest in the middle of the afternoon, she was planting her plum trees—tiny trees, which she had raised in tin cans during the winter from the seeds which she had gathered back there in the prairie river-bottom months before. She was planting the seedlings in ordered rows when Paul returned to her.

Then her vision came to her again, just as she had seen it so often in those weary days and bitter nights: Herself standing between the trees whose branches were bending to loads of purple fruit—and the man whom she loved was standing beside her. Those grown trees were still only a dream. But time and nature had finished the work of whose beginning she had not been conscious: The man was handsome and tall; the strength of youth was in him. She looked into his eyes, and saw that he was no dream, but was real. And she felt the first stirring of life within her then, reminding her that in the days to come, when these tiny seedlings were trees and their branches were laden with plums, she was also to see real children gathered here about her.

January Girl

A weird South Seas drama by the distinguished author of "The Eerie Island" and "The Flaming Sword."

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

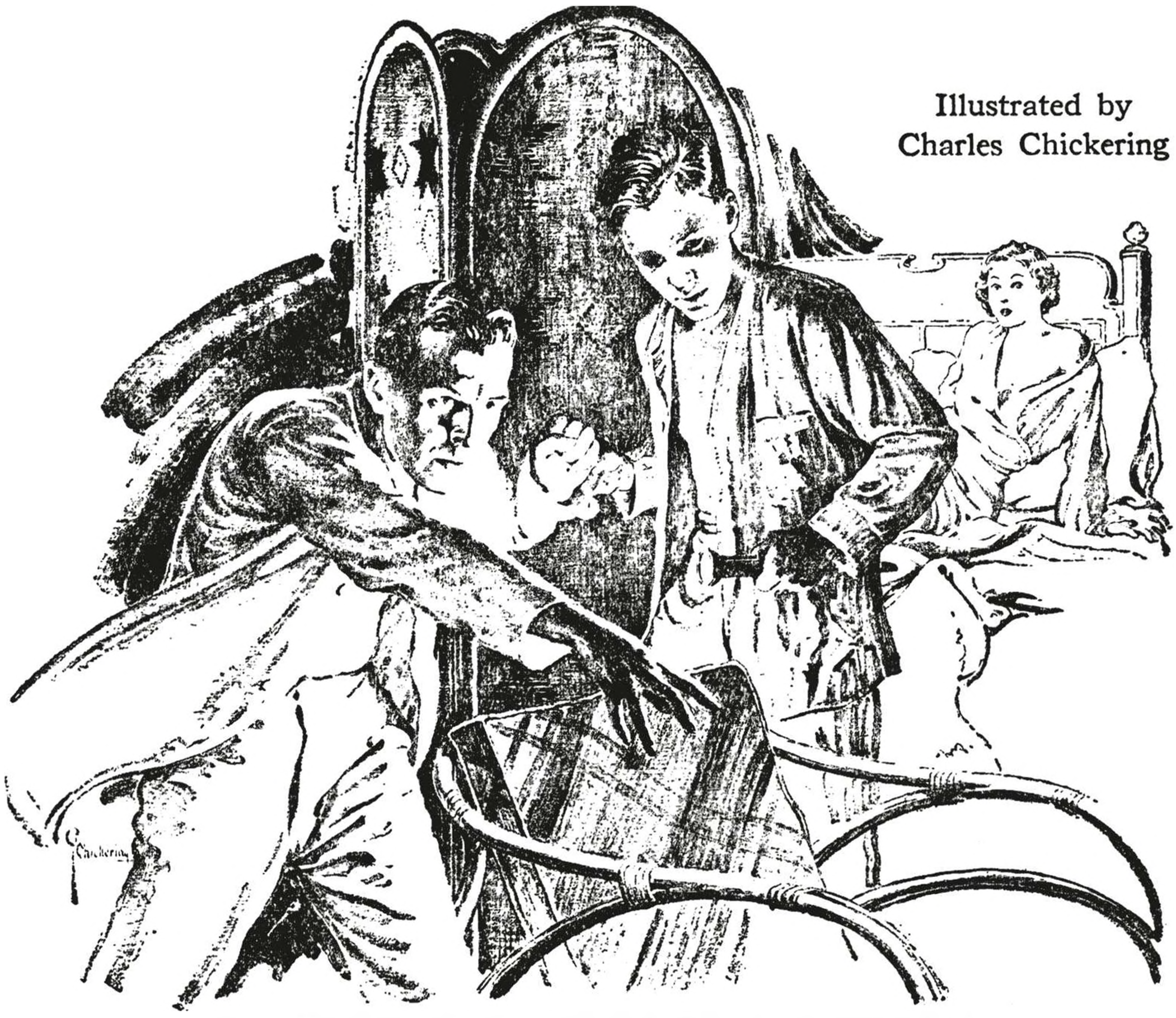
DARU, in the Far West of Papua, which lies in the Coral Sea above the loneliest side of Australia, which is at the end of the world—Daru never changes.

I would go back to Daru. I would see again the flaming woods of claret and gilt and amber croton trees, afire like a spilled sunset against the parrot-green of sago and mango. I would hear the black waves of the wicked Gulf of Papua, grave of noble men, hissing on dark sands below the two-three houses of the tiny town. I would feel the enormous loneliness of the place, the silent menace of its untamed hinterlands, press on me like a cloud; I would sip, dangerously, the burning ichor that is there distilled from utter freedom; from the sense that no one lives, no one knows, no one cares. For two steps beyond Daru, the wild begins; and after the wild, the unknown.

And Daru does not change. World troubles do not touch it. World news does not come to it. It sits alone.

January, in Papua, is the hot month of the year. Will Perry, the planter who had come down from the Fly Estuary to the little station of Daru, with a tail of native laborers to "sign off," was as well accustomed to the searing climate of New Guinea as any man might be who had lived there seven years without change. Stan Salter, the young patrol officer, member of a service as romantic and as famous as the Northwest Mounties or the Cape Police, was tough by nature and by training. But even they found

Illustrated by
Charles Chickering



Perry seized the bamboo, and pitched it out of the window.

themselves obliged to complain of this particular summer day.

In the store, where one bought tinned meats and fruits, tinned bacon and eggs, tinned cabbages and puddings, they met, each man with his sleeves cut short and his shirt open to the waist, dashing the streams of perspiration from wet foreheads with the flat of dripping arms.

"Never knew it worse in January," tall Will Perry, worn too thin by fever and by heat, said, staring with sun-paled blue eyes at the hot waves bursting on the sand below the house. Salter, four and twenty to Perry's thirty, lately from Melbourne, sophisticated and educated and trained in the anthropological lore that Will despised, answered obliquely: "It takes a few hundred years of this environment to adapt oneself like the natives."

Will was drinking a bottle of beer out of the neck. It was not much cooler than hot tea, but beer is always beer. . . . He finished it before he replied, wiping his mouth: "There's where you new chums full of university rot are wrong. There's men who can live like natives. And like it. There was Cook,—no relation to James,—who went up the Turama and stayed there for fifteen years. And brought a wife. And she had a baby and died, because she was what the natives call ' 'nother kind.' And anyhow the Turama's no place to have kids in. Cook was drowned in the river bore. And now there's Jan Cook."

"Never met him," Salter said, screwing the neck of a bottle. "A lump of ice would be just *it*," he regretfully told the storekeeper; and then, because a patrol officer must be hard, laughed and added: "One of the little things you learn not to want."

"*Her*," corrected Perry. "Man alive, if you weren't so new to the country, you'd know all about Jan. Even though she doesn't advertise—like Bobs."

"Who was Bobs?" carelessly inquired the younger man, and then without waiting for an answer: "Who's this?"

PERRY set down the emptied bottle, looked out for a moment into the fiery dazzle of the coral roadway, drew back his head and said: "January Cook."

"What did they call her that for?" Salter asked curiously. The girl who was swinging lightly, barefoot, toward the store, was handsome, he thought,

rather than pretty; something strange and wild about her; face, hands and feet burned to darkish copper, hair black, thick, short and outstanding; eyes so definitely blue, and mouth so sharply cut, that you couldn't give her a drop of native blood; and yet—yet she did remind you, somehow, of the dark girls in the village at the other side of Daru; those slim, half-naked girls who dance on moonlight nights, dance with the very heart of passionate savagery in them. Queer. . . . She was dressed in the sort of cotton frock that white women wear; she had no shoes, but every finger- and toenail was smoothed and tended; she came into the store, nodded to Perry, and asked the storekeeper, in perfect English and with a cultivated accent, for some tea. . . . Not a native by so much as one sixteenth; and yet—

Salter saw, suddenly, that Perry was staring hard at Jan. Why, he thought, the chap's in love with this young savage! He looked hard at January Cook again. And she seemed to him, now, more than handsome. It might be because he had sensed the passion for January of the other man; it might be because he saw the girl nearer. But she was on the moment, beautiful, desirable. And she did not care whether he was alive or dead. You could see that.

You didn't much like it—if you were a young patrol officer, with a good opinion of yourself.

The girl took her parcel away with her, passing so near to Perry as she went out that the starched folds of her short cotton frock brushed against him. Salter heard Perry catch his breath. But neither he nor January spoke.

WHEN the girl was gone, Salter demanded: "What's she called that for? Where does she come from? Why's she knocking about Daru by herself?"

"If it's any business of yours," the other told him, "she was called January by Cook because she was born in January, in the hottest weather, and it killed her mother, as I said; but she's always been a sort of hot-weather kid—loves it when the thermometer goes to a hundred with rain in the air, seems to sort of blossom out—it would finish her if you took her to Australia, but she's never been; when Cook was drowned by the Turama bore, and she was only three months old, the natives took her and nursed her; and when she was eleven, the Mission began making a fuss about it, and they took her over. She's twenty-one now, and her own mistress, but she lives more or less with a retired Mission Lady who looks after her—and you might as well set a white rabbit to look after a wildcat. Any more questions?"

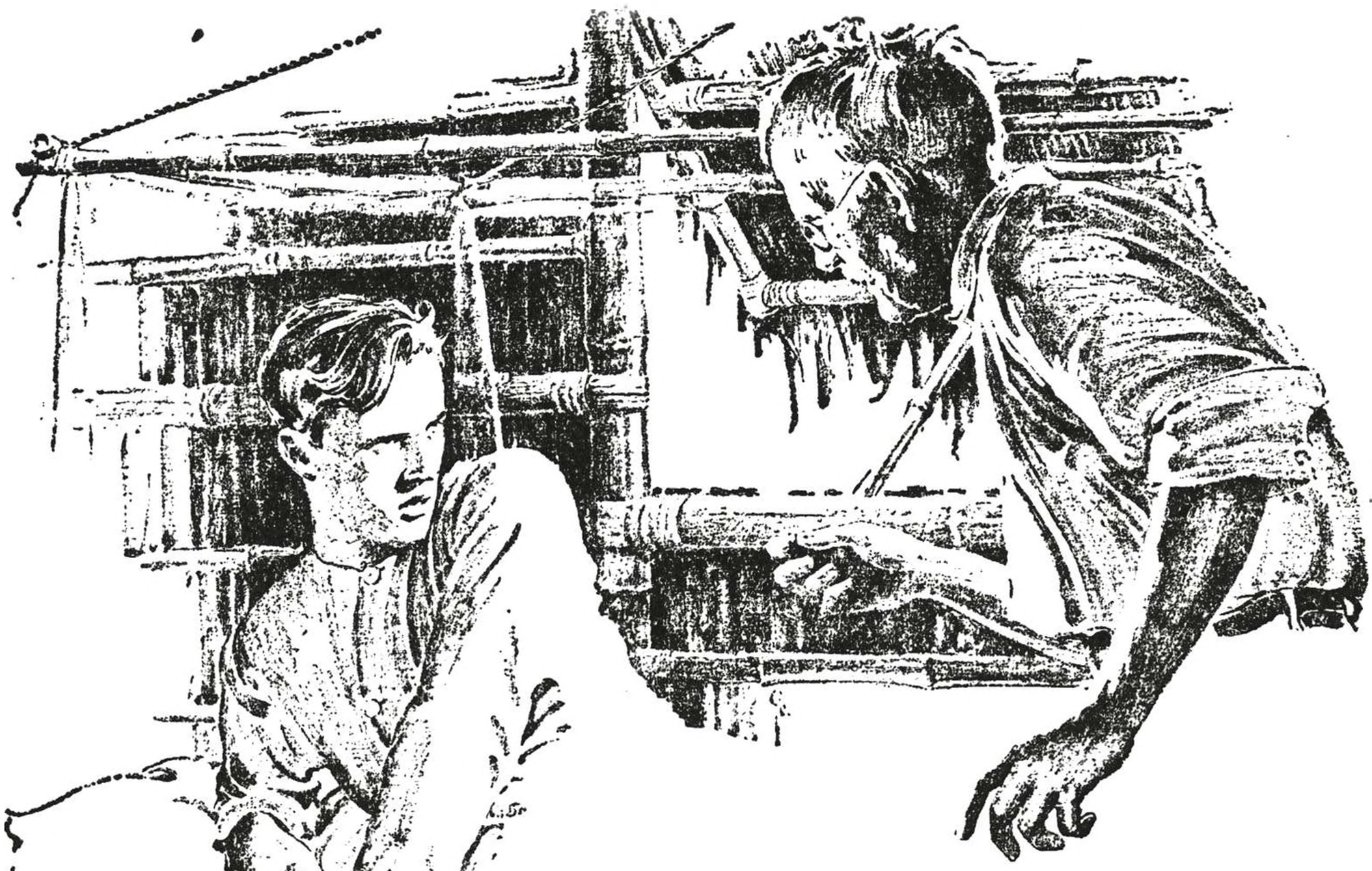
"One more," the patrol officer coolly answered. "Are you going to marry her?"

THE elderly storekeeper leaned bare elbows on his counter, and grinned. This was pepper; this was fun. Two white men almost at each other's throats because of Jan Cook—a decent girl (there's never any doubt, pro or con, about that, in tropical houses, with walls almost open and native servants silently prowling night and day) but who was certainly—odd.

Who had a Papuan sorcerer for a foster-brother, and used to go off to the bush with him, God-knows-what queer business—nothing scandalous, of course; brothers were brothers, among the natives—but she'd be away half the night sometimes, and come back with her face all shut up, and not a word to throw to a dog, or a deserving trader. And she knew the drum-talk, which no white person, you might say, knows. And the old Mission Lady was worried about her—because, she said, she didn't see how Jan Cook was ever to get decently married; which the old Mission Lady, being an old maid herself, seemed to think a good deal more important than in the view of the (sometime married) trader, it was.

Perry, the thin, tall man with the sun-faded eyes, was in love with her, of course; but nobody knew what she thought about it; and here was the new patrol officer, asking him was he engaged to her! As like as not Perry would paste him one on the snoot—Government or no Government—for his trouble. . . .

But there was to be no such lightening of the weight of the long island day for a deserving trader, after all. Because, into the very midst of that tense situation, into the dusky store with its clinking billy-cans and oily-smelling tobacco, and piles of calicoes and strings of beads, into the out-back solitude of Daru where no one ever came, Thora Cummings erupted: Pencil-slim, perfectly clad, with the newest sandal and the newest eye-veil, the latest make-up and a mass of cleverly coiffed light curls, this epitome of civilization, and of Sydney, and of lands beyond the Coral Sea—Thora, poised, sophisticated, perfect, came in and took possession of Daru.



Salter sat up. "What's wrong, Cripps?"

A crackling fire of questions and answers put Perry abreast of the situation. Thora, the sister of the Assistant Resident Magistrate, had been expected in a month or so, on a visit to Daru station. She had changed her mind and come earlier. The schooner that brought her across from Thursday Island lay at the jetty; and the A.R.M., greeting her, had asked her to go on to his house and on the way, tell the storekeeper to hurry up certain goods.

That was that. The storekeeper became busy. Thora swept the building and the men with one comprehensive smile, and said she'd be going. And Perry, who had hardly shut his astonished mouth since she came in, waked up and said he'd show her the way. Salter had meant to do it; Salter, with the swift decision that comes to men in girl-starved surroundings, had already told himself that this was his bit of skirt; that there wasn't another white man in the place outside of the storekeeper and the (married) "Customs" and the A.R.M. and Perry—that the coast was clear, and he was in luck.

And then Perry, that mad hatter from the back of beyond, Jan's admirer too, for what that might mean—Perry had jumped at her like a dog at a bone, and gone off down the blazing coral walk among the flaming croton trees, with this bit of Sydney in its white frock and its cobweb stockings. And they were out of sight; and in the store and beyond it, there was no sound save the creaming hiss of waves falling upon black sand.

Salter swung away from the store. Cripps, the storekeeper, left alone, looked after him and grinned. An old man, out of things and set away in the top gallery of life for the rest of his days, he might yet, he thought to himself, see something entertaining on the stage below, before very long.

JAN, going home, passed like a splash of light thrown up from the sea; she had the native knack of moving as natural objects move, swiftly and almost unnoticed. But Cripps saw her; there was little he did not see. He shouted after her, "Hi, Jan, your fancy man's gone off with the other girl!" and watched for the result. There was none. The girl did not even turn her head. She went by with the sunlight playing in her hair, striking lights of red and amber into its dense black mass. Cripps took his eyes off her for a moment; in that moment she was gone. "Like the natives," he thought. "I lay she has their trick of runnin' backward when she likes!"

He wondered for a minute or so whether she really fancied Perry or not. Until the present moment, he had supposed it to be all the other way. But now—

"Well," he thought. "I might as well go down and tally my stuff ashore, as sit

here chewin' the rag about people who don't know whether I'm dead or alive, and don't care."

There was a dance that night on the black-sand beach. Perry had seen it all a hundred times, but he wasn't tired of it; he liked, as ever, to stand by the side-lines and let the thrum-thrumming of the lizard-skin drums, the rhythmic bobbing and swaying of paradise headdresses under the flare of torches, the sensuous rapt faces of the dancers, invade him like a stupefying drink. You lost your personality, listening and looking; you shed your sense of place and time. You were sucked into something that led out beyond plain sensuality, never absent; you knew the influence of the nameless forces that lived in the Out Back, up the lonesome rivers and in the enormous forests where no man dwelt; where silence was a thing that did not merely exist; that was kept. . . .

The girl from Sydney was beside the planter; she watched the dancers with complete incomprehension; she compared their steps, audibly, with the Black Bottom and the Big Apple, and said she could do better herself. Perry thought her a little fool, and longed at the same moment to kiss her till she couldn't think or speak.

He had stood within touch of January Cook, when the maddening native dance was going on; he had seen her bosom, under its muslin smock, heave with the desire to join in (and she could do it, he thought). No white man had ever seen the girl dancing; even as no white knew what she did, and where she went, when she disappeared for a day and a night into the wilds. But Perry knew that she'd understand the things he understood; that the wilderness had set its brand on her as on him. He had known for some while that she would make, for him, the ideal mate. And he had guessed that she wouldn't say no, when, in due time—there was never any hurry in Daru, Daru at the end of the world—he found voice to put the question.

BUT now the tempo of the outside world had suddenly invaded Daru, along with and surrounding the personality of Thora. She was full of hurry and curiosity; she wanted to see everything, to go everywhere. She had asked a thousand questions, many of which Perry found himself unable to answer, although he understood their subjects as a man understands his own face in the mirror. She was going to look on at the native dance; she was going out in canoes; she was going to see a dugong hunt; she wanted to watch turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs, and see them intercepted and turned by native watchers on the beach. And she had already decided, it seemed, that Perry—tall slim Perry with the blue sun-faded eyes and sun-battered skin—was to be her cavalier for the time being; she had turned the full blaze of her charm upon him, and he had instantly gone down. He didn't approve of her one bit; he thought her silly and restless and conceited—and he was, all the same and suddenly, deep-drowned in love.

Under the Prussian-blue night sky that was beaded with sparkling stars, they stood together, fought mosquitoes, and watched the dancing. Perry wasn't drunk with the dance now; it was a headier draught that held him. Things were moving; he was wide awake. Already he was beginning to plan a journey south, and a parson.

SALTER, looking as romantic as he knew how, in his khaki bush outfit with cartridge-belt and service revolver, was posing not very far away. He was there more or less on duty; there had been times when these dances, growing too strenuous, had ended in the snatching of parked spears, stabbing and blood. But he wasn't thinking of that; he felt rather like something in a Western film; hoped he looked it, hoped Thora saw him.

He never saw what Cripps, who was lurking near him, saw. Jan Cook, tall and still now, not a strand of her heavy hair stirring, not a finger or a fold of her dress that wasn't stone-quiet. Jan, looking steadily at something out of the corners of her long gray eyes. Cripps didn't need to turn round in order to know what she was watching. The back of his neck prickled. He had been long in Daru.

He edged away, inconspicuously, to the spot where Salter was standing. "Bit lonely?" he asked the young man, not without spite. Salter said: "Do you want anything?" He wasn't going to discuss his defeat.

The trader said: "Yes. What do you suppose Kalipa's doing here tonight? If you've any attention left over from that little piece of Sydney goods opposite."

"What? Kalipa? That handsome chap who's dancing so well? I reckon he came to show the others how to do it."

"Kalipa's the biggest sorcerer in the West—and Jan's foster-brother!"

"That so?" The young officer stared. He saw a Papuan man, splendidly made, all but naked, decked out in native jewelry of boar-tusks and dogs' teeth, with a necklace of human finger-bones about his throat. He saw that the man was dancing, as if by accident nearer and nearer to the spot where Perry and Thora stood; that the strange gray eyes of January Cook caught Kalipa's black eyes, every now and again. That the foster-brother and sister seemed, without words, to be communicating.

Salter immediately snapped into the character of Government officer. It was his by no means secret pride to belong to this famous, perilous service. And every man in the service knew that sorcery was mostly murder.

"If there's any nonsense going," he said sharply, "I'll be on the fellow."

"If there's any nonsense going," Cripps mockingly repeated, "you probably won't. Things will happen—as they happen. Just naturally."

Salter hadn't time to express his contempt for such a point of view, because January, whom he really admired when he wasn't looking at Thora, had started to slip away. Quite quietly, quite naturally. As if she were a little tired of the dance and wanted to go home to the Mission Lady's and have a cup of tea. Coolly, too—her face and arms and her bare ankles were dry as ivory, when everyone else, Salter included, was sweating like meat in the frying-pan. She was not natural, he thought, this girl born in the heat of the year; she was a salamander. . . . But the salamander, that fabled beast, didn't even feel flame. And January, unless her gray eyes lied, knew the scorch of one kind of flame, at least.

Before he knew what had happened to her, she was gone. And he remembered Cripps' odd saying—that Jan had all the native tricks, that she could disappear when you took your eye off her, like a snake. And—

Kalipa was gone too. But Salter, with the corner of his eye, had caught a glimpse of that departure. The sorcerer had danced lightly backward until he neared the tangle of surrounding croton bush; then he simply ran back like a reversing engine, and vanished.

"VERY well," thought Salter, detaching his interest from Thora and Perry. "Very well. I mayn't be able to do that, but I reckon I know where to find the Mission Lady's house. And I must find it, because this is business. This is a job."

Thunder, never far away in the hot season, bumbled and thumped above the black-sand beach as he turned away. A river of lightning poured. In its sudden sheen, you could see the white teeth, the glittering eyeballs of the dancers; then you could see almost nothing at all. Rubbing his eyes, the patrol officer walked away.

The Mission Lady's house, a small building of iron, stood among clustered palms. Wind was getting up now; the palm fronds thrashed upon the roof with angry hands, extinguishing the sound of Salter's footsteps on the coral walk. There wasn't much sound, in any case; the young man had done detective work "down South" in Sydney, and when he wasn't thinking of girls or grog or dinner, he could do an excellent *Sherlock Holmes* job yet.

QUIETLY he circled the house. There was a veranda—nobody there; there was a lit bedroom window, modestly covered with thick calico; that would be the Mission Lady's. There was another window, curtained with the sort of gaudy colored stuff that looks opaque in the daytime, and by night proves itself, sometimes, to be nothing of the kind. To this window Salter turned his attention. He wanted to know, simply, whether Jan was in. The stuff was, as he had guessed, transparent. Light inside, turned low. No one there.

He drew aside into the clump of palms, and quite patiently waited. He waited two hours. It was nothing to the vigils he'd had down Sydney Harbor, on freezing August nights. He could wait all night, if necessary, in this heavy warmth.

There! The light had suddenly gone up. It was a hurricane-lamp; somebody had come in and turned up the wick. Salter waited a minute, slipped to the window—and almost immediately staggered back against the veranda wall, gasping. "I'm not mad," he said to himself. "I'm not drunk. I did see it."

His thick fair hair felt strange. Did hair ever really stand on end? He ran his fingers through it. . . . The scalp was sweating, but the hair lay flat.

That reassured him, and he ventured to look again.

Yes. Jan was standing in the middle of her room, staring at a length of carved bamboo, which was actually bobbing and shuffling about on end, like the dancers

who had been bobbing and shuffling down on the black-sand beach, hours ago. They were long since asleep in the village, but here was this infernal thing, the very sight of which his blood run cold, carrying on the dance as if it were alive. And Jan was looking at it, speaking to it. He couldn't catch what she said. Somehow, he didn't want to. He swallowed a great many times in a throat that had suddenly gone dry, and wondered what in the name of all the fiends he ought to do. There was nothing, the Regulations told him. If he jumped into the room, why, that hellish thing would assuredly be found lying on the floor, just a bit of bamboo a few feet long, and Jan would be wanting to know, in no very courteous terms, what on earth he meant by breaking into her bedroom.

He thought of spiritualistic tales he had read—about people who had gained power to make pencils stand on end, yards away. To order a tangle of muslin to untangle itself, and float free, without touching it. Things like that happened; and people said, when they did, that it was either fraud, or the Powers of Evil.

Well, it wasn't fraud here, unless he was crazy. And he didn't believe in Powers of Evil. And—there! He had made a slight noise—and the whole scene was changed. Jan was sitting on her bed pulling off her dress, and the bamboo was lying flat on the floor in a shadowy corner. Had he dreamed it all?

It was a considerably chastened patrol officer who slipped away from the Mission Lady's house, and silently went to bed in the quarters, taking his problem with him. He hadn't spoken to the R.M. —yet. It seemed a bit too personal.

THE hot weather continued; the flaming stillness of the days, torn at times by thunder and by furious rain; the purple breathless nights, men lying sleepless on stripped beds could hear, in the stillness, the moan of crocodiles and the deep sighing of dugongs, along the beach.

In spite of the incredible thing that had occurred on the night of the dance, Salter found himself haunting Jan's footsteps as if he had been her dog; watching her for reasons quite other than those that still seemed to move him professionally. As a government employee and an ex-cub detective of Sydney, he was on the alert for possible mischief. As a man, he would have given up his very heart for that mythical dog of Jan's to eat, if she had asked for it.

On an afternoon when the distant tops of the mangrove forests lay like smoke-blue clouds against the glass-blue sky, and the sea was cruel indigo, and the whole landscape, alive with coming storm, seemed to sneer at the feeble insects who ventured to call themselves masters of its colossal solitudes—Salter, tramping down the beach, met suddenly with Jan.

SHE was dressed in a smock of scarlet figured with daffodil, that exactly reproduced the flaming colors of the croton avenues behind her. She was, as usual, barefoot, and walking very quickly.

"Where are you going?" he asked her. He had had little converse with her lately; when he met her, she was either absent or hurried, and not inclined to talk. This time he was determined to get an answer out of her. What, was not he a patrol officer of the finest service in the world, and wasn't she a potential criminal under observation? That she, or Kalipa, meant a mischief either to Perry or Perry's love, he had never doubted since the evening of the dance, now nearly a week gone. It was his duty to observe her. He did it by quickening his pace, and walking beside her as she hurried on. He continued it by noticing the extraordinary blackness and thickness of her eyelashes, the way they stood about and shaded her gray eyes like rushes standing round a mountain tarn.

She said, in that deep curious voice of hers, a voice that somehow managed to suggest that its owner had all the time there was in the world to play with, that there was no hurry, never would be any hurry: "I'm not going anywhere."

"Where have you been, then?"

"For a walk."

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing." In her eyes, he caught a passing flicker of something like satisfaction. . . . He had seen a beautiful snake, basking on warm stone, that flickered its forked tongue in and out—just like that—because it was happy.

The patrol officer clamped his hand about the girl's sun-coppered arm. "What have you been up to?" he demanded.

Now she met him, full, with her head carried high on its brown-marble neck (no woman brought up from babyhood among white folk had a neck, a carriage like January's), and her mouth curled into a scornful smile.

"Policeman," she said, again with that hint of scorn, "what business is it of yours?"

It was Kalipa, fighting madly with a furious tiger snake—tame no more!

"I'm not a policeman," he hotly replied. "I'm a Government officer in control of native police, and the R.M. and I have to keep order. What have you been doing?"

"Nothing, Government officer."

"Are you telling me lies?"

"The Mission Lady," she told him, looking at him with eyes that said absolutely nothing, "taught me that the Good Book says all liars go to hell."

"So—" he said, suddenly remembering half-forgotten Sunday-school experiences. "So do dogs and—sorcerers."

"And whoremongers, and murderers," she calmly added. "I am January Cook. I'm not a dog or a sorcerer, and I'm a good girl; certainly I have never murdered anyone."

"What about that foster-brother of yours? He's the whole lot, if I don't mistake. What does he teach you, when you go away with him into the big bush? I've heard he keeps a sort of sorcerers' university, out there. We'll get him some day, and give him five years' jail, when we catch him."

"*When* you catch him," she softly said. "Now, Government officer, I want to go home to my tea."

She said it so nicely—she was so well-behaved, so entirely girlish and ordinary—that Salter felt his head spinning round. Was this his potential criminal?

One side of his mind coolly desired to prove that she was. The other side was burning up with love, irrational, unwilling to listen. ("Jan—Jan—is there a girl in all the world like you? There can't be. There never will be again.")

She was gone, and he hadn't seen where she went. Home to tea? Maybe.

ALL the way to his house the two halves of Salter's nature squabbled. One side recalled Cripps' saying: "Things will happen—just naturally." The other side maintained that his nerves were tricking him. He believed the girl when she said that she hadn't done any harm. How long would that be true? And how far was he fitted to judge of the case, after what he thought he'd seen the other night? Had he been hypnotized? Tem-

porarily mad? Witness of a conjuring trick? No! Whatever a piece of stick might be made to do in the hands of a clever conjurer, even a conjurer couldn't have made it get up and dance in the middle of the room all by itself. And why? *Why?*

He found himself thinking, oddly—that girl of Perry's had missed something; with her appetite for strange things, she'd have simply been thrilled. That is, if it ever happened.

But a storm was brewing. He had to hurry home.

AFTER the storm, the night was singularly calm. Stars hung like Christmas-tree fruit, glittering among the crotons and the mangoes and the palm-tree tops, all now alike in undistinguished black. Stars made long silver stitches in the quiet sea. They didn't do that, south. Not large enough. So many things were different in this strange Papua; even the heavens were changed; even love was not the same. A mountain torrent, plunging furiously to its destined end was not the same as a full, smooth river. Better? Worse? No telling. But no doubt which took you swiftest, held you strongest.

Salter, half asleep on his camp stretcher, was struck to wakefulness by a tap on the side of the bed.

"It's me," whispered the voice of Cripps. "Don't shoot."

The officer's hand stole back from the roughened grip of the .45 that lay beside his waist. He sat up under his mosquito net. "What's wrong, Cripps?"

"I don't know that anything is," the other whispered. "But January's just come back from the R.M.'s house—and he's away tonight."

"What!" Salter was up, and into his shoes; pajamas were clothing enough. He wanted to say what he thought of his superior officer for leaving a white girl—sister too!—alone in a native country. But loyalty held him back. "Are we all mad?" he thought. "It isn't like Cummings."

Cripps following, he ran, as silently as he could, toward the magistrate's house. On the way, taking a sudden turn, he collided violently with something that was soft and warm and scented with frangipanni flowers—January's favorite. He flung his arms about it. "Where've you been? What've you been up to? By God, January, if you've been in mischief, I'll clap the handcuffs on you, if it breaks my heart."

She stood quite still. She laughed.

"Thora," she said, in her low, lazy voice, "Thora will never marry him now, I think."

"Keep hold of the little hellion," he told Cripps, letting go. "Stay there." January wasn't little, and he didn't think her a hellion, but he was professional, in that moment. . . . There was the house. There was the window of the spare room—the big spare room that he knew, with its handsome furniture and huge walnut bed. No light inside. No sound. Or was there? Didn't he hear something like the rolling out of pastry on a hard board; a queer, faintly rumbling noise that he couldn't at all account for? Thora was certainly there, and certainly not dead, whatever had happened; he could hear her breathing—and even in that moment, he was vaguely conscious of a pricking disappointment. Lord, how the girl snored!

Leaning through the window, he snapped on his torch. The rolling sound had stopped; had given way to a tapping noise, vaguely reminiscent. Where had he heard that before?

Thora was awake. Sitting up, in an extremely ornate sleeping-outfit, she stared at him—and made snorting piglike noises. Surely he must be mad—or she!

Then he saw. And Thora saw. And screamed. And the piglike noises continued through the scream.

He saw that the hellish bamboo was there, dancing in the middle of the floor. He made a wild leap into the room at it—whatever it was, he was going to know, this time! But he missed it—and came into sharp contact with a man's fair, ruffled head. . . . Perry's.

THE snoring had ceased; Perry was wide awake. He seized the bamboo in his hand, and pitched it out of the window. Someone outside, apparently did not dodge it. There was a smashing, cracking sound, and a yell.

Salter was out again through the window; first this time. The light of his torch fell on someone who, as he instantly, horrifiedly saw, would not long need either punishment or hell. Kalipa! Kalipa, fighting madly with a furious tiger snake that, wreathed with the fragments of the bamboo in which it had been imprisoned, was hanging with deadly fangs on to his neck.

They could see that he was wildly endeavoring to regain control of the crea-

ture, which no doubt had been one of his trained familiars—but even a trained snake will revolt, if its prison is violently smashed on someone's person. And the tiger snake was tame no more. Perry and Salter, together, struck at the writhing body, that shone tortoiseshell and amber and jetty black in the light of the torch. It fell to the ground, Kalipa still calling and addressing it, as if it could hear. Salter seized a stick and killed it. Perry, neglecting the snake, turned his attention to Kalipa, who had fallen on the ground, and was panting for breath. In no more than a couple of minutes, his eyes turned up, he flung his arms out once and lay still.

"Got him in a vein; no chance," the planter said, letting the dead hand fall. "Thora, Thora darling, don't be frightened. It's all right."

Thora was not frightened. She was shocked. She leaned out of the window, ignoring both the corpse of the man and the body of the snake. The light of Salter's torch shone on her left hand. It bore a ring. "I—I—we were married yesterday. My brother knew," she said explanatorily, holding her hand a little farther toward the light.

"Good night," said Salter, and left them, to summon a couple of constables and have the body carried away. Thora didn't know the chap was dead, he supposed. Or else she didn't care. A native was a native, to her.

But if Perry, bushman, quick mover, sturdy fellow, hadn't been there—if she had awakened in the pale dawn, and seen that mysterious carved bamboo rolling and dancing on the floor (simple enough when you understood it, wasn't it? As simple as time and death), why, she'd have picked it up, being what she was, avidly curious; she'd have opened it, and then—two yards of glittering fury, and a dead girl on the floor. There is no poison worse than that of the tiger snake, in the hot days and nights of the New Year.

Jan had dropped it in. Jan had had it in her own room—how long? She had got it, and the knowledge to use it, from her foster-brother, the sorcerer who lay dead. And as Cripps had told him, the thing would have happened just as things happen—naturally.

DAWN had begun to light the croton trees to flame when Salter reached the spot where Cripps was waiting with Jan—the girl's wrists and ankles tied up with bush rope. It might have been the faint chill that goes with coming day, or it might have been the sickness that overcame him when he thought of what Jan had done; but Salter was shivering a little as he loosed her bonds. Briefly he told Cripps what had occurred. "She'll come quietly," he said. "You go home." And Cripps went.

JAN was quiet. "What do you want me for?" she said. Her eyes looked straight into his, and for the first time —torture!—he saw in them that which he had desired to see.

"For attempted murder," was his curt reply.

Jan said, quietly, but stressing each word: "I shall not ever go to hell. I am not a liar. Or a sorcerer. Or a dog. Or a whoremonger—I do not know what that is, but I am not it. And not a murderer."

"Who is, then?"

"Kalipa. When I told him I could not do it, and gave him back the bamboo, he threw me away and cursed me. And he said: 'The girl has hurt you, my sister of the breast, and she shall pay; hurting you, she has hurt all my tribe.' He said that in our language, and he frightened me so that I couldn't move. But at last I ran, and ran. And then when I met Cripps, I said: 'She will not marry him'—because I thought I wouldn't be in time—but I was coming—to you."

"You were?"

"May the crocodiles tear my head from my body, if I was not."

He said: "I believe you. But I shall look at all the footsteps when it grows lighter, and then—"

"Then you'll believe me more."

"I couldn't," he said, and suddenly took her in his arms. Standing there, breathless, she yet found breath to say: "She has taken him. And me, I do not want another's bread. I'd rather starve."

"You sha'n't starve," he said—and he kissed her to silence....

A little while after, when Perry had sold his plantation, and sailed away south, and the Service had lost a good man in Salter, who had bought Perry's plantation, and gone up-river to live, Cripps, sitting in his doorway, remarked to his dog Nipper: "An upside-down place, and always was. But it takes a hold of you somehow, Nipper, doesn't it?"

Nipper, who wanted his supper, faintly whined.

When he was ten years old, he tackled a lynx with his bare hands; but when he was a man, and a big one, a wolf gave him another kind of argument. . . . A legend of early days in Michigan, by the author of "The Great Man."

By CHANDLER WHIPPLE

Uncle Elmer And the Wolf

TO see the grand exploits of my Great-uncle Elmer as they were, as they cut their sure swift mark through the rich and solid earth, is difficult today—for time is, after all, a harsh rust or a bright polish upon the iron plowshare of actuality. My memory of Uncle Elmer is of a bearded old man, once big but now shrunken as if he had been too long in the wind and sun, who sat in the creaking rocker by the window, and gazed out through the notch of the hills to the plain beyond, always to the northward—a shrunken big old man who spun to me tales of mighty deeds, and sewed up the ends with petulant platitudes. I could not see him then as the one whose great doings once had been the talk of southern Michigan; but I know now that what has happened to a man is, however deeply buried, forever a part of him. Scraping the rust or the polish away, I must then have found somewhere in the core of that old man the giant of legend; I must even have found the Elmer Scofield who, on that dark night of his twenty-first birthday, founded a fact and improved upon a superstition. . . .

As the sun was sliding over the ridge to the east on that December day, Elmer looked upon his world of field and woodland and found it good: A quarter-section of rich land was his father's farm, with sixty acres, thanks mainly to Elmer's prodigious efforts, cleared and tillable. The wheat was sold and the log barn filled with hay for sheep and cattle. So far, the winter had been mild and the stock still found some pasture by the icy spring. There were no more hostile Indians and a few friendly ones; Michigan was now a full-fledged State—a State of lakes and rolling hills, deep forests and some cleared land. And Elmer Scofield, though he had never quite told himself so, was indubitably the strongest man in Michigan.

Yes, to Elmer, breathing deeply of the frosty air and seeing the red rising sun, it was plain enough that a good Whig who walked in the ways of the Lord and feared not to use his own strength might gain a reasonable profit. And aside from that, it was his twenty-first birthday, and for a long time he had had a thing in mind to do that day. Down at Eben Hawkins' little store at Pinnebog, there were an inner and an outer circle. Away from the fire the fledglings sat, or scuffled among themselves or whatever; but close to the warm blaze, on boxes and barrels and such as came to hand, you would find the grown men, tapping the hard cider from Eben Hawkins' hogshead, talking politics and religion, and always conscious of their prerogative. Let a stripling try to enter the circle, and he was quickly

Alonzo Cain said: "Elmer, I expect you're just about the strongest man that ever lived."

shooed away and put in his place. But lately Elmer had been reading considerable in the Bible, and had mastered a good bit of American history too, as well as the collected works of Lord Byron. Since these held enough knowledge for any honest man, Elmer had been planning for some weeks that on this day he would invade that inner circle.

He took a final look at the sky, and saw only a few faint clouds to the west. He stepped inside the kitchen, and came out again with his smoothbore in his hand.

"Now where are you going, Elmer?" said a monotonous voice.

Elmer felt something sink in his chest. He turned slowly. That porch on the log section of the house—what was now the east wing—had been vacant only a moment before; but now, as he might have known it would be, it was occupied by the limp, petulant form of Joseph Scofield.

"Why, Pa," said Elmer, "it's my birthday, and I thought it a fair time to go to town for a spell of talk with the boys."

"Talk! Talk indeed," said Joseph Scofield. "You'd waste the Lord's own time in chatter with a parcel of locofoco ninny-hammers, while your own flesh and blood is brought to ruin."

Elmer might have known it would be like this. He might have known that his father would manage to slip out of bed and get there in his favorite sitting-place before he could get away. That log section had been the original Scofield cabin, but Elmer had added a two-story brick and stone piece, making the main part of the house. It was a part of the elder Scofield's defeatist philosophy that he disregarded this new section as mere frippery, or as a result of dealings with the devil. Though the new part was warmer in winter and cooler in summer, he continued to live in the log wing.

"PA," said Elmer, confident at least that he had milked the cows faultlessly, "what's the matter now?"

"Elmer Scofield," said his father, shaking his head, "things wasn't like this when I was a boy. How can you stand there and ask foolish questions, when you know there's a storm coming and practically no wood cut to see it through."

Elmer tried to keep his temper. "You know as well as I do," he said, "that there's twenty cord of wood piled behind the house, and I don't see no sign of a storm. What in tarnation's the matter?"

Joseph Scofield settled down a little farther into his gloom. "Matter? With William Henry Harrison dead—and a virtual Democrat in the White House? With the country going to the dogs, and the crops bad, no money coming in for another year and maybe never? With that varmint Peterhouse living right next door? And on top of that, that confounded wolf has et up four more sheep."

ELMER saw his hopes of Pinnebog fading. "Pa," he said, "staying home on my birthday aint going to get John Tyler out of the White House nor Myron Peterhouse off the next farm. As Byron said—"

"You don't know," Joseph Scofield droned on, "how your mother and me have suffered. It seems as if the Lord would know and cease to visit further punishment upon us. But no, He's gone and given us a thankless lout for a son. Elmer, why don't you get that wolf?"

Elmer squirmed. That timber wolf and its spawn were probably just about the last left in southern Michigan, and also the smartest. The Lord knew he had tried to get it, and he didn't like to be reminded of his failure. It made him mad all through.

He laid down his gun. Generally he was a dutiful son, but now he picked up Joseph Scofield by the slack of his trousers and tossed him, reasonably gently, up onto the roof of the porch.

"Pa," he said, "I'm going to Pinnebog."

It was Saturday and a good many people were sitting around Eben Hawkins' store. Many of them spoke to Elmer as he came in, and he answered without really looking at them. He had nerved himself up on the way in, and his mind and his eye were on the fireplace where heaped-up tamarack logs were blazing and sputtering, on that and the circle of men around it, and Eben Hawkins' hogshead of hard cider.

Elmer walked straight to the circle; he spotted a big box filled with hardware and pulled it over and sat down. For a moment nobody spoke a word, and Elmer's heart was pounding.

Hank Bingham broke the dead silence. "You folks ever hear," he said, "how Elmer killed a lynx with his bare hands, when he was only ten years old?"

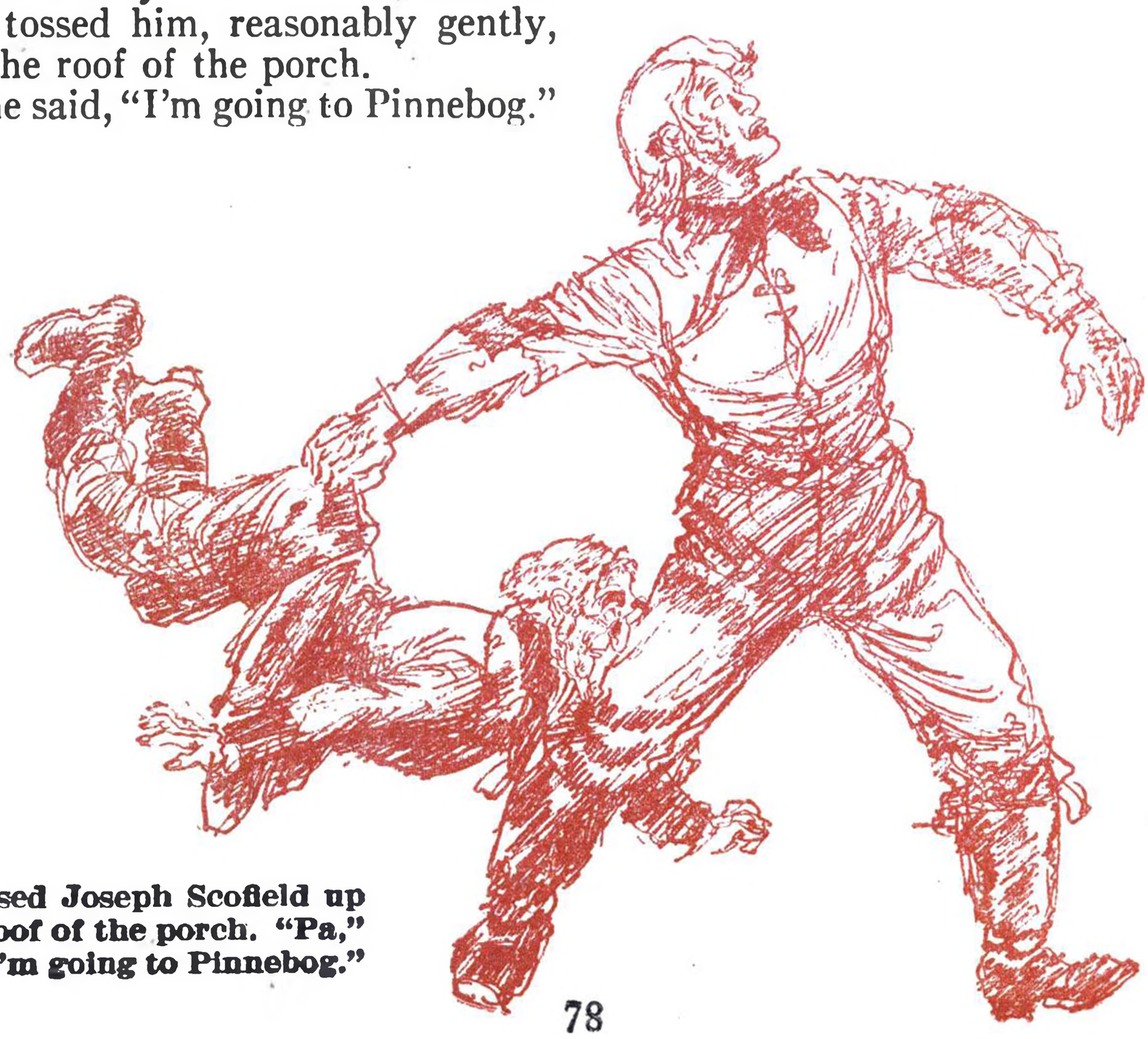
Elmer reddened with embarrassment. "Shucks, it wasn't anything," he said.

Somebody passed him a tin cup full of hard cider. He gulped it down; in his embarrassment he bent the cup into a wad of tin, then hastened to straighten it out before anyone should notice.

"I don't know about that," said Alonzo Cain, "but I do know that the other day Elmer cut ten cord of wood between sunrise and sunset. Cut it and corded it. Saw it with my own eyes."

"Lordy me," observed Hank Bingham. "Why, I'd think to be doing right well if I cut three."

Elmer blushed and gulped more cider. "It wasn't any real trouble," he insisted.



Elmer tossed Joseph Scofield up onto the roof of the porch. "Pa," he said, "I'm going to Pinnebog."

Illustrated
by
Lyle Justis

"Why, the other day Peterhouse got Eben so twisted up that he was talking for the Democrats."

Folks in those days liked a good, well-rounded yarn, and Elmer made a good subject. From that minute on, tales of his great doings sprang up like puffballs from all corners of the room. It must have gone on that way for half an hour.

Finally, Alonzo Cain said: "Elmer, I expect you're just about the strongest man that ever lived."

Elmer got red and warm all over again. Not really thinking, he reached over and picked up the hogshead of cider and poured the contents down his throat out of the bunghole. Then he was able to speak.

"Well," he said, "I guess Samson was awful strong."

"You'd think," spoke up a dry voice from over in the dimness across the fire, "that a man as mighty as Elmer'd know what to do with Myron Peterhouse."

WELL, there it was, and he might have expected it. Elmer could feel the pride and joy ooze away from along his veins and out of him. He turned and peered past the fire, but he knew already that it was Bayne Henshaw who had spoken. There was some intent of humor in Bayne's remark, but considerable of vinegar too; for after all, Bayne Henshaw favored Elmer Scofield in size, but couldn't hold a candle to him when it came to strength, and Bayne could not very well forget that.

"It would be a comforting thing if he did," Hank Bingham admitted. "But I expect Elmer, living right neighbor to him, knows that as well as we do."

Elmer kind of winced and couldn't seem to feel that half a hogshead of cider at all. Why Myron Peterhouse had had to pick that particular quarter-section of land that touched on the Scofields', nobody would ever know, but he had become the cross they had to bear. He did not keep the rail fence in repair; he let his stock stray into the Scofield grainfields; and Elmer's father held a strong suspicion that once he had butchered a Scofield heifer. But all these things were as nothing beside the one most damning fact of all: Myron Peterhouse was a Democrat. This was the thing that made Joseph Scofield feel unclean and lose sleep of nights. If he had once asked Peterhouse to sell his land to him, and at a good fat price too, he had asked him a dozen times—but Peterhouse was that mean and cantankerous he wouldn't even accommodate a neighbor.

"The trouble is," said Alonzo Cain, "Myron Peterhouse is scienced. It's like in boxing, where sometimes a small man can plain lick the tar out of a big one. Now Peterhouse, he's scienced in talk. He can talk rings around anybody in this whole county—maybe the whole State. Why, the other day he got Eben here so twisted up that he was talking for the Democrats."

Eben Hawkins grunted. "I wouldn't say that—I wouldn't say that! But Peterhouse is awful shrewd, and his ways of

"You folks ever hear how Elmer killed a lynx with his bare hands, when he was only ten years old?"

argument aint decent. You can't do him in with talk; you got to figure a smarter way around."

That was the trouble with Myron Peterhouse, in a nutshell. The time was, before he came to those parts, when a man could come into the store, or go to a barn-raising, for that matter, and know he was among good Whigs and Methodists, and sit and talk and feel himself at ease. He didn't have to worry about thinking of things to say or answering arguments; he could use the old and comfortable things that had already been said. Now here was Myron Peterhouse, a Democrat and, folks suspected, godless too, and with his smart and dangerous talk, it gave a man no peace at all.

Well, they went on talking about Peterhouse, and what a terror he was, and how he had done this and that, and the country would be well rid of him; and most likely everybody but Elmer forgot that Bayne Henshaw had kind of put it up to him to handle Peterhouse. Elmer couldn't forget it; and thinking about it made it plain to him what a failure and a weakling he really was. Here was the meanest man in the county, according to the best opinion, up to all sorts of bad business, and living not a hundred rods from Elmer Scofield, the strongest man in the county, and a right-living Whig. Yet in all these years Elmer hadn't been able to trouble Myron Peterhouse enough so that he would even sell out at a good price.

The more they talked, without saying a word against Elmer, the more he got to thinking that maybe he had been a little previous in getting himself into the inner circle around the fire. He kept edging back that boxful of cast-iron pumps he was sitting on, six inches or a foot at a time, till he was just about back among the boys again. And seeing that, he felt sorry for himself, who had had his birthday spoiled, and sorry for the county.

And about that time that half-hogshead of hard cider, maybe because of the dammed-up tears it was mixing with now, must have risen right up and hit Elmer hard. At any rate, he came to his feet so quick and hard that pans rattled on the shelves, and the fire went *whoosh* and puffed out smoke.

"By tarnation," said Elmer, with a sob in his voice, "I'll settle with Myron Peterhouse!"

Before anyone could speak or move, he was through the door and out. He didn't mean to slam that door, but he was mighty determined. The beam above it settled a full two inches, and that was a fact.

They say that as soon as Eben Hawkins got to his feet, having fallen to the floor at the impact, he ran to the door and

forced it open and called to Elmer not to be hasty, that he'd better come back and talk it over. Even Bayne Henshaw, they say, called out to Elmer and told him not to take it so hard. But Elmer did not turn back, and he may not even have heard the call. His brain was befogged; and besides, a heavy snow was falling. He knew that when he got home, his father would remind him that he had predicted snow, and that would be only the beginning. There would be more about crops, and the wood, and the wolf, and the state of the nation. Elmer's determination of a moment before was weakened by these thoughts, and it mixed him up something terrible. If William Henry Harrison himself had called out to him, he wouldn't have turned back.

Sometime later, though, when he was nearing home, he heard footsteps behind him. These were very soft, but coming closer. He turned around.

There, not thirty feet away, stood the biggest gray wolf he had ever seen.

Elmer made as if to raise his gun and fire.

"No," said the wolf. "You haven't got any gun. You left it back in the store."

For a moment it seemed to Elmer as if he had heard a wolf talking to him, just as plain as day—and talking, moreover, in the voice of Myron Peterhouse. Then things kind of fogged over again; and the main thing he remembered was that he had forgotten his gun, and it was a crying shame, because here was that confounded wolf. Out of the corners of his eyes he could see other gray shapes slinking in; still, he wasn't really afraid. With a bellow, he leaped toward the big wolf. It skittered away.

"Come back here, you varmint!" shouted Elmer. "Come back and fight like a man!"

The wolf sat down on its haunches. "Fighting," it said, "is the typical recourse of the ignorant. What do you think a fight would really gain either of us?"

Elmer made an angry leap for him. The wolf danced nimbly away on its toes, just out of reach of Elmer's ham-sized hands.

"You git out of here, you son of Satan," shouted Elmer. "This woods belongs to my pa!"

"Stop that pious noise and be sensible," said the wolf. "Can't you see by now that you can't ever catch me? Come now, calm down and come along home with me and talk this thing over."

At first that suggestion just took Elmer's breath away; then when he got it back, he exploded all over again. But it was what he finally agreed to do. He sensed a trick, and he was nervous about it, but he guessed he could play along with the trickiest of them, when it came to that.

THEY started through the woods, side by side; the wolf's four companions —three of them cubs near to full-grown— came up from behind to join them. The gray sun had set. Above, the leaves of the oaks and the pine boughs were thick between them and the sky; and everywhere in here except close to the white ground it was very dark. Off to the right, above the crunch of his own footsteps, Elmer heard the burble of a familiar waterfall. He remembered sitting there by the creek just above the falls, with his toes in the water, on a sunny day in late spring. That seemed a long time ago, though it had been only a year or two. He felt now that being a man grown wasn't as fine as he had imagined it to be.

Well, he was as pious and God-fearing as the next man, he guessed; and when in the good graces of the Lord, he ought to be a match for old Beelzebub himself.

They came after considerable of a walk to a large opening in a rocky hillside. Elmer did not recognize this cave, but he could place it as being somewhere on the north slope of a ridge called, after the last Democratic president, Van Buren's Hill. A fitting place, he thought, to harbor a wolf.

"Here we are," said the wolf. "Won't you step inside?"

Elmer hesitated a moment, thinking he ought to let the wolf go first. Then he discarded the notion as cowardice and went clumping in, trampling down with his great boots such shrubs as were still alive before the entrance. The wolf and his family came after, softly and easily on their toes, as is the fashion of such beasts.

Elmer found, though, that as he went ahead, the cave got lower and lower and darker and darker. Finally he stopped.

"Just a little farther," said the wolf.

Elmer took another step, and bumped his head on a rock overhead. So the varmint wanted him whittled down to its own size, did it? He whirled around.

"Not for man or beast, sir!" he said. "I have never gone down on my knees save before my Maker, and I don't intend to do so now. You're trying to trick me. You know mighty well I've got the strength of ten men, and you're trying to fix things so it'll do me no good."

The wolf gave a dry little chuckle.

"*Vis consili expers mole ruit sua*," said he, and the words sounded like the slapping of old leather.

"What?" inquired Elmer suspiciously. "How's that?"

"I repeated," answered the wolf with a mischievous grin, "what was said sometime ago by a Roman poet—that brute strength bereft of reason falls of its own weight. By which I meant that you're near to a man grown now, Elmer, and being already as strong as need be, you'd best look to your learning." He added, sort of wistfully: "It might give a fellow somebody to talk to."

"Now look here," said Elmer, full of strength and hard cider and honest indignation, "there's nothing wrong with my wits nor learning. I may not know the heathen verses you have learned, but I do know my Scriptures. And I know enough to be a good Whig and no pettifogging Democrat."

"Ah, Elmer," chuckled the wolf, "and can you tell me why you are a Whig and no pettifogging Democrat?"

"Why—why, that's plain to see," answered Elmer. "Could I favor slavery? Could I favor a party that refuses to protect its infant industries by a just tariff?"

"Ah," said the wolf, "and were slavery and the tariff mentioned in the platform of your last Whig convention? Is that what your party stands for?"

"Why, why—" Elmer stammered coloring up.

"It seems to me," said the wolf, "that in the last campaign that your party con-

"Elmer," said the wolf, "can you tell me why you are a Whig?"

ducted so successfully, a great deal was said about the virtues of log cabins,—your candidate, one William Henry Harrison, never having lived in one,—and as much said and done about the virtues of hard cider, in which your candidate had never indulged. Of a platform, I remember nothing; of any mention of slavery or a high tariff to protect our infant industries, I recall not a word."

"No matter," came back Elmer desperately. "'Twas all implied, if it wasn't written."

"Ah," was the wolf's answer, "so your Whigs make a platform by implications, and win their campaign with brass bands and free cider! Of such is the salvation of our Republic."

WELL, that was only the beginning of it. For two hours the talk went on, with Elmer getting into deeper and deeper water all the time. He tried to escape from politics by getting off onto Byron, but even there the wolf tracked him down and outquoted him. Finally the wolf sort of settled himself back and said, in a voice almost kindly:

"My boy, it's time you gave up. Your strength is as the strength of ten, but your logic's at sixes and sevens."

Well sir, Elmer looked down at him from way up there by the roof of the cave, and the pores of his body were dammed with rage. "Sir," he said, with his voice breaking, "your wit is inspired by Satan. I'll hear no more!"

He turned and started toward the entrance. The wolf came right after him.

"Now, Elmer," he said, "there's no call to be going off half-cocked like that. I didn't aim to make you mad. I was enjoying our little argument. Come and sit a spell, and let's talk some more. Why, we haven't even started yet on the question of whose land this is, and which of us has got the most right to be here."

The wolf looked so unhappy and downright disappointed that Elmer calmed a mite and turned back. But he was going to be firm, just the same.

"There's no question there," he said. "It's our land. We got it from the Government. You've got to get out."

"Now you're talking," said the wolf. "But from whom did the Government get this land?"

"You can't mix me up on that," growled Elmer. "They bought it from the Injuns."

"Stole," the wolf corrected. "*Stole*, not bought, is the word. But the fact is, it wasn't ever settled in the first place whether the Indians or the wolves owned it. Even if your Government bought it, it's doubtful if it recompensed the proper parties."

"Now, look here," said Elmer, "the smartest wolf in the world can't prove to me that he could own title to land." Triumphantly if figuratively, he whisked the Scofield family Bible from the dark waste of the parlor table. "Man, if you read your Scriptures, was given dominion over the birds of the heavens and every living thing that moveth upon this earth."

"*Dominion*," repeated the wolf. "It means, strictly, *rule, sovereignty, control*. But even if that whole passage wasn't invented by man himself, in the present democratic denotation of the word *dominion*, I don't see anything to justify your driving us from our homes and our means of livelihood."

Not quite so confidently, Elmer said: "You can't stop the wheels of progress."

"Is it progress," said the wolf, "or is it just a new way of enslaving yourselves?"

Elmer thought that over for a minute; then he remembered his American history. "You're seeing here the taming of a continent," he quoted. "Man sweeps westward toward the setting sun. Where

he walks, beasts and heathen savages have got to make way for him. That's plain destiny."

The wolf made a sound very much like a snort.

"I understand," he said, "that all the way eastward to the ocean stout forests are tumbling, and you men of destiny are ripping up the fine green ground that was good beneath the feet. When that's done, you put up factories that belch smoke and taint the air you breathe, so you can toil in them to make machinery to make life easier. Then you have to build more factories to make the machines to make the machinery. Before you're through, you're working for the factories, not they for you, and you can't any longer roam free in the forests like every other living thing. Is that what you call fulfilling destiny?"

"Well—" said Elmer. "Well, I expect it's the Christian way to live. If it wasn't right that Christian folk should build factories and make progress, then the good Lord wouldn't have given them the brains to do it."

"THAT," said the wolf, "is about as bad a piece of rationalization as I could hope to hear: Justifying the rightness of the fact by its existence! Elmer Scofield, you know very well that you don't really believe that yourself."

Elmer looked sheepish. "No," he said. "I expect you're right. I guess that—"

There, right on the edge of agreeing, Elmer stopped. Maybe it was the agreeing that got him. It was one thing to be licked in an argument, but something a lot different and worse to start admitting you were wrong.

It could have been that, or it could have been just a trick of light, so that, looking into the wolf's eyes, he seemed all at once to see the sharp eyes of Myron Peterhouse. Anyhow, right at that moment, like a dash of cold snow down his neck, it came to him where he was, and what he had been doing. He'd been talking to a wolf, and letting that wolf argue him into agreement. Why, he must be bewitched!

Elmer took no stock in such things. He believed only in what you could touch and explain and put a name to. Just the same he was scared. He was scared half out of his boots, and his teeth were chattering. He didn't dare to turn his back and run, but he had to do something mightyfast.

Then he remembered: Hank Bingham had told him that the thing to do when you were bewitched was to repeat the names of the Twelve Apostles. He opened his mouth and began: "Matthew, Mark, Luke—"

The queer thing was, though, that those weren't the words that came out. Maybe it was his teeth chattering, or maybe it was too much American history, for the sounds he heard were:

"George Washington—John Adams—Thomas Jefferson—James Madison—"

He was naming the Presidents of the United States, and he went right through to William Henry Harrison without stopping. For some reason he skipped John Tyler, but he couldn't stop himself now: he went right back to George Washington and started over again, only faster this time.

With the second "George Washington!" a great rock dislodged itself from the roof of the cave and clattered down. With the second "John Adams!" another one fell. It just missed one of the wolf

cubs, and the cub yelped and cowered back farther into the cave.

With the Democratic Presidents, nothing happened, except for "John Quincy Adams!" when a small stone fell, maybe because he was more or less of a Federalist at one time. But with the second "William Henry Harrison!" the whole floor heaved up. The she-wolf and all the young ones had run far back into the cave now, and only the leader was left.

The thing had got out of hand. Elmer could see the entire cave collapsing around him, but he couldn't help himself: he went right on.

Finally, when he reached the thirteenth "John Quincy Adams!" the gray wolf came forward and lifted his paw.

"Stop!" he said. "*E pluribus unum! Si quaris peninsulam, anoenam circumspice!* In the name of the United States of America, stop!"

Either the charm was gone, or Elmer was all out of breath. He stopped.

"When we came here," said the wolf, sounding very tired, "I thought we could discuss our differences like gentlemen, in a logical fashion. I was wrong. You can't settle disputes amicably with clod-polls and dunderpates. When they're out-talked, they always get angry and resort to force.

"If you were the only one, I might stay on and fight it out; but you're not. I can see it happening: these fine woods filling with men like you who are more ox than man, with psalm-singing Puritans and pious dollar-chasers. In five years' time the quoting of Horace will be a lost art in these parts, and a man wanting a good talk on logic will have to talk to himself, in what's left of the woods."

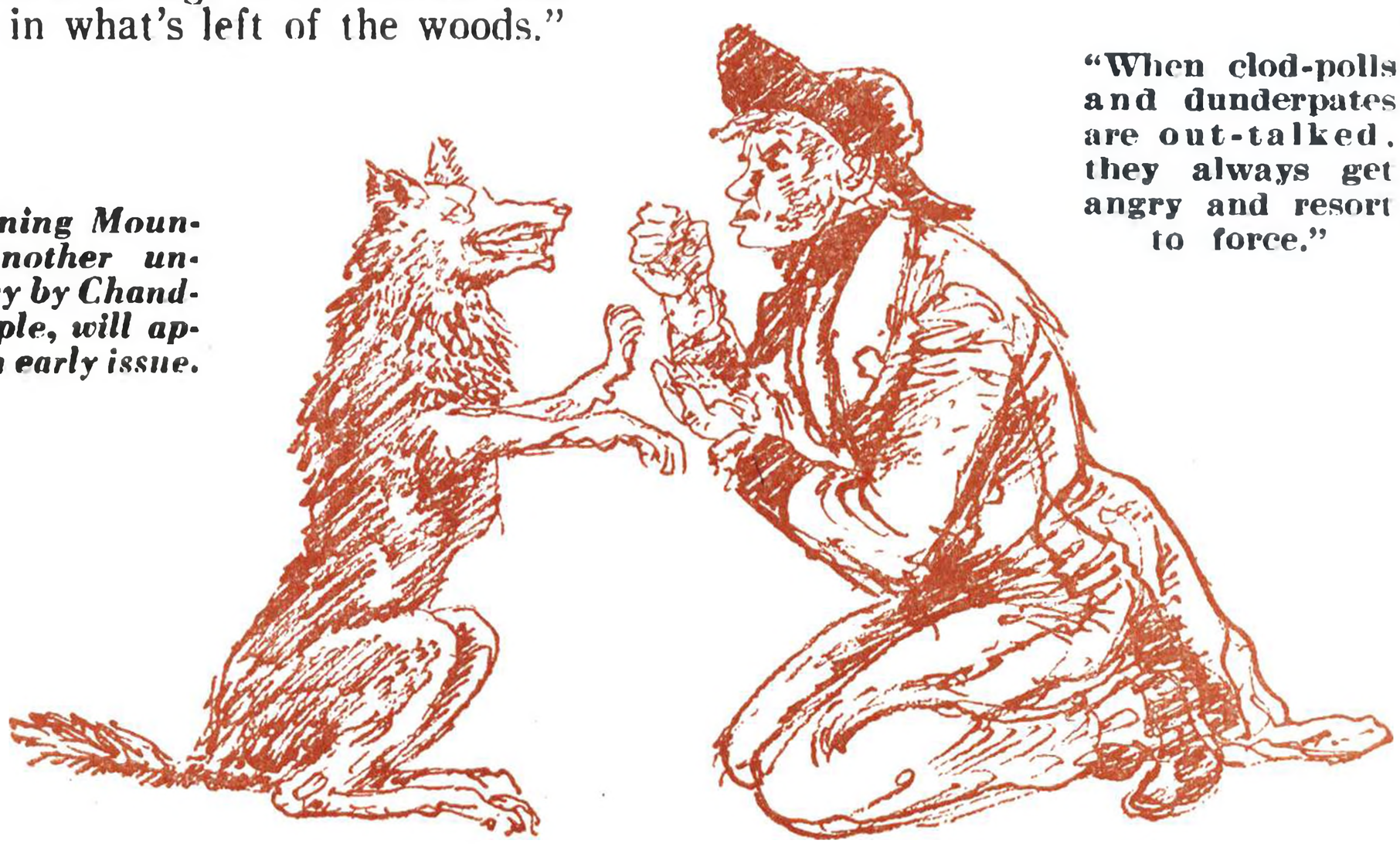
The wolf shook his head. "No sir; I'd be lonely here. You can have your woods: I'm going north. Get out now, and leave us in peace; you have my word that by morning we'll be gone for good."

Elmer went. He felt very quiet within himself, maybe a little ashamed, as he pushed aside the walls of the tumbled cave and stepped out into the white of the falling snow. He did not look back.

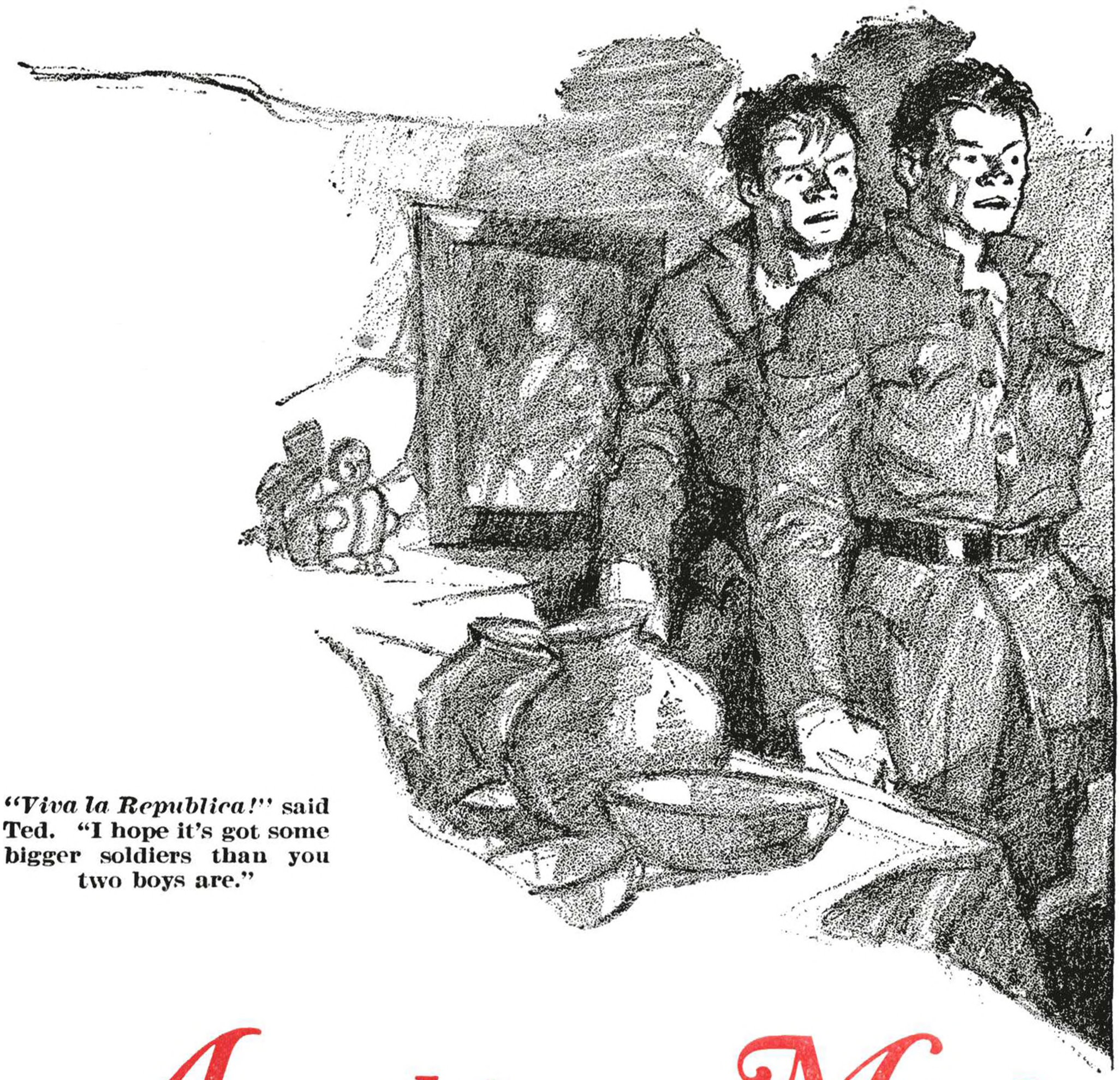
WELL, you can take that or leave it alone. Now and then Uncle Elmer was vague about that night, and now and then he wasn't. But of one thing that happened then there is no doubt: Sometime toward morning, Myron Peterhouse tramped through the darkness and the deepening snow to the Scofield house, and there disposed of his farm and goods, lock, stock and barrel, to Joseph Scofield for the sum of six hundred and twenty-five dollars. Then Myron Peterhouse walked out into the night, and neither he nor his wife nor his children were ever seen again.

And as Uncle Elmer always said, after that night no wolf was ever seen again in that part of Michigan, and for a long time, mighty few Democrats. But as he said it to me, those many years later, he would be peering out the window to the northward—and it seemed sometimes that he peered nervously, as if expecting that at any moment, from the wooded plain beyond the notch of the hills, Myron Peterhouse or the wolf might appear, coming to take him too, off to that sturdy land of legend into which they had so long since gone.

"The Shining Mountains," another unusual story by Chandler Whipple, will appear in an early issue.



"When clod-polls and dunderpates are out-talked, they always get angry and resort to force."



"Viva la Republica!" said Ted. "I hope it's got some bigger soldiers than you two boys are."

Anything Might

The Story Thus Far:

"NOTHING ever happens down here in Panama," growled Ted to Shep Reeves, his partner, on a banana plantation.

"It aint what happens," said Shep wisely. "It's what *might* happen that counts. You'll feel better when we steam for Colón on leave."

Shep was right. For in Colón the fruit-company manager asked them to undertake a job of intelligence work on behalf of the government as well as the fruit company, though neither would acknowledge it—or help them out if they got into trouble. For foreign agents, presumably Nazi, were developing banana plantations in the neighboring country of Parador; and there was strong evidence that their investment was more political than commercial. Ted and Shep were to pose as entomologists making museum collections, and find out just what was happening in Parador.

They found out, though there was a delay while Ted recovered from a fever in the hospital—a delay prolonged a bit because Ted fell in love with his pretty American nurse Martha Evans. She too came to be interested in Parador, which Ted had talked about in his delirium: for her next patient was wealthy old Don Miguel Ferrara, a leader of the anti-government faction in Parador. And when thanks to insulin he got on his feet again, he engaged her to instruct those who were to care for him on his big hacienda.

Soon after Ted and Shep arrived on their mission in Parador, a German named Reiser questioned them all too curiously about their bug-hunting activities. And one evening soon afterward as they were sitting in a little rural tavern, a fight started and the lights went out. When they came on again, the police had arrived—and Ted was arrested for the murder of a man who lay dead on the

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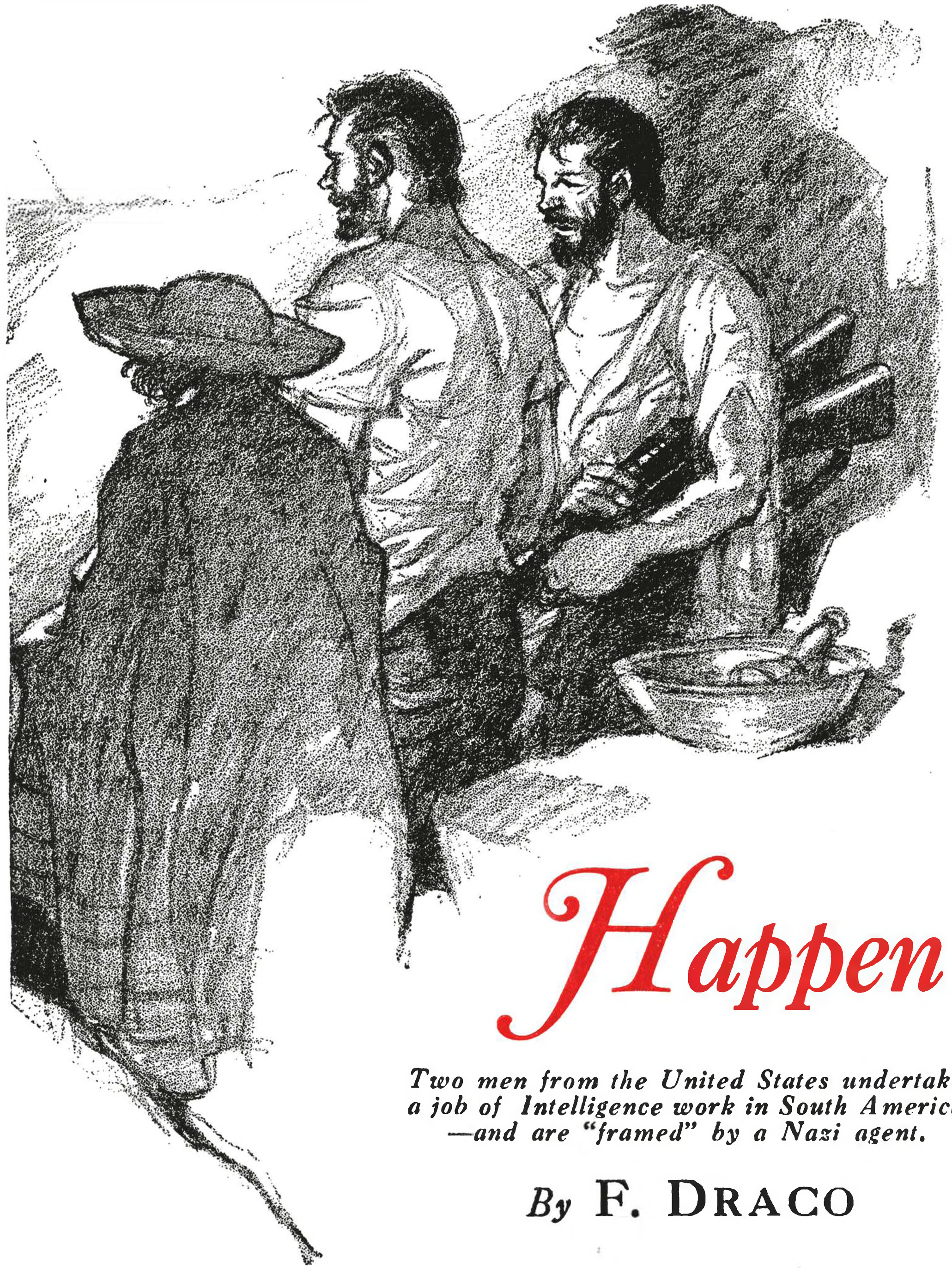


Happen

Two men from the United States undertake a job of Intelligence work in South America —and are "framed" by a Nazi agent.

By F. DRACO

floor. Obviously "framed," Ted and Shep presently found themselves in a chain-gang working on the roads. . . .

So it happened that Martha Evans, driving up a mountain road with Don Miguel and his party, was horrified to recognize a tattoo mark on the bare shoulder of a convict in a road-gang. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THE men who had worked on the roads all day came back at night to a compound surrounded by a crude stockade. There they ate their evening meal of oily rice with gobbets of meat in it, then sat for a while around little fires while they warmed their stiffened muscles, sang, gambled and talked.

Ted stretched out his feet to the fire, took off the remains of his shoes, and cautiously unwound the rags with which he had replaced his wornout socks.

"But I saw her," he said. "I tell you, I saw her as plainly as I see you. She was riding in the car with that old Don they talk so much about."

"You're dreaming," answered Shep. "I know how it is. I've had it myself, but don't let it get you. What in hell would Martha be doing here?"

"He was in the Panama hospital. She could have come down to nurse him, couldn't she?"

"Mighty unlikely. You may have seen a blonde, but all blondes aren't Martha. Not by a damn' sight."

Ted sighed. It was useless to argue with Shep when he wanted to be contradictory. Better change the subject.

"To think, just to think," he groaned, "that I found Riobar boring."

Shep hid his grin behind his new grizzled beard. He pulled together over his chest what was left of a green silk shirt, and stretched himself out with his back to the fire. He had an animal's capacity for making himself comfortable anywhere. Weeks of hard labor, lean diet, and forced abstinence from liquor had removed his paunch, and the sun had burned the pearly luster out of his skin. What remained was a stocky brown figure, built for power and endurance rather than speed, wide and close to the ground.

"Some folks," he drawled, "can't be satisfied. I did all right in Riobar, and I'm doing all right here. I feel pretty healthy, and I'm still alive. What more do you ask?"

Ted looked at him with envy. Since they had been in the camp, he had earnestly and vainly tried to imitate Shep's acceptance of life as it came. He could numb himself with work so that he did not think at all, but he could not achieve any reasoned calm about his confinement.

A Paradorian came over and joined them, holding out a couple of cigarettes. These *Norte-Americanos* were popular, for they joked a lot, never tried to put their work off on anybody else, never informed, and were generally good-natured. Their comrades—murderers, thieves and political prisoners—appreciated these qualities. Ted accepted a cigarette and led off with the infallible formula for conversation:

"How's the revolution, Pepe?"

"No good," answered Pepe in the little English which he had picked up from them. Then, relapsing into rapid Spanish: "They are vultures, vampire bats, bloodsuckers. They fatten on the blood of the people, the sons of swine."

SHEP opened one eye. "Somebody you don't like?"

"Which side?" asked Ted, just to keep it going.

"The *conservistas*, of course, the ones who are trying to get in. To destroy the first reforms my country has had in twenty years, to bleed the people until they cannot fight for themselves, to sell us to the foreigners." Pepe spat expressively into the fire.

Ted began to take more interest. "You mean there really is going to be a revolution?"

"But of course! Everyone knows that. It comes soon, I think."

"Are you for the Government?"

"I?" Pepe drew himself up proudly. "I am for no government. Me, I'm an anarchist."

Ted had not quite learned not to try tying the Latin mind down to Anglo-Saxon ideas. "Why do you care, then?"

PEPE tossed back the thick shock of coarse black hair which showed how strongly Indian and how little Spanish his ancestors had been. His deep-set black eyes glittered fanatically; his round head bobbed with excitement on a neck too thin for it, as he grasped at a chance to make a speech like the ones which had delighted the laborers in the *cantina* of his native village. In the firelight his heavy features took on a certain nobility and even sweetness.

"Governments," he announced, "they are all bad. Always the politicians rob the people and give them promises for payment. The ones who are in, change places with the ones who are out, and the people pay. Some day there will be no more government, and then the people can live. That is for tomorrow. That is for when all the tyrants have killed each other off.

"Meanwhile, this present government is better than most. It gives us roads and schools, and they are what we need in Parador. Myself, I am glad to work on the roads. That is serving my country. It is right I am here: I get very drunk one night and hit my friend with a machete. Luckily I am very drunk and my foot slips, so I do not kill him, but his neck gets twisted over to one side like so, and he will always look very funny. I am lucky it is no worse.

"No, comrades, this government is not bad. The one that is coming will be much worse. That will be the landowners, the big fellows who would squash a man the way I would squash that beetle, who will sell us to the foreigners, and commit any crime to line their own filthy pockets! And at the head and front of them is that prince of Satan, who reeks of stolen gold and the blood of his countrymen, that robber Don Miguel Ferrara.

"Him I know. My father has worked and lived always on his land, and my grandfather before him, and who knows how many before that. If I can get out in time, I will kill him, but who knows whether I get out?"

Ted began to feel an unexpected interest in Pepe's political theories.

"But look here, Pepe," he said. "You are talking as if this revolution were sure to succeed. Who is going to fight for this Ferrara if he is as bad as you say?"

Pepe spat again into the fire, and rubbed his thumb and forefinger together expressively.

"There is always money. If you keep people poor enough, so that their bellies always ache a little, they will sell their souls for a little money to put some comfort in their stomachs. My people are easily led. The revolution will succeed, and it will be bad, very bad. There will be blood on the soil of Parador until all the leaders die."

Nothing baffled Ted more in the Paradorian character, than the satisfaction with which they resigned themselves to the worst. Since he did not know any more questions, he fell to staring into the fire as Pepe did. Then he noticed that one of the guards had left the table by the compound gate, where by the light of a flashlight they were playing cards and slapping insects, and was strolling toward them. The guards could be distinguished from the prisoners by their revolvers, and by the fact that they had better boots.

"Here comes trouble," Ted said. "Maybe you've been talking too much."

"For nothing," Pepe answered. "They shoot you as soon as a pig if you run, but they are too lazy to bother about talking."

AS soon as the guard was near enough to make his voice carry, he conserved energy by shouting:

"You, Pepe Huertez, here's a visitor for you. A guy with his head on his own shoulder."

Pepe beamed. "Excuse me, my comrades," he said with the courtesy which a Paradorian uses even toward a man he intends to murder. "It is my best friend. The man I had the fight with. He is one good friend, I tell you. He comes very often to see me."

Pepe went off happily, and Ted sat silent for a moment, then pounded with his fists on his knees.

"I'm going crazy doing nothing. We ought to get out of here and warn the company. I want to check on this Ferrara guy, too."

"Let them fight it out," Shep answered. "We'll be O.K. if we don't choose sides until we see who is going to win."

Ted made no answer. He had not lost enough faith in life to be able to accept Shep's cynicism; yet under the circumstances he could not find much with which to combat it. He went on adjusting the rags around his feet, and silence reigned.

IT was interrupted by the return of Pepe, but a Pepe in a very different mood. His eyes had almost vanished under his heavy brows; he appeared violently agitated, and his long stringy arms jerked about like a puppet on wires.

"My mother and my father!" he said, over and over, and then with a string of maledictions consigned Don Miguel Ferrara to the lowest hole in hell. He shook his fists at the sky, and shouted until foam gathered on his lips, then flung himself full length on the ground and buried his face on his arms. Shep sat up and looked at him curiously, and Ted put a hand on his shoulder.

"What is it, *hombre?* Tell us about it."

When Pepe's sobs had subsided enough to allow him to speak, he sat up again.

"It is as I told you. He is a devil incarnate, with no more heart than the devil has. My father and my mother have lived always on his land. Now they are old, and my father is blind. Last week his agent comes and turns them out of their little house. 'Where are we to go?' they ask. 'Are we foxes that can hide in a burrow?' 'How am I to know?' says the man. 'Let us see the *Patrón,*' they beg. 'The *Patrón* is busy,' says the man. Busy! All the countryside knows how he is busy with that new American toy of his, that Meesevan!"

Shep was in time to catch Ted's arm as it came up, and to ask: "Did you say Miss Evans?"

"Some such a name. She comes with him from Panama. They say she is beautiful."

Ted tried to shake off Shep's hand.

"Don't be a fool," said Shep in English. "How will you find out what you want to know if you choke off the source of information? Pepe doesn't mean any harm. You can't expect these guys to understand a trained nurse if she isn't dressed like a nun. Shut up."

Pepe went on, absorbed in his story:

"I must kill that son of a swine before he does more harm."

"Now they have gone, those sick old people, to a cave in the mountains. How shall they live there? There is no food for them. It is too much. I must get out of here. I must help them, and I must kill that son of a swine before he does more harm."

"If you can get out, I can too," said Ted grimly. "I'll give you all the help I can, now and later."

Pepe held out his hand and Ted took it.

"You are my brother," said Pepe.

IN the nights that followed, the three men talked over plan after plan, but could find none that offered a chance of success. It would not be hard to get away from the careless guards even in the daytime, but the cultivated countryside in which they were working did not offer them the slightest hope of a hiding-place; nor could they expect any help from the peons living there. At night they were manacled to posts driven into the ground.

Pepe summed it up with his clear and simple logic: "In the villages the people give us up. If we run the other way, we are dead before we get to the mountains."

They began to work on ideas for cutting the chains off their ankles at night; and although the situation looked hopeless, Ted found himself more light-hearted than he had been for a long time. Life had regained some meaning. Before discouragement could set in again, it was announced that the camp was moving to temporary quarters farther up the road. Pepe took the news as stolidly as everyone else, but Ted caught his eye and thought that it had a gleam in it.

They were packed into trucks and driven for hours over an impossible road into country which grew steadily wilder and more mountainous. They ate their supper in the new location, and Pepe came up to them and pretended to quarrel over a cigarette which should be returned to him for his loan of one the night before.

"I was a boy in this country," he said, "and it is not for strangers to come here and cheat me."

Ted answered him soothingly, and he dropped his voice like a man whose grievance is subsiding but who still wants to grumble a little. When he was sure the bystanders had lost interest, he went on:

"There is a cave in that cliff that sticks out like a nose on the highest mountain. My father and mother are there, I think. Tonight we go. It is about five kilometers." He raised his voice. "If that's the way it was, we'll say no more about it. When you get some, you share with me."

"You bet we will!" said Shep. . . .

This camp was to be so temporary that shacks had not been built. It stood near a small grove of eucalyptus trees which sheltered a spring. A narrow ravine led

from the grove into the heart of a mountain. The guards were stirring around busily, parking trucks on each side of the camp, facing in. The trucks were to keep their lights on all night, and some guards would sit in them while others walked sentry duty. The men were issued a blanket apiece and told to sleep on the ground. The guards grumbled more than the men over the new arrangement, because it involved too much staying awake. They hoped to spend only one night in this place.

"What they don't know, what nobody knows but me," said Pepe, "is that twenty meters down that ravine is a rock as big as a house, with a crack in it that a man can squeeze into and work himself up to the top. We get there if we can; and if we get separated, we meet in the cave." Ted nodded, and Pepe raised his voice again. "All I'm saying is, you need not have smoked all you had. You could have saved one for me, that's all."

"Look here," said Ted, "if I'd had one, I'd have saved it. What's mine is yours. You know that."

Pepe nodded, mollified, and lurched off to bed himself down on the other side of the group of men. Shep and Ted looked at each other. This haphazard idea could hardly be called a plan; and yet they would have seized at an even slimmer opportunity. Ted was somewhat shocked to find himself feeling that he would be glad to kill all the guards with his bare hands, if that would help. The fever which had been accumulating in him since he had known that Martha was in the neighborhood had badly cracked his civilized shell. Shep grunted.

"We'd better go. I'm tired of it here."

Without further consultation they set about finding a place to sleep on the side nearest the grove.

THE men were restless in their new quarters. One after another would sit up, throw off his blankets, and ask permission to go out a moment. Each time there was great shouting of threats and objections from the guards. It became a game, keeping the guards stirred up. Ted and Shep took advantage of the confusion each time to edge a little farther from the crossing beams of light. They could no longer distinguish Pepe among the shapeless rolls of blanket, and so concerted action was impossible. It was a night without moon, but the stars hung marvelously clear and low; and beyond the crowded camping-space the velvety darkness beckoned them, black and silent. Their nerves stretched taut under the necessity for waiting.

AFTER an hour the patience of the guards was exhausted. Two of them brought out their long black whips and snapped them meaningly over the recumbent men, describing, not too delicately, certain things which would happen to the next one who made a disturbance. Others produced handcuffs and began locking the prisoners together, two by two, starting near the fire where the fracas had centered. Many prisoners got up, and there was a good deal of milling around.

"If they once get those things on us, we're cooked," whispered Ted.

Shep nodded. Straining their eyes through the darkness, they could see the grove not more than forty feet away. If they could gain that comparative shelter, they had a good chance of making the ravine. By common consent, without saying anything more, they began to crawl toward it on their bellies, a terrible inchworm progress, with the noise of their bodies on the ground sounding in their ears like an avalanche.

They had gone perhaps ten feet when a guard shouted, and a bullet cut up a little puff of dust just under Ted's nose. He got up in one bound and ran as he did not know he could. He heard another bullet smack flatly on the ground behind him. He heard, rather than saw, Shep running ahead. Against the dark trees they did not make good targets. Someone behind them yelled for a flashlight. They were in the grove when its beam first reached the trees.

Ted found his mind working as clearly and rapidly as his legs, estimating how many guards could be spared to run after them. Not more than three, he thought, with the rest of the prisoners as excited as they were. He was not conscious of making any effort, but felt light and free as though he could run forever. Then he tripped and fell over a root.

He regained his feet, and two more strides brought him out of the grove. Someone was running close behind him now, but not firing. That meant that the guard who was nearest had emptied his revolver, and had probably forgotten his cartridge-belt. The others were afraid to shoot, since one of their own comrades was ahead of them in the darkness. The beams of light did not reach so far.

Now he could see the looming rock of which Pepe had spoken. He did not dare

lose time by looking around, but he could clearly hear the breathing of the guard, could almost imagine he felt it on the back of his neck. With his pursuer so near, he could not stop to look for the crevice. If the others had reached it already, he would be leading the pursuit to them and endangering such safety as they had won. He raced on down the ravine in the dim starlight, trusting that some other way of hiding would reveal itself.

Suddenly he heard a thud behind him, a brief scuffle, a cry. He turned now, and saw two dark shapes struggling. One fell. More men were coming down the ravine, this time with lights. Instinctively Ted flattened himself on the ground behind a clump of mesquite, and tried to control his labored breathing. The flashlight showed Pepe lying on the ground with the hilt of a knife sticking out of his throat. A man turned him over with a foot, and for a moment Ted saw his face, not distorted, but open-eyed and smiling. The dark pool under him was widening.

"*Es muerto,*" said the guard, retrieving his knife. "Where are the others?"

They pointed excitedly in several directions, and finally ran off in a body down the ravine. When they had passed him, Ted crawled cautiously back. The guards had been right—a man does not live long with a knife in his throat! Far down the ravine, Ted could see two flashlights bobbing along like will-o'-the-wisps. They were coming back now.

He felt his way along the stony surface until his groping hand touched nothing. The crevice was there. He slid into it.

Chapter Eleven

AN almost inaudible whistle overhead made Ted look up, and in the relief which flooded him, his heart pounded uncomfortably. It was dark in the crevice, but he could see a thin wedge of stars twenty feet above him, and a head sticking out against them. He began to climb cautiously, testing each move before he made it, terrified of dislodging a pebble. Because he had to move slowly, these seemed the longest moments since he had left camp.

At last, beyond his own hopes, beyond belief, he found himself at the top, lying in a rough shallow basin of rock large enough for three men. Pepe had been right. It was a good hiding-place. Except from the hillside directly above it, it was invisible, and the guards were not likely to climb up there until every more suspicious quarter had been exhausted.

As Ted finally heaved himself over the rim, Shep put a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it hard.

"You saw Pepe?" Ted whispered.

"Yes. He thought you couldn't make it."

Ted felt the tears smart under his lids. That fanatical, faintly ridiculous guy, making no sense, throwing his life away for a man he had known only a month—never thinking, just rushing out after the first idea he got! Lying on the rock, afraid to speak for fear of being overheard, Ted shut his eyes and pressed his hand hard over them.

IN imagination he heard himself offering to help Pepe; he could see Pepe's eyes gleam in the firelight, see his head bobbing on its skinny neck, hear him say; "I am your brother." It had been funny at the time. Well, Pepe had meant it, all right. Staring up at the low big stars, Ted remembered that a Spaniard had invented *Don Quixote.*

The guards were coming back now, freely cursing the *Americanos. Mañana,* they said, *mañana* they would comb the countryside. The men couldn't go far, on foot and without food or weapons. It would have been better to have killed them, of course, but they would be picked up, never fear. A hundred miles from a railroad, how would they make it? It was bad luck they got away—the Captain would be angry; but in this cursed darkness what could a man do? The guards passed on, leaving Pepe to be buried in the morning. After a moment there was a distant babble from the camp.

"*Mañana,*" said Shep, "we have got to be in that cave. *Vamos.*"

They crawled out of their hiding-place and up the hillside as quietly as possible. Near the top, Shep motioned to Ted to lie down and crawl, so that they should not show against the skyline. When they had put the ridge of the hill between them and the camp, he stood up, took a deep breath, and stretched himself. All around them, the silent black mountainous country lay as empty as it had been when time began.

"Oh, boy!" said Shep aloud. "It does a man good to breathe for a change."

Ted roused himself out of thoughts of Pepe, reminding himself that brooding would do no good. What was done was done, and could not be changed.

"Which way?" he asked, trying to sound more cheerful than he felt.

"Well, I took a bearing on the stars before we left camp, and figured we'd better head straight for that big low one sitting on the highest hill. If we don't pick up our landmarks when we get across this valley, we'll try the next one. Here goes."

They set off down the hillside.

The cave was, according to Pepe's information, about five kilometers off; and five kilos can be a long way in darkness and uncertainty. In the valleys they waded in the irrigation ditches.

"Just in case," Shep said, "they fetch up some dogs."

"Nice idea," said Ted.

"Don't worry," Shep reassured him. "Scent doesn't lie long in this dry country."

Occasionally they would lie down in a field of wheat or alfalfa, drinking a little from the ditch, and resting for the next climb. Then they would burst their lungs again scrambling up a mountainside, stopping to listen like hunted animals for sounds which might indicate pursuit. Shep apostrophized the star which he had selected for his beacon:

"Don't you go and set on us!"

"It won't matter," said Ted. "I've got the whole sky by now, right up to the zenith."

But the stars began to fade at last, and disappeared into a pale white sky, and dawn found them on a remote bleak mountainside without the faintest idea where they were.

"By jiminy," said Shep, "I think we missed it in the dark."

HE and Ted sat down and looked at each other ruefully, and at the bare country around them, which would hardly give sustenance to a jackrabbit. If they went down into the green valleys, they would be caught; if they stayed up on the mountains, they would starve. They did not need to discuss these things; they were both perfectly conscious of them; so instead they took stock of each other. Their shoes, which had been nearly worn out when they started, were now slit through, and their trouser-legs in ribbons from the knee down. Ted had lost the skin on one side of his left arm below the elbow, and Shep's thumb was cut and swelling painfully. Now that they had stopped, they felt exhausted.

"Well," said Shep, "two such looking people sure can't travel in the daytime, and they won't get here for a while. Let's pile up behind those rocks and get us some rest."

Ted lay down without protest; at the moment his numb brain could not think of anything better to do. He stretched out and put his head on his arms.

THE equatorial noonday sun wakened him hours later. At first he could not orientate himself.

Then it all came back, and he slowly rolled his sun-blistered body over and looked around. Shep snored peacefully a few feet away. With his instinct for comfort, he had somehow burrowed himself into the partial shade of a rock. Ted looked to the other side—and met the unblinking eyes of a shriveled old Indian woman.

She squatted on the ground, wrapped in a dirty but brightly striped hand-woven shawl. Under a filthy round felt hat, made of beaten llama hair, her seamed little face peered out like an incredibly ancient monkey. It was impossible to tell whether her look indicated sympathy or hostility, or mere curiosity.

Ted nudged Shep, allowed a moment for the slow grunting process which Shep called waking up, then nodded toward the old woman.

"Do you see what I see?" he asked.

"Must be I do," Shep admitted uncertainly.

"Then it's really there. Had me scared for a moment." Just then a thought occurred to him which wiped the smile from his face. "Good God! Do you suppose it could be Pepe's mother?"

The old woman had not changed expression when they began to talk, but at the word "Pepe" she smiled faintly, and bobbed her head in a motion poignantly reminiscent.

"How will I tell her, Shep?" Ted asked.

"Let me. *Señora, usted es la madre de Pepe Huertez?*"

There was no doubt about her smile now. Her eyes almost disappeared into deep wrinkles, but all she allowed herself to say was "*Si.*"

"We knew Pepe well in the prison-camp."

The old woman held out a clawlike hand.

"Friends to Pepe?" she asked in broken Spanish.

"Yes."

"When comes Pepe?"

Shep lost his nerve. "Where is your husband?"

The old woman closed her eyes, and jerked a thumb toward the earth. "Dead." Then after a silence which no one wanted to fill in she asked: "Pepe comes soon?"

"Señora," said Ted, "your son Pepe was a very brave man. He died last night when we escaped. Died, trying to save me. I would have stopped him if I could."

The old woman did not understand. She shook her head and smiled apologetically. Ted leaned forward and took her hand.

"Mother of Pepe," he said, "Pepe is dead."

Now it got through to her. Her eyes searched Ted's face.

"When died?"

"Last night."

The mother of Pepe let go of Ted and folded her hands against her breast. She continued to look at him, but he knew that she did not see him any more. She might have been carved of stone, and her tearless wizened face a symbol of all the griefs. At last she spoke.

"Soon I die too," she said, with a finality which did not permit of any argument. She got up. "You Pepe's friends. You come with me."

Ted and Shep followed her humbly. She climbed only a few feet to an overhanging ledge, bent down and pushed aside a screen of brush. They crawled after her, and found themselves in a large cave. When a candle had been lighted, they could see on one side a pile of straw with some blankets, on the other a few earthenware pots, a wooden stool, a stone mortar for grinding coffee or meal—in fact, all the household effects of Pepe's mother. On a ledge in the rock stood a highly colored picture of a madonna, and a curious little wooden image of a man with his knees up to his chin.

"Sit down," she said. "Stay here. I make coffee."

"*Gracias, señora,*" said Shep.

She shook her head. "Me Shira," she corrected, and gathering a few things, scuttled out to the flat shelving rock at the mouth of the cave, where she had made herself a little oven of three large stones with another on top.

Ted sat down on the straw with his elbows on his knees and his fists on his temples. Shep watched him for a moment, then laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Do you see what I see?" Ted asked.
"Must be I do," Shep admitted.

"Guess you never had anybody die saving you before?"

"I never did."

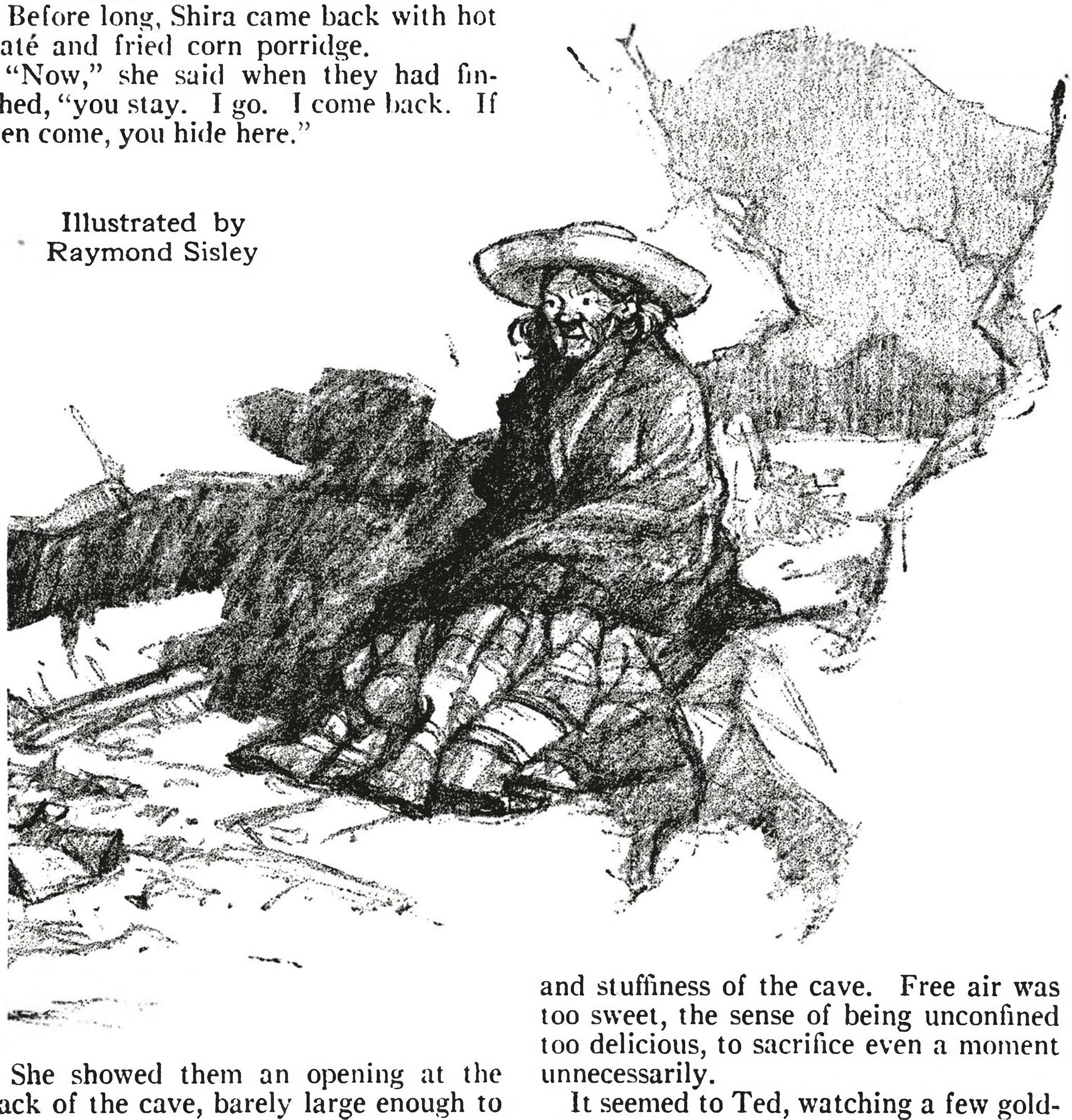
"I did once. Couple of men in my regiment. I couldn't figure it out for a long time. A couple of swell guys were dead, and I was alive—to go back and measure calico in a small-town store! It didn't add up. Then I figured, well, what the hell! It's all in the cards. You just play them the best you can."

"Thanks," said Ted, and managed a one-sided smile.

Before long, Shira came back with hot maté and fried corn porridge.

"Now," she said when they had finished, "you stay. I go. I come back. If men come, you hide here."

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley



She showed them an opening at the back of the cave, barely large enough to squeeze through, which led through a little tunnel to a smaller cave behind. Then she beckoned them to follow her out to the ledge. In the thin air they could see for fifty miles, fifty miles of superb mountainous country with green fields flowering in the valleys. Just before them the mountain dropped sharply away; and three hundred feet below, a trail of a road wound at the bottom.

"Listen," said Shira suddenly.

Straining their ears, they could hear a distant popping like remote tiny fireworks. "Is revolution," said Shira.

She set off down the mountain with her jerky scuttling gait, and soon they saw her beetlelike figure moving rapidly along the trail below. They stayed where they were. When they lay flat on the ledge, they could not be seen from the road; and above them were only the eagles and the vultures. They were both reluctant to go back into the obscurity and stuffiness of the cave. Free air was too sweet, the sense of being unconfined too delicious, to sacrifice even a moment unnecessarily.

It seemed to Ted, watching a few gold-colored clouds drifting across the evening sky, that he had never been really alive before. After a month in which he had tried to turn himself into an automaton, moving unthinkingly while others pulled the strings, his life had suddenly been given back to him, placed in his own hands again. That he was ragged, dirty, hungry and tired, that he was a hunted man—these things did not matter. He had regained his individuality. He could

lie on this rock as long as he chose; he could watch the clouds, or sleep; he could speak or be silent, without compulsion. He had not known the importance of such privileges before, had not known how to value them. Then he remembered at what price he had been given this freedom, and felt ashamed of his enjoyment, but not for long. The springs of his happiness were too deep; they welled up and washed away the regret which his conscience told him he should feel. After all, he thought, death was a kind of freedom too, the ultimate in freedom.

As the sun set, they heard in the distance hoof-beats, shouts and the creaking of many wagons. A large party of some kind was coming along the trail. They started to crawl in, then reconsidered. The searchers who might come for them would be silent men, moving swiftly, on foot, or perhaps mounted on horses and accompanied by the baying of dogs. These noises were too domestic to be alarming. Lying flat, peering cautiously over, they watched a cavalcade go by.

First came a string of oxcarts loaded with goods, bedding, food, two huge old Spanish chests, two Indian girls. There followed a train of little burros, then about twenty head of cattle, driven by dark-faced *vaqueros*. At the end of the procession rode two men, and a woman draped in black, perched side-saddle on a big white mule. The men had guns across their saddles.

"Looks like it might be a revolution, at that," said Shep, "and some big family is making a get-away."

The wagons creaked out of sight; the animals followed them slowly, and the red sun dropped behind the rim of the sky.

Chapter Twelve

AFTER the cavalcade had disappeared, the road was not deserted for long. In the swift dusk, and even in the darkness, band after band of silent peons passed, three or four together, hurrying toward some unknown rendezvous in the direction from which the wagon-train had come. Shira did not return. Ted and Shep lay a long while on the ledge watching the activity until the mountain chill began to stiffen their bones.

"Big doings," said Shep at last, stretching, "but I'm about to freeze, out here."

"Right," Ted answered. "Only I hate to go into that hole again. I had a bath thirty days ago, and I'm particular."

In spite of everything, they slept better than they expected; and when Ted crawled again out of the darkness of the cave, the sun was high, and Shira was squatting on the ledge cooking a chicken in her primitive fireplace. Ted yelled the good news to Shep, who arrived in record time, snapped out of sleepiness by the prospect of real food. They felt it unwise to inquire how Shira had collected the chicken. Obviously she had no money to buy it, and it seemed equally unlikely that it had been given to her. It tasted delicious, roasted on a spit over the fire, and they gladly accepted it from her dirty little claws, and ate it with relish.

SHIRA had collected much information. In her broken Spanish, mixed with plentiful lapses into Quechua, the Indian dialect, she made them understand that no one was looking for them. On the contrary, the prisoners had been hastily loaded into the trucks and rushed back to the barracks. Why? Because of course the revolution had begun. If those convicts were left in the open and the fighting came close, they might all get away, and while the señors knew some of them were good men, it could not be denied that some of them were bad, and better shut up. Yes. It was the revolution. The *Patrón* was at the head of it; and Hacienda Tranquilla was like a fort: all the men in the countryside were going there and getting arms, and going to march on Bolto.

Why were they going? But of course because those were the *Patrón's* orders. Besides that, it was said in the villages that they were to be paid as well. It was also said that Maladon had already fallen, but that was so far away that no one ever went there, and so no one cared. The Don had sent his treasure and most of his household up to the old ranch-house in the mountains—the one his grandfather had lived in before he built the big one. Her father had worked on the big one. *Ai-ai!* The old Don drove his people hard. He had been the one for getting things done! This Don spent more time away. He let his overseers have too much authority. When that happened, people suffered more. The one to come might be better—who could tell?

Shira spat. These two men had been sent her by her son. Therefore they were in a sense members of her family, and could be talked to, and not treated to the silence which was reserved for superiors. Shira liked to talk when she felt it was

safe. With some difficulty and much tact, Ted got her back to the subject he was interested in.

The old ranchhouse? Oh, yes, she knew that one. Her mother had taken her there when she was a child. The road was bad then and it was bad now, because no one had ever done anything about it. It was at least three days' walk on the road. It was right on the other side of the mountains, where they began to slope down into the jungle. It had thick walls, with slits in them to shoot through. Nobody knew how old it was. It had been built by the first Don. She well remembered going there. The old *Patrón* had been alive then, the grandfather of this one. Tall, he was, with white hair, very much white hair, and—

TED'S impatience got the better of him.

"Listen, Shira. The Don has a girl in his house? An American girl?"

Shira looked blank. She had been about to tell one of her best stories, and she did not like being interrupted. These *Norte-Americanos* were nice men; they were friends of Pepe's, and they were dependent on her. In her dim mind they had become in a way her sons. She had stolen for them and fed them as if they had been sons. Sons were supposed to keep quiet when their mother talked.

"Try to listen, Shira: A girl—a girl with yellow hair—at Hacienda Tranquilla."

Shira nodded, grudgingly. Oh, yes. She had seen that one.

"Is she still there, Shira? Did she go to the mountains? Do you know where she is?"

Shira sighed. Boys were all alike. You tried to tell them things—old things which you knew and they did not, and then it turned out that all the time they were thinking about the girls.

"No sé," she answered stubbornly.

"Shira, you must know. You could find out, anyway. You could ask somebody. You know somebody who works at the ranchhouse, don't you?"

Shira sighed again. Might as well give up. Pepe had been the same.

"My brother's grandchild, Lolita, she is maid to that señorita."

"I knew you could tell me something!" said Ted triumphantly. "Is it far to the Hacienda Tranquilla?"

"No. Not far. One morning, maybe. Maybe less."

"Could you take me there?"

"Fella," exclaimed Shep, "you're nuts! They'd shoot you like a sitting duck. And leaving that out of it—pardon me if I get personal—you don't look much like love's young dream. Frankly, a girl looking at you right now would be just a little bit inclined to scream. If you're smart, you'll just leave Martha her memories."

"Look, I'm not such a fool as to think I could charge right in. But if I could hide in the neighborhood, it might make a lot of sense. You can't tell. If there's fighting, she may need help."

Shep looked disgusted. "Hell! You don't even know she's there yet."

Ted turned back to the old woman. "Shira, you could get into the ranch, couldn't you?"

Shira nodded without enthusiasm.

"Well, will you go and find out if she is there? If she is, take her a message. You will do it, won't you?"

Shira leaned back against the rock. Her little nutshell of a face seemed to shrivel into the shade of the big felt hat.

"Shira tires herself," she stated flatly.

"Of course you are tired. I didn't mean you should go right away. I wouldn't think of asking you to do a thing like that. But later, when you are rested. I'll do anything for you. Of course I haven't much right now, but later—Gosh, Shep, what can I give her to get her to go?"

Shep stared disinterestedly at the remote horizon. "I really wouldn't know."

"You don't need to take that attitude. You might fall for somebody yourself one day."

"I might, and I might not."

"If you did, I would at least try to help you out. I'll write a message. No good trying to get Shira to remember anything. But what can I write on?"

FRENZIEDLY Ted looked around, and at last an idea came to him. He took a stick and held it in the fire until the end of it charred black; then he picked up one of the three earthen pots and broke it.

"Ai-ai!" cried Shira.

"Now, you don't need to worry. When I get out of here, I'll buy you fifty pots. Yes, and a house too. A house where nobody will ever bother you again. You'd like that, wouldn't you? A house that was all your own, and fifty pots?"

Shira grunted. That was how Pepe had talked; her husband too, for that matter. Men were like that, living for things that

did not happen. You could look at this boy, and see that he had nothing.

Ted wrote feverishly on the flattest fragment, *"I have escaped and am in hiding. Are you all right?"* and signed his name. There was no room for more.

"Here, Shira. Please do me the favor to take it to her. You are so kind. You will do it, won't you?"

SHIRA held the fragment in her skinny fingers and looked at it curiously. She might as well give in to him. She could see that he would give her no peace until she did.

"*Mañana* I go," she said; and the piece of pottery disappeared into some mysterious recess of her garments.

"You couldn't make it today?" Ted ventured. "After you have rested, of course."

"*Mañana,*" answered Shira, calmly. She fished out of her dress a package wrapped in a rag, took out a portion of coco-leaf, put it in her mouth and began to chew, her eyes staring blankly in front of her. Soon they closed, and a look of satisfaction came over her face; only the slow rhythmical movement of her jaws showed that she was still awake.

"I don't suppose there is any way of getting her started before she is ready to go," Ted mused.

"If you'll take my advice, fella, tomorrow will see us heading for the coast. While the country's upset, we've got our best chance of slipping through."

"We can't leave Martha now."

"I've seen dames who couldn't take care of themselves, but they weren't this Evans girl."

"You don't seem to realize what she may be up against. I'm worried as hell."

"O.K.," grunted Shep.

No longer exhausted, Ted found it impossible to sleep, and the night interminable. About midnight, Shep invited him feelingly to go outside because the fleas made quieter bedfellows. He stepped over the hunched little form of Shira, and crawled into the moonlight. During the afternoon she had showed them the shallow grave she had dug for her husband, and had regretted the lack of strength which made her unable to do better. Ted began searching the hillside for stones to pile on top of it as a marker and a protection. The work soothed him, and he had raised a respectable cairn by the time he felt tired enough to go in again and rest. It was nearly dawn when he fell asleep; and to his horror when he woke up, the sun had climbed halfway across the sky, and Shira sat peacefully on the ledge as if she intended never to leave it.

"Have you been to the ranch yet?" he inquired, although he knew very well what the answer would be.

"No go today. Tomorrow, maybe."

In vain Ted pleaded with her. There was meal enough in the cave to last through this day. Why should she make this tiring trip for nothing? At last Ted had an inspiration.

"I worked for you all last night," he told her, and led her out to see the cairn. She looked at it in silence, and a tear rolled down one withered cheek.

"I go now," she said, and set off down the mountain.

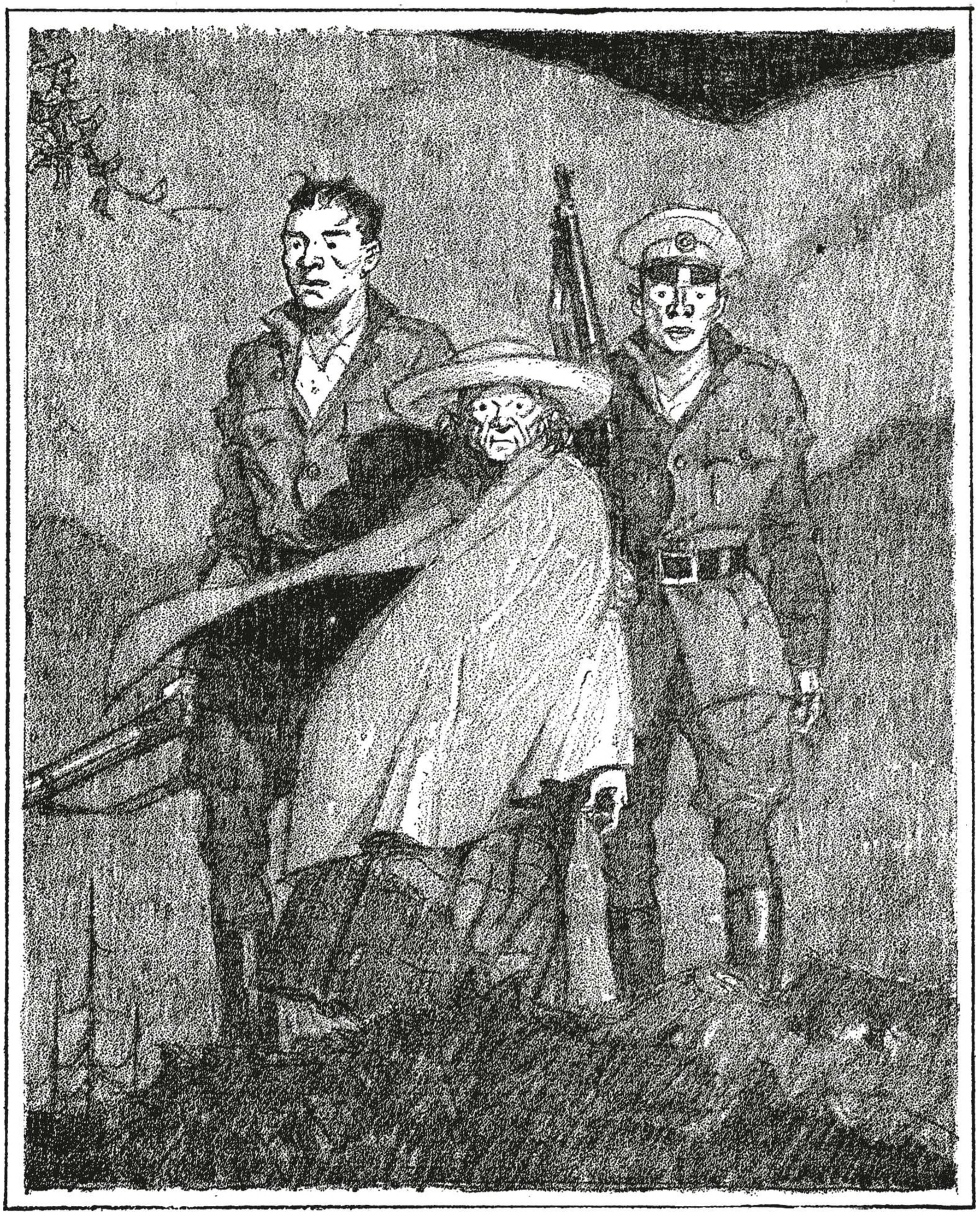
Ted and Shep put in the afternoon as best they could. Watching the road only increased their impatience, so they went back in the hills to a spring Shira had showed them, and bathed vigorously in the cool water. In the cave they found a little bundle of her husband's clothes which she had thriftily put away, and decided that she would not object if they borrowed a few things to eke out their ragged costumes. Like the pot which Ted had broken, such loans could be more than repaid later on. They regretted that peons did not wear shoes.

At one time they heard scattered bursts of distant firing, which lasted half an hour; but they could see nothing, though they climbed to the top of the mountain. They cooked and ate the remainder of the meal. When it grew dark, they put out the fire lest they attract attention.

According to the stars and the moon, it was after midnight when they heard footsteps. There were no voices, only an unmistakable scrambling and sliding, not one person but several climbing up, fairly distant at first, but coming nearer. Ted cautiously crawled out to the ledge and looked over. He could see them distinctly, three of them, plain against the moon-drenched mountainside. In front he recognized Shira's little shapeless figure and big felt hat. Behind her came two men. They dipped into a shadow and disappeared. When they emerged, the faint light glittered on their gunbarrels.

Chapter Thirteen

THERE was no time to get out. Ted caught up the big knife, the only weapon he could see, and quickly crawled after Shep into the hole at the back which



Behind Shira came two men; light glittered on their gunbarrels.

Shira had showed them. Soon they heard her come with the two men into the cave, and sit down, puffing. In a moment the light of a candle glimmered through the crack.

"It's a good thing we found you, old grandmother," said one of the men, and his voice sounded young, almost boyish. "We've had a hot day."

Shira grunted.

A second voice spoke, deeper, but with a gruffness which seemed exaggerated, as though the owner were determined to convince everyone, including himself, that he was a dangerous man:

"I still say you were a fool to hide in that straw-stack instead of running."

"Ho, José, why do you complain? Most of those who ran are still lying in that alfalfa field, and won't be getting up. You and I are alive—and have our guns."

"But what good is a gun without bullets? And how will we get out of here?"

"Leave that to the saints and old grandmother. They've looked after us so far. *Holá*, old one, got anything to eat?"

"No," said Shira stubbornly.

Ted and Shep heard the men stirring as though they did not accept the denial and were rummaging around for themselves to see what they could find. Suddenly one of them exclaimed, his voice rising almost to a squeak in his surprise.

"José! Look! There have been men here!"

"What did I tell you?" shouted José, entirely forgetting to be gruff. "It's a trap—she's brought us into a trap! Where are they, old woman?"

"*No sé.*"

"Where are they? Tell me now, or I'll beat your brains out."

Ted hitched himself closer to the opening. The men had admitted that they had no ammunition; but to get back into the big cave, he would have to crawl through headfirst, presenting a perfect target for a rifle-butt.

"How I know?" asked Shira, quietly. "You see me come."

"You know something. You never wore these shoes, nor these pants, either."

TED could see the cave now. Shira squatted near her pots, apparently as calm as she had ever been. A man stood over her, his back to Ted, his rifle raised by the barrel in both hands as though he would bring it down on her head. The other man was invisible from this angle, but his rifle leaned against the rock near the candle, not three feet from the opening through which Ted would have to crawl. There was no time to lose; he took a desperate chance. His hand shot out and extinguished the candle. In the darkness he grabbed a pair of legs and brought someone down on top of him.

He pulled his feet through the hole and rolled away from the opening. A knife grazed his shoulder, and he caught the hand that held it. To his surprise, the fingers were as small and weak as a girl's. The knife clattered down and was lost in the darkness. Another moment, and he had his opponent's arms pinned down, and was sitting astride a squirming slender body.

"Shep!" he panted. "I've got mine. Where are you?"

"Here. This one's down already."

"You no hurt him," said Shira's quiet voice. "Him nice boy."

She struck a match, and the candle flickered up again. Ted was holding his man face down, with his arms twisted across his back. Across the cave lay the other, apparently unconscious. With the first glimmer of light, Shep collected both rifles and the knife. The one who had been knocked out opened enormous dark eyes and looked up with a curious mixture of defiance and fear.

"MY gosh," said Shep. "They're only kids!"

"We are soldiers of the Government," asserted the one on the floor, trying to sit up.

"Well, get up, sonny. We aren't going to hurt you."

Ted let go of his prisoner, who rolled over and climbed to his feet, rubbing his strained arms.

"*Viva la Republica!*" he said sullenly, through clenched teeth.

"That's all right," Shep answered. "We're Loyalistas too. Let's talk things over. I'll keep the guns for now. And you on the floor—take out your knife and hand it to my friend. We don't want any accidents. As soon as we understand each other, we'll get along fine."

The boy with the big gruff voice shook his head as though he would clear it, scowled, and put the knife into Ted's outstretched hand. They could not have been more than sixteen, either of them. A first faint down was just beginning to appear on their upper lips, and their eyes were still soft as women's might be.

"*Viva la Republica!*" said Ted. "I hope it's got some bigger soldiers than you two boys are."

José scowled fiercely. "We are good soldiers," he growled.

"I can see that," Shep answered in a conciliatory tone. "My friend and I are waiting for a chance to join up too. The people of North America sent us down here to fight for your side, but those rapacious bloodsuckers the *capitalistas* caught us and threw us in prison. We just got away. Suppose you tell us what has been going on."

"Do you believe him, Tomas?" asked José uncertainly.

Tomas considered. Although he was the smaller and the weaker, he liked to be the mental giant of the two. It was he who made the plans, and José who grumblingly carried them out.

"I believe that they are North Americans," he said at last. "I have seen such men before. They do not usually wear beards, and they are usually cleaner, but they all talk in that funny way."

"I have heard that all North Americans are capitalists," José objected.

"These do not look as if they could be."

José's eyes narrowed as he studied Ted, and finally widened in triumph.

"That one is out of the road-gang. My uncle was in it, and he wore just such a shirt."

This discovery reassured Tomas. He turned back to Shep.

"Will you swear by the blood of Jesus and the milk of Mary that what you have told us is true?"

"I will swear it."

"I too," affirmed Ted solemnly.

Tomas looked relieved. "That is a big oath they have sworn. I think we can trust them."

Tomas and José, glad now of a chance to talk, began to tell Shep and Ted about the revolution. That morning they had seen their first action, and they discussed it like boys who had just played in their first important football game, awed, impressed, and feeling more important than they had ever done before.

They had been sent out with a small detachment from Bolto for an attack on the Hacienda Tranquilla. It had been a sort of suicide squad, intended only to keep the attack on the capital from being made in full force. They had taken a circuitous route, escaped attention, flanked Don Miguel's army, and fallen upon his rear as he was marching forward. They had never reached the ranch, and most of them had been killed.

"But it is not to be supposed," said Tomas proudly, "that we did no good. For we delayed the revolutionists very much. The Captain told me that before he died. They had to turn back to fight us, most of them, and that gave time to strengthen the barricades. They did not get in, I think, and they won't, either."

"GRANDMOTHER," cried José, tired of conversation, "I'm starving! Give me some food."

"Ai-ai!" Shira clapped her hand to her forehead. Here she had been enjoying her new family, but like a bad mother she had nothing to give them. She looked from one to another. Four of them, big boys too. What a lot of chickens it would take! She could never steal enough. If they stayed in the cave they would all starve. With the country so torn up they could probably escape being shot.

"I have nothing," she said sadly. "Tomorrow we go."

Tomas slapped his thigh. "Sure, Grandmother. Tomorrow we go. We take the Americans with us and go back to Bolto. I remember the road. We can get through."

"Good!" cried José. "They will come with us, and fight for the Captain."

Tomas looked sad. "The Captain is dead, silly. You saw him fall."

"That's right, of course. I had forgotten. They'll fight for the Colonel, then. We've got him left."

"It's agreed!"

Tomas held out his hand, and Shep took it, but Ted hesitated.

"Wait a minute, Shep. You forget I've got business around here, and it will have to be attended to first. Shira, when you left this morning, you were going to the ranch for me. Did you go?"

Shira nodded.

"Did you see the Señorita?"

Shira nodded again.

"But *say* something. Did you give her my letter? How is she?"

"Is all right."

"She must have said *something* to you."

"Talk to Lolita. Lolita talk to me."

"Didn't she give you *any* message for me?"

"Oh, sure."

SHIRA produced a white envelope—considerably soiled by contact with her person—addressed in a firm hand. Ted seized it and tore it open. He had never seen that writing before; yet he would have sworn that he recognized it. He held it close to the candle and read as if to remember every word forever.

Dear Ted:

It is wonderful news that you are near and all right. I suppose that means Shep too. We seem to have stuck our American necks into quite a jam, haven't we?

You must not worry about me. The Don is kindness itself, and has promised to take good care of me. He seems quite sure that his coup *will go through all right, and then he will see me safely out of the country. I confess I don't know what it is all about.*

I can't write more now, as I mustn't get caught communicating with people. It would be bad for the Don. Where did you get the wonderful messenger? Send her again if you can.

Best regards,

Martha.

Shep, who had shamelessly looked over Ted's shoulder while he was reading, slapped him on the back.

"She's worried about me too, fella. Did you get that?"

"There are too many spies around."

"I can see she hasn't the slightest idea what is going on," snapped Ted, crossly. "That old man must have hypnotized her. I'm going to get her out of there."

"Wait a minute. Don't go off half cocked."

"I've listened to you long enough. I'm going down there, and I'm going now."

He turned impatiently to Shira, who had just settled down on her bit of straw, and provided herself with a large cud of coco-leaf. He called her, but she gave no sign of having heard him. He took her by the shoulder and shook her gently; she opened one eye and looked at him with patient tolerance.

"Shira, I've got to get down to the ranch."

"Me tired."

"I know that, Shira. I don't expect you to go. Just tell me the way. Tell me the general direction. I'll get there by myself."

"No use."

"Of course it's some use. I've got by this far, and I won't get caught now."

"No use."

"Don't keep saying that over and over like a damned parrot. You tell me the way. I won't let you sleep until you do."

"Señorita not there."

"What do you mean, she's not there. You just told me you had seen her, and you gave me this letter."

"Señorita goes with Pedro to old ranch this afternoon."

Chapter Fourteen

UNTIL then Ted had not realized what it had meant to him to feel that Martha was in the neighborhood, nor how much he had counted on the possibility of seeing her. For a few moments he stared at Shira, unable to speak. When he recovered himself, Shep had an argument on his hands.

"Look at the facts," he kept saying, over and over. "Look at the facts."

The facts, as Shep stated them, were clear and simple. Martha had been moved fifty miles away to a spot chosen for its inaccessibility even to people who knew the country well. Moreover, the old ranch would undoubtedly be strongly guarded, and in these times vigilance would not be relaxed. If Ted were able to find his way there, which was doubtful, he would certainly not be able to get in. If he got in by impersonating a peon, which incidentally would not fool anybody, he would not be able to get out. If he got out, he would not be able to get Martha out with him. And if he did get Martha out with him, what would he do with her, and how would he take her through mile after mile of unfriendly country? She was safer under the protection of the Don than she would be running around with a penniless unarmed ex-convict who probably had a price on his head.

"WE have to look at things the way they are and not how we want them to be," concluded Shep.

"We can't just sit here and rot."

"No need for that. We'll join up with the boys."

"Suppose they lose?"

Shep winked. "With *us* fighting for them?"

He went on with his argument, patiently repeating one point after another. The time had come to join up, because obviously they were not going to get very far unless they did. Once in the army, they might have a chance to take the old ranch.

"Frankly," said Shep, "I like to eat. I want to go some place where they feed you."

One point Shep ignored so completely that Ted felt embarrassed about bringing it up. It occurred to him forcibly that they might get shot in the army; but he hated to be the first to mention it, and so he kept quiet. In the end he agreed with everything Shep said, and they dropped off to sleep.

Ted dreamed that a prison guard was pinching him. He woke to find himself clutched by Shira's little bony claw.

"We go now," she said. "Too many for travel in daytime," she explained.

She began collecting her effects. The two remaining pots disappeared under her poncho, so did the knife, and two or three candle-ends, and the box of matches. She looked a long time at the highly colored picture of the Virgin, and sighed. Evidently there were limits to the amount

which could be stowed about her person. At last she picked up the curious little squatting figure and tucked it away.

"Looks like you're moving out," said Shep.

Shira nodded and smiled.

"You're safer here, old lady. You'd better wait here for us. If you come along, something might happen to you."

"No matter," said Shira cheerfully.

All five slid down the mountain-side without speaking, and went quietly along the road. Only Ted and Shep could be heard walking, in spite of the rags with which they had replaced their worn-out shoes; the others were as silent as cats. Shira set a fast pace, and they followed her for about an hour. The young moon had gone down, and the stars were fading when they came to the edge of a small village. Shira went straight to the door of one of the adobe houses, set crookedly along the dusty road, pushed it open and walked in without ceremony. Two old Indians, a man and a woman, sleeping on a mat in the corner of the room, started up and stared with frightened eyes at the soldiers and the ragged men. Shira spoke to them quickly and softly in Quechua, and after some conversation turned around with a satisfied air.

"These my cousins," she said. "You stay here."

Ted said: "You have relatives everywhere, haven't you?"

"Sure," said Shira.

The old woman whose guests they had suddenly become blew up a little fire on the hearth, and in a short time produced frijoles and coco. Tomas found in his pocket a *real,* which he gave in payment, and which was cheerfully accepted. It developed, too, that he could speak Quechua, having learned it from an Indian grandmother, and so he could explain what went on.

THESE were two of Don Miguel's peons. They had a son in his army. It would of course be fatal for them to hide any of his enemies, so they were leaving at once for their work in the fields. The men could stay there or go; it was nothing so long as they did not know about it. If they roused the village to take these men prisoners, there would be too much talk, and they might be blamed. Besides, all the men of fighting age were away with the army, and these men had guns. . . .

They began to dress for the day, a simple process, consisting of putting two colored ponchos over their heads, and slapping on two big white felt hats. As the man turned his bare back to them in dressing, Ted could see the healed scars of a lash across his shoulders. At the door the Indian hesitated. His work-knotted fingers played for a moment uncertainly with the wooden bar which locked it, and an almost human gleam came into his dull eyes.

"If you meet my Juan, you remember," he said, and went out, followed by his wife. Through the door, as it quickly opened and shut, they could see the gray light creeping over the dusty little town.

INSIDE the hut it was still dark: but by the embers and the light which began to trickle through the cracks in the door and the shutter, objects were visible. It was almost as bare of belongings as Shira's cave had been; the earthen floor was polished by centuries of bare feet; but around the stone hearth, the earth appeared to have been disturbed recently.

The day wore on. . . . The men did not dare speak, for fear of being overheard. There was absolutely nothing to do except lie on the dirty bare ground. The stone began to have a fascination for Shep. He started to poke around it, found it loose; and more to keep himself occupied than anything else, set carefully and silently to work to raise it. Tomas helped him with a stick of wood for a lever. They were repaid for their curiosity far beyond their expectations. A groove had been dug in the earth beneath the stone; and in the groove lay an object which had for them an especial beauty: a new and shining German rifle of the latest make.

Evidently the Don had been lavish and careless with arms for his men; for somehow he had dealt out one too many, and it had been left behind. Shep slid back the bolt, saw that it was loaded, and his eyes gleamed with delight. They carefully replaced the hearth, and smoothed the earth down around it.

Apparently the loyalty of the peons to their *Patrón* had definite limits. It did not include refusing to shelter his enemies if it seemed more convenient to do so, and it did not include returning a weapon which had by chance come into their hands, but which certainly had not been intended for them. There was no open rebellion in these people, but there was the hidden resistance of the slave.

Tomas began moving quietly around the hut, running his hand into the palm-

leaf thatch which served as a roof. Rats and lizards which squeaked, dropped out, and ran across the room. A spider as big as the palm of his hand jumped onto his shoulder, and then to the floor, where José put a foot on it. Not finding what he wanted around the eaves, Tomas took the wooden stool and stood on it. He had grown up in a hut like this; he knew where things were likely to be. Grinning in silent delight, he pulled a small box of ammunition from the highest point of the roof.

IT was a disappointment that the cartridges did not fit the Government rifles which he and José were carrying; but since they now had at least one functioning weapon, the spirits of the party rose to such a degree of optimism that they found it difficult to keep still. The sun began to come through the chinks in the shutter, and they could hear the village stirring around them. Shira, who had watched everything they did as though it were to be expected, got up and went out. Ted put his eye to a crack, saw her plant herself on the doorstep, lean back comfortably, and start chewing coco.

Apparently she was well known in the village, for everyone who passed spoke to her, seeming to take it as a matter of course that she should be sunning herself in front of her relatives' house. She seemed to be something of a wit in her own language, for her replies to the greetings usually produced giggles. One after another all the people filed by on their way to work, old men, women, children, each carrying a hoe or rake, a pickax or shovel, in proportion to their strength. The faces of the six-year-olds were as grave and intent as those of their elders, and they walked silently, with a full consciousness of having attained to adult responsibilities. Only the mothers with babies at their breasts appeared to be exempt, and the tiny ones who toddled naked up and down the road.

The sun climbed higher and higher, beat fiercely on the thatch, and the atmosphere in the close little hut grew stifling. Ted and the two boys woke up bathed in sweat, and it was too hot to think of sleeping any more. Each one crawled as close to a crack as possible, and lay in silent misery.

The day ended at last, and the cool air began to creep with the darkness into the hut. Shira gave up her vigil on the doorstep and shuffled away. The unwilling host and hostess did not come back, having apparently decided to establish an alibi by visiting friends until all danger had passed. With nightfall, the village relaxed for its brief evening. There would be no artificial lights to keep the people awake, no restlessness left in them after a day of unremitting physical toil. There were no young men to sing or quarrel or talk to the girls. The young wives sat and sighed on their doorsteps; the girls strolled by in twos and threes, scuffling the dust with their toes and talking in subdued voices. Little by little the small noises grew less, and sound subsided into silence. In the deep oblivion of heavy sleep everything was forgotten. The hidden men strained their ears and heard nothing. Then the board door creaked, and Shira came in.

She had some slices of black bread and a pineapple, which she doled out in the darkness. She did not waste time talking to the younger men, but whispered for a moment to Shep, who then told the others that they were to go out one by one, and wait for each other beyond the last house. José and Tomas would go first, for without their uniform tunics and rifles, which Ted would carry, they could pass as boys from a neighboring village. Ted would follow them, and Shep would take the place of most danger, the rear, carrying the gun.

Shira and the boys went out like shadows. When he had waited a little it was Ted's turn. The cool air felt like wine to his lungs, and he drank it in as he walked along as quickly and quietly as possible. All the doors were shut, and no sound came from any of the crooked little huts. A dog barked, and the bark ended in a squeal, as someone hit it. In these troubled times no one cared to know why strange feet walked the roads. It was safer not to inquire into the identity of dark shapes which might pass during the night.

THEY met without incident, and traveled on until morning. Next day they lay by in the hills, and refreshed themselves with a jackrabbit stew, shot by Shep and cooked in Shira's pots. On the second night they camped in a spot from which they could look down and see the city of Bolto lying in its wide green valley with the white glory of the snow-capped mountains behind it. There was fighting on the low side of the town. Little feathers of artillery-smoke bloomed out, followed by the thud of a big gun, and the unimportant popping of rifle-fire.

Toward evening a crowd of antlike figures ran back from the town and out into the fields.

José and Tomas thumped each other on the shoulders.

"We are making them run!" they cried. "Look! They will never get in! We are using the monastery as a fort. They will never cross the bridge."

"I don't understand this gunfire," said Shep critically in English. "I don't hear any machine-guns, and unless they are short of ammunition, they ought to make that big one talk more often. This is a hell of a war."

The boys could not understand him, but they caught his tone. He saw their crestfallen faces, and made haste to cheer them up.

"I was talking about the guns and not the fighting. When we get in there tomorrow, we'll show them something."

The two boys beamed. There was no doubt in their minds that "Captain Chip" would win the war.

ALL night they climbed in a circuitous route over the steep mountains, hauling themselves up slope after slope, only to slide down again into incredible valleys. Don Miguel's troops had seized the railway, and the roads to the capital except where the high hills closed it in, so that easier methods of approach had to be avoided. In all the climbing and the walking, Shira astonished them by her endurance. Dawn found them scrambling down a footpath which ran through a precariously tilted peach orchard to meet the first mean houses of the town. The poorer people perched their little huts here, where the steep grades made the land cheap. Just beyond the first few houses, a squad of soldiers appeared from around a corner and halted them.

"Advance and give the countersign!" called the corporal in charge.

"*Bolivar!*" replied Tomas, confidently.

"That was all right two days ago," said the corporal, "but it is no good now."

"We were in the rear-guard action," Tomas explained. "Third regiment, second company. We got cut off. We've just made our way here."

The corporal spread his feet apart, and spat to the side of the path. He was a dark hairy man with a big nose; and the collar of his tunic was already unbuttoned, although the edge of the sun had just shone over the mountain-top.

"A fellow hears all kinds of stories these days," he remarked.

"Look at our uniforms," Tomas insisted. "They're the same as yours. Our guns, too. Only—we've used up all our ammunition."

"You have, have you? Well, who are these beauties you've picked up?"

"The gentlemen are sent from America of the North," Tomas answered proudly, "to help us win."

The corporal took a good look at them, threw back his head and laughed uproariously. The merriment communicated itself to his men. Ted felt himself getting red in the face. He stepped forward and spoke in his best Spanish.

"It is regrettable that you have not a proper appreciation of our efforts in your behalf. It should be plain, you son of a pig, that we have been reduced to our present ragged condition by our devotion to your cause. If we are not treated with the proper respect, our country will be very angry. It may even be necessary to send some Marines here. I demand to be taken at once to your General."

"You talk big," shouted the corporal, losing his temper too. "But if I shoot you now, who is going to send for those Marines?"

"Wait a minute," said Shep. "You're off on the wrong foot. Look at it this way. You take us to the General. If he wants to shoot us, he can. If he doesn't, he'll call you a smart fellow."

"There are too many spies around," objected the corporal.

"What chance will we have to get out with information if the General does not want to let us go? Just look at the facts, man. Here, I'll hand over my rifle to show my good intentions. And mine *is* loaded."

The corporal took the rifle and looked at it suspiciously. One of the men in the squad made some remark, and they all crowded around it, chattering. The corporal bellowed to make himself heard.

"Be quiet! This is a gun like the ones we have been capturing from Don Miguel's troops. These men are obviously suspicious foreigners, and it is our duty to take them to the Colonel. Americans, it will be very surprising if he does not have you shot, so you had better make ready for it."

WITH this complicated reconciling of two points of view and two courses of action, everyone had to be satisfied. The corporal in particular seemed pleased to have thought of it, and hustled them down into the city. . . .

Colonel Corotizo was having his breakfast on a sunlit balcony when they were ushered informally into his presence. The balcony ran along one side of the war college, and overlooked a large and dusty parade-ground, in the middle of which a group of men were apparently trying to put together a complicated piece of machinery. The Colonel watched them dreamily, while he drank his *café con leche,* and took an occasional bite at a peeled orange which he held on a stick. He was resplendent in a pale blue uniform loaded with gold braid, and he appeared considerably annoyed at being interrupted.

After a few incisive questions, he was convinced that Tomas and José were exactly what they said, and he ordered them to return at once to their company, which happened to be one of his own, and which was stationed at the moment in another part of the city, recruiting the losses which it had suffered. He sharply ordered the disappointed corporal to leave him alone with the two Americans, but to station one guard outside the door, and another under the balcony. The soldiers reluctantly withdrew. Shira, who had been overlooked in the general excitement, scuttled out after them. Ted and Shep remained standing. They looked at the Colonel, and the Colonel looked at them.

"Let's speak English," said the Colonel, with a strong Midwestern accent. "I went to Culver and Ann Arbor. I was a Delt." He regarded them inquiringly.

"I was at Yale," Ted answered. "Bones."

The Colonel shrugged. "No matter. Sit down. How did you get here, and what's your story?"

SHEP and Ted decided without conference that the time had come to put the cards on the table. They did not explain their mission in detail, but said that they had come into the country with the assistance of Señor Alvaro, the minister to Panama, and gave a lively description of their adventures since arriving.

"What luck!" said Colonel Corotizo. "The minister is in Bolto at the moment. He arrived on the last train before these damn' rebels seized the railroad. You will like to see him."

"I don't think he will recognize me, if I can't have a bath and a shave," Ted answered.

"Excuse *me!* Here I sit gabbing, and offer you no hospitality. Of course you must have a chance to make yourselves comfortable. You'll have to overlook my bad manners. I've got a lot to worry me. This damn' revolution gets on my nerves. I've had the honor to defend the Government in four, but this is the worst one. These devils are opposing us in force. They've grabbed our railroad; we're short of ammunition; and to make matters worse, I'm stuck with a consignment of machine-guns which we have at great trouble imported from Belgium, and not a man in the army knows how to operate them."

"I might be able to help out," said Shep. "I was a machine-gun captain in the last war. I haven't kept up with all the new models, but I think I could get the hang of it."

THE Colonel leaped up from the table and rushed at Shep as if about to kiss him. When he stood on his feet, they could see that he was little more than five feet tall. He seized Shep's hand and pumped it up and down in both of his own. His Midwestern English deserted him, and with it the brusqueness with which he had spoken, and he flew into eloquent and flowery Spanish.

"Welcome of God! It is a miracle that has sent you to us! You will come at once with me down to the parade-ground. Beloved friend, you will forgive that I hurry you, but the enemy are at our gates, and we have no time to lose. You shall be a captain again. Consider yourself a captain. I will speak to the General. It is arranged."

"Wait a minute, Colonel. What about my friend?"

"Has he had any experience of military affairs?"

"I went to a military academy."

The Colonel was in no mood to quibble over trifles. "You are a lieutenant, and special aide to the Captain. Come, let us go."

"Wait a minute," said Shep again. "It won't take me long to clean up, but I just plain am not going to take over a new command while I look like this."

"But of course! Of course! Friend of my soul, you must have patience with me again." The Colonel clapped his hands, and an orderly popped in, to whom he barked a series of orders, each one ending in "*Hurry.*" At the end, he paused, collecting himself, and seemed to feel that he had shown too much enthusiasm. "You will understand that I am perfectly able to operate the guns

"Let's speak English," said the Colonel. . . . "How did you get here, and what's your story?"

myself. It is only that my time is so occupied with pressing matters."

Shep manifested a courtliness of which Ted would not have thought him capable. "That goes without saying, Colonel. A commanding officer cannot be with all his troops at once."

IN record time Shep and Ted had bathed, shaved, clothed themselves in cotton uniforms which mysteriously appeared from somewhere, and which approximated a fit, although Shep's was too tight, and Ted's was too short. The Colonel apologized for not having the insignia of rank to attach at once, but promised that it would be forthcoming by the next day. By no means lacking in shrewdness, he had telephoned to Señor Alvaro while they dressed, described them, and received a tentative confirmation of their story. He brought them a courtly message from the minister, who promised himself the pleasure of seeing them that afternoon, as he understood that they would be occupied with important matters during the morning. They started for the parade-ground, but the Colonel halted, and slapped his forehead with his hand.

"I am forgetting too much! You must be sworn in."

Out of the breast pocket of his uniform he produced a small silver crucifix, which Ted and Shep held in turn while they swore to defend and uphold the Republic of Parador, so long as the present emergency lasted. The latter phrase was the product of quick thinking on Ted's part, since he had no idea of finding himself committed to years of service in the Paradorian army.

The soldiers around the machine-guns, and the young Lieutenant in charge of them, had apparently given up. Overcome by fatalistic resignation, they were sitting around in dumb and dark-eyed silence, while the Lieutenant languidly turned over some pieces with his toe. At sight of the Colonel they climbed slowly to their feet and gave some kind of salute. Corotizo announced to them that he had brought them their new Captain

and Lieutenant; Shep acknowledged the introduction with a curt nod, and bent over the guns. He knew that he had a miracle to perform if he was to retain his standing, and he prayed inwardly that designs in machine-guns had not changed too radically since 1918. He had looked at all the new ones the United States Army had brought to Panama, whenever he could persuade one of the officers to give him a chance, but he did not feel too sure of himself. Within five minutes, however, he realized that he had nothing to worry about. These guns were Benet-Merciers out of the old surplus stock. They had been tough to handle at Chateau Thierry, and they were tough still. A thrifty Belgium firm had evidently put the left-overs aside, bright and shiny in their cases, to sell to remote and easily satisfied countries.

Shep straightened up and began barking orders in a tone which brought the men to attention in spite of themselves, and Ted translated them, turning occasionally to the Colonel for the correct military term. In five minutes, activity had taken the place of despair. The Colonel turned on his heel and went away, satisfied, and his cocky little figure disappeared under the shady arcade of the barracks.

THE young Lieutenant, Moreno, was sent to muster out the rest of the company; the soldiers sprang around with an unimaginable disregard for the mounting sun, and Ted stared in admiration of a Shep whom he had never seen before. Gone was the languor, the devil-may-care expression, the lackadaisical manner. This was an officer who knew his business, and intended to get the most possible out of his equipment in the shortest possible time. The men instinctively felt it, and showed it by the respect in their glances and the alacrity with which they obeyed orders.

They sweated and maneuvered, and time after time went through the motions of bringing their guns into action and firing, until, as Shep said, they could do it without killing any of their own men. All the time they kept an ear cocked for the crackle of firing which would tell them that the battle had begun again on the outskirts of the city.

"Step around, there!" shouted Shep. "You've got maybe one hour, maybe two, nobody knows how long, to learn what takes most soldiers six months. We're going to do it, so step lively."

There was no pause for lunch—worse still, no siesta. Tunics had been discarded; wet shirts were sticking to their backs, and the hot red sun was throwing a last pink veil over the snow-covered mountains, when Shep finally stopped.

"Lieutenant Phillips, report to the Colonel that we are ready for inspection."

Ted found the Colonel on his balcony, enjoying a well-iced Planter's Punch, and delivered the message. Word was sent to the General, to Señor Alvaro, and others. In the brief wait which followed, Ted had time to remember Shira. His conscience pricked him as he realized how he had let her pass out of his mind after all the hardships she had endured and the loyalty she had shown. It did not make him feel any better to find that no one had seen her, or had the faintest idea where she had gone.

There had been no fighting during the day. Don Miguel had not attacked again, no one knew why; and the defenders had decided to wait until their machine-guns were ready. The third and fourth regiments of the national army were in Bolto; the fifth had been cut to pieces in Maladon; the sixth had deserted to Don Miguel, as most of its officers were relatives of his; the seventh was supposed to be on the road, coming to the support of the capital, but had not been heard from. The first and second were not mentioned, because they did not exist. In order to make the army sound larger, they started with the number three. The President and most members of the Government had withdrawn temporarily into a place of safety in the hills.

The inspection was an unqualified success. The guns moved quickly, looked impressive, and made a lot of noise. The men were dismissed at last, exhausted but happy, and told to get a good rest. Colonel Corotizo said that a room had been provided for Shep and Ted in the war college, where he himself was staying at the moment.

"Confidentially," said Shep, as he and Ted took a shower, "I'm not sure we could hit the broad side of a barn. That'll come, though. That'll come."

AT a gala dinner in the officers mess they drank death to the rebels, in lukewarm champagne, and shouted: *"Arriba la Republica!"*

Shep, who had not tasted alcohol for weeks, became very expansive, and rolled back to his bedroom with his arm around

Ted's shoulders, reviving with an incredible amount of detail the fame of the once young Mademoiselle from Armentières. He looked at his quarters with unqualified approval.

"A real bed, with sheets on it! Ted, this is a gentleman's war! I thought they had forgotten how to have them."

Chapter Fifteen

SHEP was confirmed in his opinion about the war next morning. He awoke to a sweet antiphony of church-bells ringing all over the city. It was hard to believe that anything unpleasant could be taking place under that peaceful music. He saw Ted struggling into his uniform.

"I'm going out to see if there is still a war on," said Ted, seeing Shep was awake.

Before Ted could carry out his intentions, however, there came a knock at the door, and Tomas and José appeared, with clean and beaming faces.

"Capitan Chip," Tomas exclaimed, grinning widely, "I am your orderly; and José, here, is for Teniente Teed!"

They shook hands all around with as great a warmth of affection as if they had known each other all their lives instead of less than a week. Shep then told Tomas to find the Colonel and bring back the orders for the day, and José was assigned to the equally important job of discovering some hot water for shaving. Tomas shook his head.

"Nobody will fight this morning. It is Sunday."

"Can we count on the enemy to see it that way?"

"But of course, Capitan. Don Miguel is a very bad man, but he is also a Christian."

"Well, just check it for me, will you? If we're really having a vacation, we can get the company together for a little more practice with the guns."

"But, Capitan, the men must go to church too. It would not be possible to find them until after twelve o'clock."

"I'm beginning to get it," said Shep. "You take my message to the Colonel, anyway."

By the time Shep and Ted had finished dressing and breakfasted on the *café-con-leche* and rolls brought by José, Tomas came back with a message from the Colonel. He would be pleased to have the Americans join him for lunch; and after lunch the company would fall in for more drill. Meanwhile he suggested that the old cathedral, dating from the early Sixteenth Century, might interest them very much if they cared to attend services there.

"Show me the way," Shep said. "I don't understand all the rules, but I'm willing to play them."

Ted announced that he felt it his first duty to find Shira, after which he would go to church if there were still time. Meanwhile he hoped that José had gone to early mass, because he would be required to help in the search. But of course, José assured him solemnly. In time of war it was necessary to keep on the right side of the church—in case of getting killed, you see! They went out together into the crooked sunlit streets.

There was no atmosphere of grimness in the beleaguered city. Here in the central portion the ground was flat, the streets spread themselves out into squares and plazas, the pink and blue houses, beflowered with geranium and heliotrope, in the shade of eucalyptus trees. There was hardly a vista which did not include a church, built with a low square tower to withstand the frequent earthquakes; and from every part of the city could be seen the snowy mountains, and a feather of smoke curling in constant warning from the peak of the active volcano.

MOST of the population were in the streets, moving with Sabbath sedateness. Women passed, dressed in decent black, the heads of the older ones bowed under black *mantas*, the younger with the more coquettish lace mantillas. They tripped over the uneven pavings on high French heels, and the more important of them were followed by little Indian maids carrying their prayer-stools.

One procession interested Ted very much. The Colonel was taking his family to church. He walked at the head of them, resplendent in his blue uniform with the gold epaulettes, and a plump and placid-looking lady leaned on his arm. Behind them came an extremely pretty slender girl of about sixteen, eyes modestly on the prayerbook she carried, face shaded by her mantilla, and with her a boy somewhat younger in the uniform of a cadet. Two little girls of twelve or thirteen followed, old enough to wear mantillas, but not yet graduated to high heels, and then a tall stark-looking woman, apparently a nurse or a governess, with two small boys strutting ahead of her, and the youngest clinging to her

hand. A rabble of little Indian servants with prayer-stools brought up the rear.

Ted saluted, and stepped off the narrow sidewalk to let them pass. The Colonel returned the salute, but did not stop for introductions.

The city was cut in three by two deep gulches, at the bottom of which little streams trickled in the rainy weather, but which were quite dry most of the time. Each gulch had only one bridge. The ancient monastery of Saint Augustine commanded the approach to the bridge over the second arroyo. It had been seized from the monks by a liberal government some twenty years before, and never returned to them, since the order had built for themselves newer quarters in the mountains. A huge Seventeenth Century building of gray stone, constructed in the heaviest and gloomiest Spanish tradition, its narrow slits of windows were like the loopholes in a feudal fortress. The Indians still had fight in them when it was built, and it was intended as much for defense as for habitation. The royal arms of Spain were cut into the stone above its heavy oaken door, and the great stone cross rested upon them. The arroyo was like a moat along one side.

"I'd hate to try to pass this and get into town," said Ted.

José grinned. "They will find out that it can't be done."

"Maybe they won't try it."

José shook his head. "Oh, no. Would the Teniente believe it, the men in Don Miguel's army get paid every week—the men, even! Not just the officers. I know, because I have cousins in it, and they told their mother, and she told me."

"But that is only for now; when he gets in, they will be worse off than before."

"Yes, Señor Teniente, but who is going to look that far ahead?"

Ted started across the bridge. "The Teniente will not go here?" objected José. "There was fighting yesterday, and it is a poor quarter of town."

"All the more reason to see what it is like. We may be fighting here ourselves tomorrow."

José shrugged, and followed. Much as he had grown to admire the Teniente, everyone knew that gringos were crazy. This was a sample, going to meet trouble before necessary, when one had only to wait, and trouble would seek one out!

Lively trouble indeed follows in the forthcoming March installment of this novel of South America.

Hero Hater

The able author of "The Fourth Officer" and "Story Coming Up" gives us another lively story of 1940 seafaring men.

By

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

YOUNG Captain Carlson's hook-up with Mike Armour had begun in disaster and then petered down into acute and continuing misery. Captain Carlson had taken seriously the duty of remaining on the bridge until the last man had left his sinking ship.

It wasn't much of a sea disaster, anyhow, just the freighter *Alice Monroe* rammed and sunk in routine style by a passenger-ship making too many knots in a fog off Ushant, some weeks before the war started. But Carlson, a conscientious young commander, had regarded the collision with gravity.

"I know my duty, Mister," he had said to his mate. "You get that boat to hell away from here."

"You're crazy as a bedbug," the mate retorted. But being a married man and knowing the Captain's gun was tucked in his hip pocket for emergencies, he had lowered away.

In consequence of Captain Carlson's strong sense of propriety, it was a long four hours later when he was picked up out of a choppy sea off a raft composed of hatch-covers, gratings and other flotsam. The shipmaster was unconscious, and had a knob the size of his nose on the top of his head.

With an angry snarl the giant grabbed Carlson.

His enormous rescuer, Mike Armour, A.B., carried Carlson aboard the rescue ship draped over a buttress-like shoulder. Without much coaxing, Mike had described how he had climbed to the bridge and found Captain Carlson lying unconscious with a cargo-block from aloft beside his swelling head. As the *Alice* settled with ominous rapidity, Mike had jumped overboard with him and held him up till the sinking of the freighter floated off some stuff to hang onto.

Also aboard the wreckage was John Bullivant, a taciturn, dried-up, middle-aged seaman who admitted under prodding that in trying to save his library of sea books, he had scrambled about too long in the lightless forecastle.

All this, of course, was fairly ordinary—just plain-sailing sea grief. The misery really started when Captain Carlson came hopefully aboard his new command, the *Helen Monroe*. After him, grinning, swaggered tremendous Mike Armour. Bullivant, the forecastle reader, who had made a third on the raft, followed, but was eclipsed by the towering Armour.

"I promised this man a job as boatswain, Mr. Northrop," young Captain Carlson announced to the long and grizzled mate, indicating Mike.

"Boatswain, sir?" Mr. Northrop was surprised. "We don't carry that rating."

Captain Carlson frowned. "We do now," he said.

Mike Armour looked down at the mate and the *Helen* with a belittling eye, and spat upon her iron deck behind the master's back. During this brief contre-

temps Bullivant unobtrusively lugged his dunnage, consisting mostly of books, into the forecastle and stayed there.

Young Captain Carlson bore on his arm a tightly rolled silk umbrella. He had read somewhere that masters in the merchant service carried such things; and being above all a man who respected his obligations, he had carried this one ever since they had given him a ship.

He was uncomfortably aware that his new mate snorted in private at that umbrella. Captain Carlson liked to get on with his mates. But the mate's low opinion of the ceremonial umbrella-carrying was nothing compared to Captain Carlson's drop in his esteem at Barcelona, after the embargo kept the ship away from the northern ports—but not away from trouble....

Mr. Northrop was engaged in dressing down Mike Armour for coming aboard drunk and playfully kicking Bullivant almost onto the anchor windlass while it was heaving in. The mate was angry, and he barbed his words. Of a sudden Mike Armour picked him up and sat him down hard on the drum of the windlass, bellowing his intention of grinding Northrop down to proper size. It needed all the mate's outraged vigor and the strength of Bullivant to free him from Armour's grip.

"That man's got to go as soon as we hit Brooklyn, sir!" Northrop burst out to the master. "I wouldn't sign him on again for—"

Captain Carlson, who had got as ruddy as underdone beef, cleared his throat. He had a feeling it was going to be hard to get Northrop to see his point of view.

"It's difficult for me to give a man his discharge for a minor infraction of discipline, after he's saved my life," Captain Carlson explained.

"Minor—" Mr. Northrop was voiceless only for an instant. Then he opened up. "Well, sir, he hasn't saved *my* life, and—"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Northrop," the master interrupted. "I like to do the right thing—the decent thing that people expect. It would be rank ingratitude." He shook his head. "I'll speak to Armour about this myself."

MR. NORTHROP swallowed hard, then emitted a resounding snort. He packed that snort with contempt, derision and insubordination. Reluctantly Carlson refrained from blaming him. He, the Old Man, was doing the mate dirt. But Mike Armour had saved his life; he couldn't throw him on the beach.

Mr. Northrop limped away muttering, "Rank ingratitude!" He stalked past Bullivant, who was leaning against the well-deck ladder with a pained expression on his face. He was recovering slowly from Mike Armour's kick.

The mate paused. Bullivant had taken a good bit of punishment in his efforts to release the mate from Mike Armour's inebriate clutch.

CAPTAIN CARLSON looked down on the two. Somehow he didn't often notice Bullivant around.

"It was luck you were standing by when the boatswain assaulted me, my man," Mr. Northrop said approvingly.

Bullivant polished the bowl of his pipe in the palm of his hand. He didn't lift his head.

"I often have bad luck, sir."

"Bad luck!" snapped the startled mate. "What d'you mean? Bad luck!"

Bullivant raised brown eyes momentarily in mild surprise. "I got a beating out of it, sir. It was bad luck, like you said. If I hadn't been there, I wouldn't have got a beating."

"Huh!" Mr. Northrop glowered at him, then walked on....

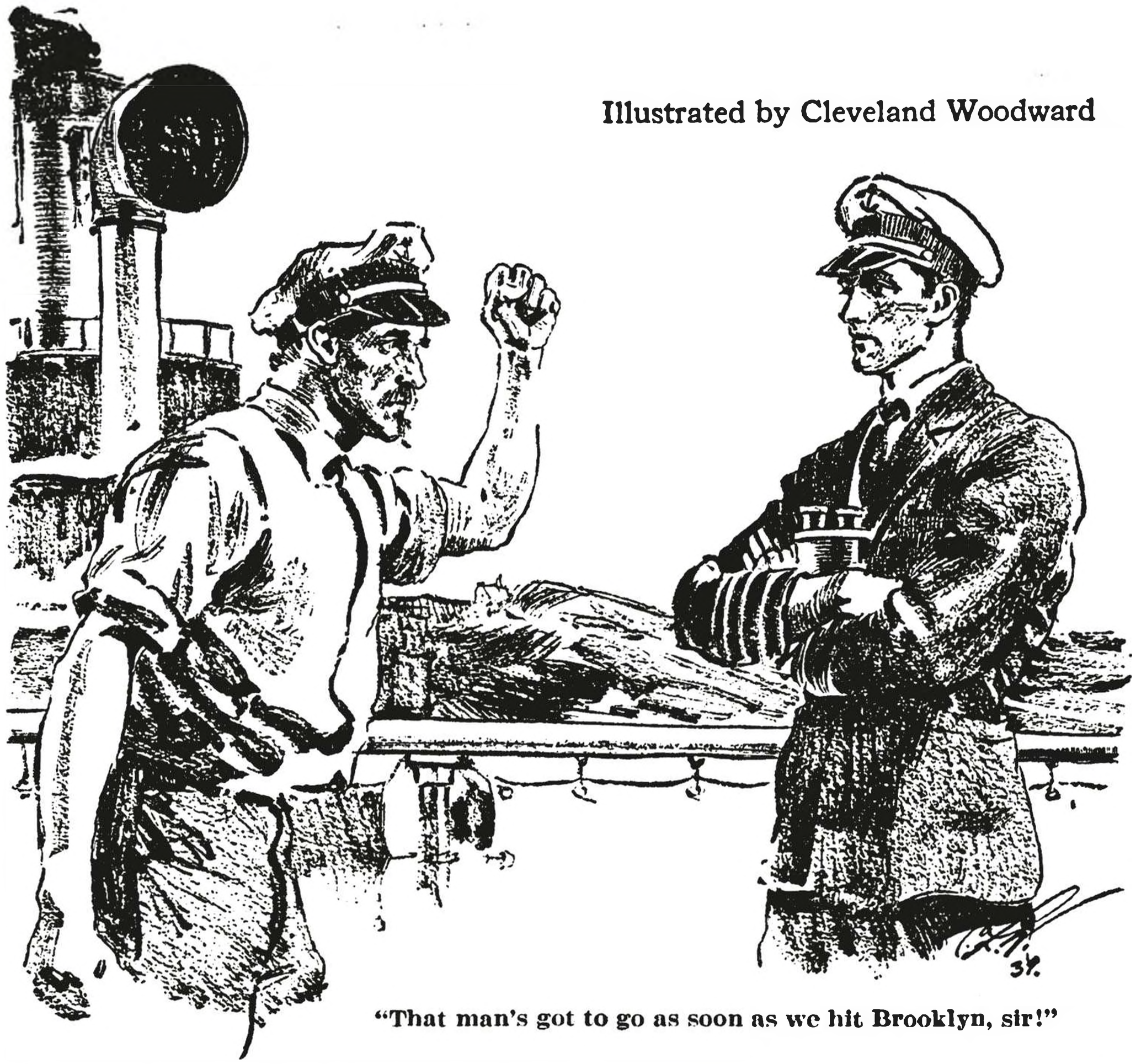
The *Helen*, with a mixed cargo in her holds, churned out to sea with Mike Armour standing over the men, instead of giving them a lead at the work as was Mr. Northrop's conception of a boatswain's job. Mike, as Captain Carlson observed unhappily, seemed to be above scrubbing with souji-mouji, wielding a paint-brush or even presiding over a hose; but his columnar form loomed imposingly or bellicosely on deck whenever an officer turned his eyes down from the bridge. On the other hand, Bullivant faded out of the regard of all men. In his watches below, he read in his bunk. But when Mr. Northrop checked up on the middle-aged, middle-sized seaman, he was always silently at work. So, like the rest of the crew, Captain Carlson accepted the man's habitual invisibility as a character trait not injurious to the ship, and wished in silence that Mike would contract a touch of it.

Only once did the mate mention Bullivant to Captain Carlson. The shipmaster nodded.

"A good man, Bullivant," he said. "Still aboard, is he? I like that fellow."

The mate exhibited surprise. "D'you like him as much as you do Armour?"

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward



"That man's got to go as soon as we hit Brooklyn, sir!"

"I never said I liked Armour, Mister," Captain Carlson retorted stiffly. "I said he'd saved my life."

Before the mate had time to probe further, the master firmly departed to his office. Like Armour! You might as well like an engine that had hopped off its holding-down bolts.

THOUGH the Mediterranean was kind, the Bay of Biscay was crusty. A stiff southwester rolling up the narrowing sleeve of the sea gave the *Helen* a shaking that set her to squeaking and jingling like a music-box. The *Helen* took it stolidly enough; only Carlson, confronted with a slow start on the long Atlantic passage, and the chief engineer, with fuel-consumption rising hour after hour, were disposed to take it otherwise. Hard-working Carlson knew that with one ship of that line sunken under him, the office openly expected him to do wonders with his second command, out of gratitude for the chance. He did what he could.

And then, in a moderate gale shortly after dawn, the *Helen* fell in with a French fishing-smack which had lost her mainmast and was rolling deck-under in the sea. Her crew was clustered by the still-standing mizzen, with lines around them. She didn't look to Mr. Northrop as if she would last long. He frowned at her through his binoculars, and called the Old Man.

By the time Captain Carlson hit the bridge, Mike Armour was standing impatiently by the starboard lifeboat. He had discarded boots and oilskins, and awaited the command to cast off the gripes and swing her out.

"She's in a bad way," Captain Carlson said with glum conviction. He looked at Mike Armour, champing to go, and wondered if he were really doing the Frenchmen a good turn in letting loose this rescuer on them.

Not too cheerily, Mr. Northrop called for volunteers. It was the mate's job to handle the steering-oar, and he stood ready to do so. But not too softly under his breath he wished these Frenchmen far, far away. It is quite a trick to get a boat away from a rolling, high-sided tramp. Captain Carlson knew that. He himself had done it, as a mate.

"Come on, boys," roared Mike Armour, waving his long arms. "Who's goin' to swing an oar with me?"

"If he does swing one, it'll be the first bit of honest work he's done in this wagon," said Mr. Northrop.

The men were shuffling forward.

"Come on, Bullivant, how about you?" demanded Mike Armour.

Surprisingly, Bullivant shook his head. "Not me," he said firmly. "I've still got a lame back from that twist that you gave me at Barcelona."

He jerked a hand to leeward. "Besides, here's a Cornishman that'll take 'em off before we get a boat across to 'em."

Everybody followed the jerk of his arm. Coming up through the grayness was a black-hulled fishing-smack, about seventy feet on deck, one of the pilchard fleet by the look of her. Compared to Carlson's towering freighter, she was like a lifeboat herself. Under the drive of her motor she sidled over the cresting seas with an air of business-as-usual. Though her sides were only a scant few feet in height, she rarely took water on her deck. She had been built for those seas, and the seas seemed to know it.

"Give 'em oil!" trumpeted Captain Carlson in great relief. "Get those storm-tanks flowing, Mr. Northrop! Give 'em a slick!"

He coughed. "And stand by that lifeboat," he said as an afterthought.

Mike Armour raised an arm high and cast his cigarette violently to the deck. Then he leaned sourly against the davit with his hands sunk in his pockets and his eyes sunk in his head. The other men swept into action.

BEFORE the big steamer's storm-oil had spread its restraining film around the sodden Frenchboat, the little Cornish craft was close alongside. Her men dropped nets overside, and slung lines down onto the afterdeck of the dismasted boat. The Frenchmen, with their lines around them, jumped overboard and were hauled up onto the fishing-boat's deck in jig time.

Down on the well-deck of the *Helen*, Bullivant was quietly searching his pockets for enough tobacco to fill his pipe. Carlson inhaled air. It was all over. Mr. Northrop rang up the engines.

Captain Carlson chuckled as he pointed out the placid Bullivant to the mate. Carlson's relief was giving him a talking jag.

"That's the kind of a seaman I tie to, Mister," he said. "He's no hero, he isn't. Heroes are twelve for a nickel at sea. With me, anyhow. Some men are heroes in a jam, but can't stand up to the monotony of doing their work day after day like Bullivant does. I'm proud of that man, Mister. He doesn't want to get drowned, and he says so. He does his work, and he don't crab about it."

Mr. Northrop was too bewildered to speak, at this outburst of praise.

The young Old Man waved a hand toward Mike Armour. "Look at that toe-dancing prima donna now. Gets drunk ashore; won't work aboard."

"But—but—if you feel that way, why don't you kick Armour to blazes off the ship?" Northrop demanded.

Captain Carlson frowned. A leaden weight dropped on him again. "The man saved my life as I lay unconscious on the bridge," he said. "It's a matter of *noblesse oblige*."

"Come again, sir," requested the mystified mate.

"*Noblesse oblige*," Carlson repeated. He was somewhat embarrassed. He didn't like to explain his interior to this hard-shell mate.

"That's spot news to me, sir," insisted the mate. "*Nobless*—"

"Nobility ob—my position as master, Mr. Northrop, obliges me to act like—with the highest motives."

"Well, it may be *noblesse oblige* to you, but it's applesauce to me," the first officer declared stubbornly. "You're the skipper. If you want to kick a boatswain onto the beach, you've got the gold lace to do it."

Captain Carlson was scowling over the bridge rail at the disgruntled Mike Armour. Suppressed emotions flooded up. He spoke through his teeth. "If I could just save that swab's life for him once, Northrop, I wouldn't kick him onto the beach. I'd feel free to break his neck with my bare hands."

He showed the mate his hands, knotted with longing.

"Of course you would, sir," the mate said soothingly. He retreated to the other end of the bridge, too alarmed to snort.

Carlson knew he was asking himself whether he was chief officer of a ship or of a nut-foundry. Nevertheless he followed Northrop to the port wing. He was still seething. "Armour's ruined my discipline—made me a laughingstock on my own ship," he declared. He stopped himself. He shook his head violently and came out of it. "Uh—Mr. Northrop: I have a book on the St. Hilaire method of navigation which I will be obliged if

you will hand to Bullivant with my compliments. I like Bullivant."

To himself he added: "He doesn't go round rescuing poor devils."

"Aye, sir!" cried Mr. Northrop. Carlson guessed that the gift, too, seemed screwy to the literal mate. But at least it wasn't violent. From the bridge Carlson witnessed Bullivant's reception of the book. The startled seaman dropped the book, turned purple in the back of the neck as he bent and fumbled to pick it up. Then he shuffled away with an oversize, embarrassed grin on his face.

THE westerlies were rampant on the Atlantic, and the voyage to Brooklyn was no picnic. The *Helen* took the graybacks on the bow and thrust through, over or under them, according to her mood at the moment. Captain Carlson, staggering through watch after watch on Mount Misery, meditated at length on some method of restoring peace and quiet to his ship. Bullivant had submerged almost altogether. But Mike Armour's high visibility was rasping the nerves of every other soul aboard her. At times Captain Carlson regretted having been saved. It was a raw deal for the *Helen*. Still, the fact remained: Mike had saved his life. Decency, the right thing, demanded that he be allowed to hold his job. Wistfully young Captain Carlson wished he could somehow save Armour's life. But how? There he stuck like a pig in a hawsehole. He could do the right thing, the decent thing people expected, could Carlson; but the mind of a scenario-writer had been denied him.

Mike Armour was aboard when they dropped their pilot off Ambrose for the next voyage. Aboard and roaring drunk, strongly liquored against monotony. He was aboard and roaring drunk, too, at their farthest east, an Italian port this time.

But he was not aboard when the *Helen* lay alongside a greasy white jetty with a cargo of china clay in her holds, her mooring-lines singled up, and a white breath of steam curling above her rusty funnel.

Captain Carlson would not give the word to cast off.

Mr. Northrop had paid his usual visit to the forecastle and had uncovered three bottles of alleged whisky in Mike Armour's mattress. He had cracked them against the *Helen's* plates, and Carlson hoped Mike hadn't another hiding-place.

Now, on the river side of the bridge, the mate snorted as was his custom, and stared moodily at the tide rushing out into the Channel. The pilot rested on his elbows on the rail in comfortable calm. Her hatches were on over the mucky cargo. Twice Mr. Northrop had taken his stand on the forecastle head and looked meaningly up at the bridge; but Captain Carlson, struggling in a mire of *noblesse oblige*, would not give the word to cast off.

The eyes of young Carlson were glued on the corner of the public house just visible beyond the railroad sidings where pint-size freight cars stood laden with yet more china clay.

At last Captain Carlson took a turn on the bridge, which brought him over to the mate.

"If those two don't show within five minutes, Mr. Northrop, we get under way," he declared. "It isn't doing the right thing by the owners to wait for a couple of hands."

"I'll say," the mate stated grimly.

Captain Carlson cast another look ashore, and his chunky figure stiffened to rigid attention. He was looking at a lean seaman who had rounded the corner of the public house and was hurrying over the rails toward the ship. It was Bullivant. He was alone.

Breathing hard, young Carlson looked past the hurrying sailor toward the corner of the red-brick building. His gaze was anxious yet hopeful.

"There's Bullivant," he said. "I guess he hasn't been able to round up Armour. We can't wait for Mike. It wouldn't be right to delay the ship, would it, Mr. Northrop?"

The question was voiced in a plain gush of relief. Mr. Northrop disdained to answer it, save by popping an eye.

"It's too bad about Mike," Captain Carlson said with most unconvincing sorrow.

"It's too bad we ever had such a trouble-making swab in the ship," the mate retorted savagely.

Captain Carlson shook his head in not too vigorous reproof.

"Armour was always a good man, though he's got a bit out of hand lately. Of course, I can't ever forget how he saved my life when that blasted liner cut down the *Alice*."

At such close quarters Mr. Northrop did not risk a snort, but he did sigh wearily and drape himself in bored resignation on the rail. The Captain, still watching the approaching Bullivant, talked on:

"It was me that did most o' the swimming for two, Cap'n!" cried Mike Armour in alarm.

"I have a proper feeling for custom and the opinion of my profession in such matters as standing by my ship, Mister. Something heavy from aloft—she had been been hit hard—knocked me out cold; and the next thing I knew— Have I told you this before? Anyhow, Armour saved my life, and probably Bullivant's as well."

This time Mr. Northrop risked a snort. "And he's been plaguing the same life out of you ever since!" he said in a rush of emotion.

"I like to do the right thing, Mr. Northrop," the shipmaster said stiffly. "I *have* done the right thing!" he added.

He nodded emphatically, put away his watch and leaped across the bridge to address Bullivant as the sailor reached the saloon deck:

"Did you find Armour?"

John Bullivant touched a hand gingerly to a leathery but reddening jaw. "Yes sir, but he said—he said he'd come aboard in his own good time."

"What did you do about that, Bullivant?" Captain Carlson demanded.

"As soon as I could break away from him, I ran, sir," the middle-aged seaman replied.

Captain Carlson turned so abruptly that he almost butted the lanky mate. "There's something about Bullivant that I like, even if he is a creeping coward," the Old Man muttered emotionally. "A good man!"

He looked quickly, even fearfully, at the shore once more, and then became decisive.

"Stand by, Mr. Northrop."

"Stand by, sir."

Mr. Northrop blew his whistle and repeated the command in a bellow. He hurried down the ladder, and at a gallop charged forward to the forecastle head. The pilot rubbed his nose vigorously and straightened up. They settled down to the job of getting the *Helen* away without removing the stern of a Jap loading at the jetty below them in the rushing tideway.

IT took some time in spite of the fact that Captain Carlson was now in a prancing hurry to get clear of the shore. He had, he felt, right on his side. Now he wanted speed.

They worked her out into the stream. Northrop stood by the anchor and stared with increasing good humor down the river as they rounded the bend and steamed between high rounded green hills toward the abrupt and narrow gash in the granite coast that led to the channel. On the

bridge Captain Carlson paced with a jaunty step. The festive air extended also to the seaman on the well deck.

The pilot-boat came edging alongside as they passed between the headlands into deep water. Captain Carlson rang down the engines and shook hands with the pilot. Bullivant, below on the well-deck, had the Jacob's ladder over the side for the departing pilot and was standing by.

THE pilot was halfway down the ladder when a stubby gray fishing-boat with a heavy-duty motor came thudding up astern.

Captain Carlson's eyes narrowed suddenly. There was a man on the foredeck of this squat craft, a big man with arms that looked as thick as cargo-booms upstretched above a bare, tousled head. It was Mike Armour.

Captain Carlson stopped breathing.

Armour leaped a gap of six feet to the afterdeck of the pilot's motorboat, ran forward on the craft, sent the pilot twirling out of the way with a thrust of his shoulder and grabbed at the rungs of the rope ladder. Next instant he was bounding up onto the iron deck of the *Helen*. His movements had the blithe certainty imparted by alcohol.

Jovially he planted a hamlike hand on Bullivant's chest. Bullivant went flying back against the hatch, and fell with loosened muscles. He rolled over once and stood up again. Without any show of resentment, he walked away.

Armour hauled up the rope ladder with a rush, and waved a hand at the bridge.

"Report for duty, Cap'n," he bawled, and a grin split his flaming red face.

Captain Carlson's features were thin and taut, but he said nothing. He was paralyzed. Mr. Northrop cursed. He marshaled his deck force and put the men to work snugging down the cargo gear against the choppy seas kicking up under the urge of a stiff southerly breeze.

For once Armour worked mightily, handling wires with happy ease, as if they were silken threads. But his enthusiasm waned rapidly. Of a sudden he wiped his mouth and plunged into the forecastle.

Mr. Northrop tightened his lips and headed for the bridge ladder. Captain Carlson leaned far forward over the dodger in the intensity with which he watched the steel door through which Armour had left the deck.

A moment later the door swung with a crash. Armour piled out again, roaring incoherently. He stopped on the steel deck with thick legs outstretched, arms hooked and fists swinging.

"Who stole my bottles?" he blared. "Come on, you swipes! Who's been at my bunk?"

The gang had scattered and for the most part disappeared. Bullivant had walked down the port alleyway. Armour's infuriated eyes swept a bare well-deck and then lifted belligerently toward the bridge.

"This is going to be tougher than usual, sir," Mr. Northrop said between his teeth. "Any orders?"

Captain Carlson cleared his throat noisily. Before he could pick out some words, Armour was bellowing again. He addressed the captain directly:

"All ri'! Somebody's robbed me. What you goin' to do about that, Skipper? Here I go savin' your life, and you let me be robbed."

Captain Carlson darted a look at the grim and unsympathetic countenance of Mr. Northrop. It was plain the mate wished he had gone to the bottom and stayed there. Carlson himself spoke to the infuriated giant on the well-deck.

"You know the rules, my man. Your liquor has gone overside. Stand by to—"

"Overside!" Armour roared like a gale, and his arms waved like tottering masts. "That's gratitude, that is! Destroy a man's medicine after he's saved your shivering skin!"

Captain Carlson's frown was apprehensive as well as angry. He had a delicate balancing job to do—with the right thing for Mike on one side, and the right thing for his ship on the other.

"Get some men together and put irons on him till he quiets down, Mr. Northrop," he said in a low voice.

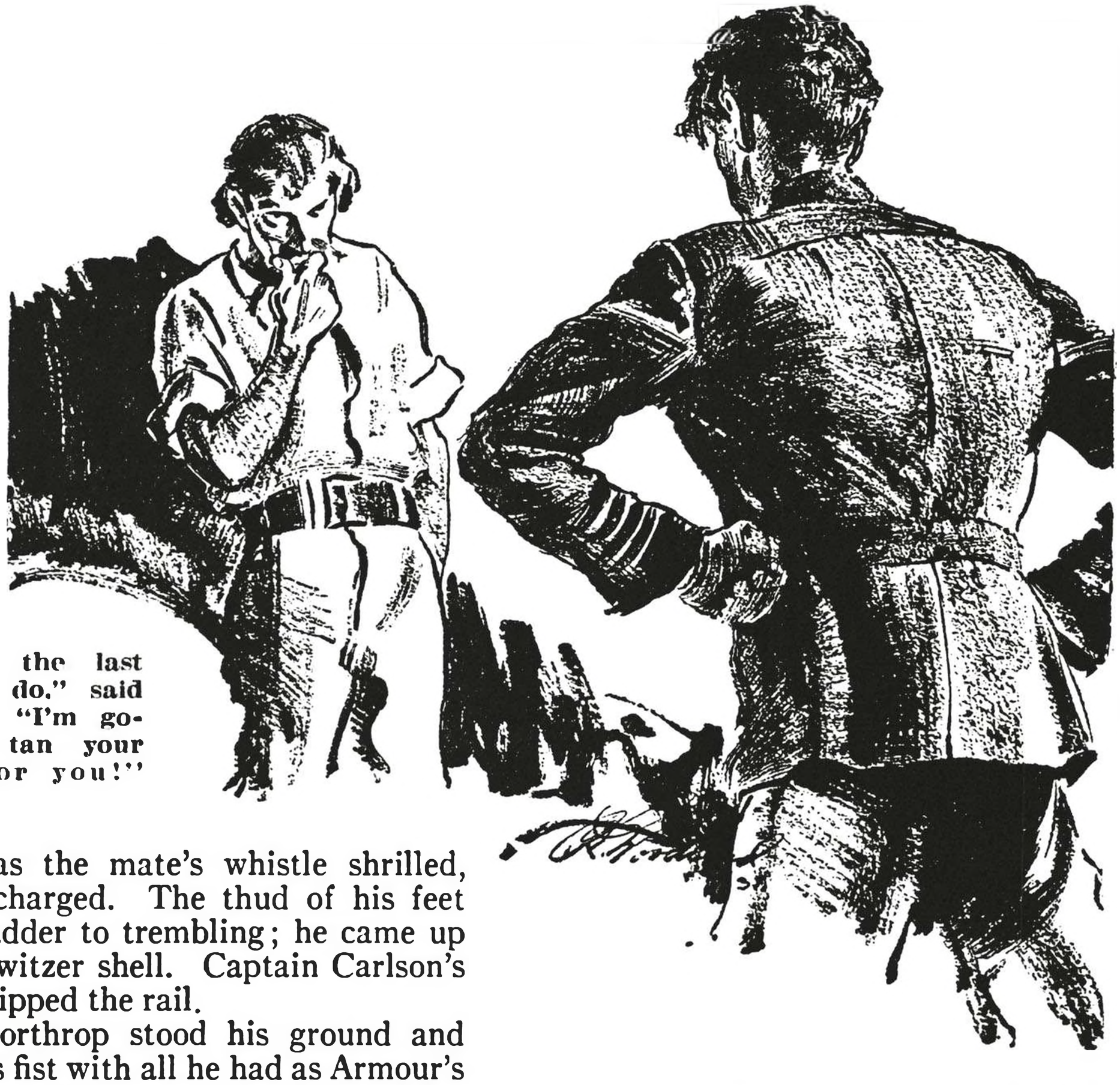
"Iron him, sir," Mr. Northrop repeated in bitter obedience. Gingerly he descended the ladder.

ARMOUR was charging across the well-deck, but suddenly he stopped with thick jaw sagging in thought.

"Tell you what!" he proposed with heavy gravity. "Give me my bottles, or back we head for more!" His voice rose again: "One or the other! Bottles or back!"

His roving eyes encountered the unhappy Mr. Northrop on the lower bridge, with his whistle poised to summon the watch.

"So!" he roared. "That's it! Mob me, hey? I'll fix you!"



"If it's the last thing I do," said Carlson, "I'm going to tan your hide for you!"

Even as the mate's whistle shrilled, Armour charged. The thud of his feet set the ladder to trembling; he came up like a howitzer shell. Captain Carlson's fingers gripped the rail.

Mr. Northrop stood his ground and swung his fist with all he had as Armour's jaw came within range. But his knuckles skidded along that iron jaw. Next instant Armour was level with him, and Armour's fist sent him crashing back to the house.

As Northrop's head cracked against it, Carlson felt the world twirl almost as if he had taken that blow himself. Northrop sagged to a revolving deck. The taciturn Bullivant, responding to the mate's whistle, took one look and vanished. Armour stormed past the fallen mate up the ladder to the bridge.

The quartermaster at the wheel was frozen. Carlson stood blocking the door. His hands were clenched, but he kept them down. His level, accusing eyes, the eyes of a shipmaster on his bridge, were the weapons with which he reckoned on taming Mike Armour. It wasn't the right thing for a sea captain to use his hands on a mutineer.

"Get off this bridge!" he commanded.

AT the last moment he realized that to the rushing giant, he simply wasn't there. He braced himself desperately; but Armour, lunging into him, knocked him backward almost to the binnacle. He was up on his knees at once. He wrapped his arms around Armour's legs and heaved mightily.

For an instant the giant tottered; then with an angry snarl he kicked free and grabbed Carlson. Carlson was lifted off the wheelhouse floor. His clutch at the giant's leathery throat failed by an inch. Armour heaved him over his shoulder, turned, ran to the bridge ladder. He slung the Captain onto the steeply inclined treads.

Battered, clawing for a grip, Carlson thudded on down to the lower bridge. He landed in a huddle, groaned, cursed and tried flounderingly to get up. His nose was a bleeding wreck from the metal edge of a ladder tread.

"Thrown off my own bridge!" he raged. "S-Satan!"

A man nimbly descended the port bridge ladder, sliding most of the way. It was the quartermaster who had been at the wheel. A pair of binoculars whizzed past his head and splintered on the steel plates of the well deck. The man ducked, ridiculously late, and sprinted out of sight around the corner of the house.

Carlson, struggling to get on his feet, stopped moving. His eyes had been caught and fixed by a terrible sight beyond the bow. He shook his groggy head. A stretch of the coast, which the ship had been skirting, was slowly, remorse-

lessly swinging into view—a huge, towering headland.

Well enough did Carlson know that chunk of cliff. It was Dead Man Point. It should be on the starboard beam, not dead ahead. Then he remembered. The helmsman! There was nobody at the wheel. He could hear Mike Armour stamping across the bridge over his head.

"Bottles or back!" Armour stormed. "I'll take her back myself!"

FOR a single instant Carlson met the stricken mate's eyes. Within sixty seconds he and Northrop could get their guns; the junior mates and the watch would be at his back; the engines would be stopped and Mike Armour would be shot or overpowered.

But it wasn't the man that Carlson feared; it was the situation. He hadn't those sixty seconds. The headland was desperately close. The ship would be crumpling on the rocks below the Dead Man within less than a minute.

Carlson was on his feet now. "No time for a gun!" he croaked. "You—up the other ladder. Get to the wheel somehow! I'll— Get going!"

Mr. Northrop crossed to the port ladder, peered up, saw no one at the top, and changed his furious rush to a soundless tiptoeing.

"Armour!" the Captain was hailing from the foot of the starboard ladder. "Mike! She's heading for the rocks! Get to the wheel, man!"

"Wheel be— Want me off the bridge, hey?" Armour raged. "I'm in command—I am! I'll—"

To hold Mike Armour's attention, Carlson started pounding up the ladder. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of Bullivant. The seaman was shinning up outside the cab on the port side of the bridge, swinging over the seething water alongside. He was climbing to the deserted flying bridge above the vantage-point taken over by Mike Armour.

Bullivant would be safe up there, Carlson told himself fleetingly as he stamped slowly on up the ladder toward Armour's reaching arms. It was an excellent hide-out for one who was not a hero.

"Here I come, Mike!" Carlson called.

On the other ladder Northrop was cautiously raising his head above the level of the navigating bridge. Mike Armour, legs aspraddle at the top of the starboard ladder, waved the Captain to come on. "You're goin' to swim back, Skipper!" he roared.

Fleetingly Carlson made out Northrop on hands and knees creeping toward the port wheelhouse door. The engine-room telegraph was too close to Armour. Northrop must get to the wheel. There were solid chunks of matter in the wheelhouse that would serve for weapons. The mate crawled in toward the deserted helm. His fingers on the spokes for an instant or two would wipe out that crumpling menace so close to the ship.

Carlson paused as Armour lunged at him. Northrop, he saw, got his hands on the wheel. Carlson had a frightening vision of the cliff looming high behind his back. And at that moment Armour lifted his head from Carlson on the ladder and saw the mate at the helm. Northrop's eyes were held helplessly by Armour's glaring regard. Doggedly Carlson lunged up the last rungs. He would be too late.

Above the giant seaman, like an agile spider leaping down his web onto a fat fly, Bullivant suddenly swung into sight. He had a marlinspike in his free hand. He thumped it on the giant's skull just as Mike lunged toward the wheelhouse.

Mike Armour's sudden movement spoiled Bullivant's aim. But the steel spike did some service on the side of Armour's head. It knocked him out of his stride. He grabbed the rail.

Bullivant cast himself loose from the flying bridge. He dropped onto Armour's head and shoulders, draped himself over the man, clinging with arms and legs, octopus-style.

Instantly Captain Carlson came thundering past them. He stopped again at the wheelhouse door.

"Hard left!" he shouted.

NORTHROP rose—flung himself on the wheel. He made it spin as the world had spun for him half a minute before. The ship plowed on toward that iron cliff; and then sluggishly swung her bow to port. Degree by degree, and then point by point, she turned toward honest gray water, away from the devil's stew of froth and granite rock at the base of the point.

The minute the ship had turned to deep water, Carlson left the door. Bullivant, limp as a jellyfish and just as clinging, still rode Mike Armour's head and shoulders. Carlson jammed at his legs, straining to throw him. On the verge of toppling, Armour's arms thrashed madly.

Carlson dizzily made out the mate measuring that big target. Northrop

was dreadfully deliberate about it. He ducked in under a swinging arm as thick and hard as a shot of anchor-chain. He hit Armour in the stomach. Not in the chest, but in the stomach.

Armour doubled and went down with Carlson and Bullivant sprawling over him; Northrop too dropped down on him.

ARMOUR was still struggling. Most of his efforts were directed toward liquidating the silent Bullivant, who had been jolted loose from his commanding position. To Carlson, it was like riding an earthquake. But slowly they flattened the sprawling giant.

"Thought you could knock me out—like you did the Old Man—in the *Alice*, hey?" Armour panted. He jabbed an elbow deep into Bullivant's ribs, a last effort. "Huh! I don't pass out—so easy, you swipe! I'll—"

"What's that?" cried Captain Carlson. His knotted fist, poised above the point of Armour's jaw, wavered and opened into fingers. He touched the place where the knob on his head had been when he came to himself on the wreckage of the *Alice*. "Bullivant?" he gasped. "Bullivant knocked me out? Bullivant? What?"

Armour was pinned down, but he could still writhe—and talk.

"It was Bullivant—from the flying bridge—like he just pulled on me," he snarled viciously. "He socked you plenty—with a spike. Said you wouldn't leave in time. He raised that egg on you—he did!"

The quartermaster came padding up the ladder, apologetic in aspect, with a bucket of sea-water. The mate splashed it over Armour's head, taking his time about it, making a job of it. Though still stunned by this news, Carlson swept the quartermaster back into the wheelhouse with a petulant arm. Armour had ceased to struggle—the alcohol had been watered down too skillfully; he merely tried not to drown. They eased up on him.

"So!" said Carlson. He whirled around on the silent Bullivant, who was growing as red as a setting sun. "Armour did the carrying, but it was you who stayed to boss the job. You're the hero, hey?"

"I bore a hand," Bullivant muttered. "She was settling fast."

"It was me that did most o' the swimming for two, Cap'n!" cried Mike Armour in alarm. "He just socked you, like I said!"

The young Old Man paid no heed to him. All his attention was focused on the squirming middle-aged seaman with the abashed countenance.

"So!" said Captain Carlson explosively. "S-Satan! It was you, Bullivant; you were the hero who saved your captain's life! Well, then, you sheepfaced swab, you red, flustered, coy, disgusting object, you, stop shuffling your feet and tell me why you let this big ape walk all over me for months with his hero game?"

Bullivant writhed. His lean figure twisted. His eyes stared at his feet.

"I'm bashful, sir," he protested faintly. "I can't stand bein' a hero. They give me a medal once—on a platform." He blanched and swallowed hard. "All them eyes! Bein' looked at—an' all that. It—it was awful."

"And I thought you were a man I could trust!" said Carlson, with his voice shaking. "I'll bet a million you did have a bad back that day we sighted the sinking Frenchman. S-Satan! If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to tan your quaking hide for you!"

"You can't," said Bullivant, and for a moment he lifted his eyes to the shipmaster's face. "You can't, sir. I saved your life."

"And ship," added Mr. Northrop, with a gesture toward the cliff.

CAPTAIN CARLSON wavered on his feet. He put a hand to his dizzy head. Then, abruptly, he plunged down the bridge ladder.

"Wait!" he flung over his shoulder at them. In a moment he was back. In his hands he clutched his tightly rolled silk umbrella. He raised this symbol of the right thing, of the decent thing, of what people expected of a shipmaster, over his head, and brought it down violently over his knee. It cracked and broke. He raised the splintered wreckage and shook it in their faces.

"*Noblesse* be blasted!" he said, and hurled the broken wreckage into the sea. "You'll do your duty on this ship, my man, or you'll hit the beach. Heroes are out! Gratitude is out! What people think is out! My ship is in! D'you get it, you disrated boatswain, you? D'you hear me, you invisible book-reading possible fourth mate? Rescue me again, either of you, and you won't live to see Brooklyn."

"You hear him!" said Mr. Northrop prayerfully.

A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

MOONEY'S IN A JAM

By KERRY O'NEIL

Who wrote "Mooney Moves Around."

OUR DETECTIVE'S PRETTY ASSISTANT, A GIRL NICKNAMED MICKEY, WAS IN THE REAL JAM; FOR SHE WAS ACCUSED OF THE MURDER, AND THE EVIDENCE WAS DAMNING, AND THE CHIEF OF POLICE WAS ON THE WARPATH. DETECTIVE MOONEY, HOWEVER, KNEW HOW TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE—AND EVIDENCE.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

At sight of Jerry, Mickey stopped, startled. Then she laughed. "To think," she said, "of seeing you here!"

MOONEY'S IN A JAM

By KERRY O'NEIL

Who wrote "Mooney Moves Around" and other popular books.

MICKEY always said the music at the Algerian Moon was just dandy. Under the slow, sultry direction of Sixto Marchand, it throbbed while she stepped; it made her dream of the languorous spots of a perfect world.

"How is it going, kid?" said Jerry Mooney as he paced with her. "Nice and easy?"

"I think that fat little Sixto's an angel," said Mickey. "And handed down to us to give us some idea of how things'll be some day, if we act straight and don't get funny."

Jerry grinned at this. For all his bigness, he knew how to step; he did it lightly and with the unconscious spring of a true dancer. But then, as he said, anybody could dance with Mickey.

"Babe," he said to her as they drifted around the dim room, "it aint all Sixto. It's mostly you. What you are, Mick, is floating moonlight."

"It's a wonder," she said, "you don't think of something like that at the times you leave me sitting some place, waiting for you."

"Now, listen," he said; "when I do that, can I help it? Wouldn't I rather be where you are than listening to some of these boilerheads that get themselves in trouble and want me to get them out?"

"This is the first night in six outs that I've had a chance to get my party dress on," Mickey said. "Almost always I've got to start right from the office; because if I don't, the next I hear of you is on the phone; and you're eight miles away, and still going."

"Anything wrong, kid?" asked Jerry. "Outside of what you've been saying?"

"I wish," said Mickey, "they'd keep the door shut."

"Has somebody come in?" said Jerry. "Anybody I know?"

"Don't start looking around," she said. "But awhile ago I saw that party Engle, you know, from City Hall."

"That so?" said Jerry. "But he'll be all right. I know him."

"Listen," said Mickey; "it's you he wants, Mooney, and nobody else. When he saw you, he was coming right out on the floor, only José stopped him."

José was major-domo at the Algerian Moon; Jerry saw him standing at the far side of the room talking to a stocky man who held a derby hat in his hand. Jerry led Mickey to a table, and they sat down: in a moment José came to them.

"I am sorree," he said. "It is the police. He will spik with you."

The stocky man was only a few steps behind José; he nodded to Jerry and Mickey and also sat down at the table.

"A little business," he said.

"I hope," said Jerry, "Pash aint worrying about me again."

"He'd like a few words with you," said the man.

"Here I am, having a nice time," Jerry said. "With a friend. And now this party's asking for a few words. Aint he had enough words with me? I can shut my eyes and think back, and there don't seem to be a time since I started Proceedings, that I aint been some place with Pash, and doing what you'd call bandying words."

"Anyhow," said Engle, fingering the derby hat, "there he sits over at Headquarters, behind his desk, and waiting for you. So, what say if we start?"

Jerry looked at Mickey.

"Do you see how it is?" he said to her. "This is the way they square off at me. Do you think you'd like to wait? Or will I get José to call a cab for you?"

"I'll wait," said Mickey. "If it's not too long."

CAPTAIN PASH, at Police Headquarters, was sitting behind his big shabby desk when Jerry came in with Engle. His attitude was the usual round-shouldered one, and his big beak was thrust out like that of a hawk.

"Hiyah, Captain," said Jerry good-humoredly. "Here I am, towed in once more."

"So I see," said Pash sourly. "I knew Engle'd pick you up somewhere."

"Don't he always?" said Jerry. "The boy's quite a cop. It gives me a thrill to see him at work."

Pash tapped the desk with a bony finger.

"What I want tonight," he said, "is not so many bright remarks, and more listening. Get that fixed in your mind." He continued to prod the desk-top with the finger. "Every now and then I get thinking about you, and I'm never satisfied. Now and then you work out a good thing, but more often you're in something that makes everybody here at Headquarters think they're being made saps of. And they don't like to feel that way; especially I don't. And I want to say to you, now, that every time you act that way, I get the idea of turning the heat on. And right now I feel more like it than ever."

"What you do is let things take hold of you," said Jerry. "And you let them keep hold. What I do when I get jumpy about a thing is to either do it or get it out of my mind."

Pash's eyes snapped venomously.

"Up to now, Mooney," he said, "we've never got anything on you. Not that I don't think there have been things, understand: but we haven't been lucky. You've got a license, I know that: a private dick, so it's legal for you to do certain things. But there are some things that aint legal for you or anybody else to do. You might get away with it in Philadelphia or Baltimore, but not here. And that's what I want to talk about."

"Listen," said Jerry, "it seems to me we've had this a couple of times before."

"Yes, I know. And I hope this'll be the last one. There are people doing stretches in the State coop that haven't done half what you've got away with. That thing you did in the Shallcross case," said Pash, "was nothing less than breaking and entering. There's ten years written down in the book for a thing like that. Yes, I know,"—as Jerry was about to speak,—"you've got an alibi. We haven't got a thing on you. But just the same, privately and inside, we know you're the jake that did it. You've been around a lot," said Pash, "and you've seen how a good many things are done. And you know the police can pretty well tell who has worked on a job by the way it's done. And that leads us right up to your door, for the things we notice about your jobs are—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Jerry: "I think I'd better let you know I'm getting a little tired of this, Pash. And beginning with right now, you've either got to accuse me and book me in the regular way, or you've got to shut up."

"All right," Pash said; "let it go that way. But I want to tell you, and it's not the first time I've done it, you're not fooling us any. We haven't been able to make good with any of the things we know about you; but just the same, you're the party that was behind the jobs. And I'm telling you if you keep it up, Mooney, we'll get you in the end."

"Anyway," said Jerry, "it's nice of you to let me know."

"Listen," said Pash, leaning across the desk, "don't give me credit for anything that's not coming to me. As far as I'm concerned,"—and the hawklike eyes were as hard as flint,—"I'd like to have the boys take you downstairs, just to see how much you can take."

"All right," said Jerry. "I know about that. You say it every time I come in. But you've never done anything yet. And in case you've forgotten, I'll repeat my regular come-back to it: Stick to police methods that can be talked about in polite society; and remember, while you've been here a long time, you can still be shaken loose."

"That," said Pash, glowering, "sounds like a threat."

"Weigh it out just as you want it," Jerry said. "I always like to see people make up their own minds." He pulled the brim of his hat down, and added: "And now, if that's all there is, I'll be leaving. Also, it's nice to have seen you, even if what you've had to say wasn't very pleasant."

"It wasn't meant to be. I just wanted you to know you'd best watch your step.

If you don't, you're going to stumble, and once we get you down, we're going to load a lot of things on you."

Jerry made no reply, and after a little more of the same, Pash said he could go. When he got back to the Algerian Room, he found Mickey at a remote table, and with her was a chatty-looking girl in a red hat.

"This," said Mickey to the girl, "is Mr. Mooney. And this,"—to Jerry—"is Ada Fuller. You've heard me mention Fully, I know."

"Awful glad," said Jerry, as he sat down.

"Her boy friend's in the bar consulting with some one, and I just happened to see her," Mickey told him.

"Very nice," said Jerry. "And now that we're all here, what say if we have a few refreshments?"

When the order had been given, Mickey asked: "What happened?"

"Pash has only one thing to talk about with me," Jerry said. "He tells me what he's going to do sometime if I don't keep listening when he snaps his fingers. Every time something happens that Headquarters can't handle, he figures I've had something to do with it, and sends for me."

"He must be a terrible old prune," said Mickey. "If it was me, I'd get awful disgusted with it."

"That wouldn't do any good," Jerry said. "He's tough as a goat. Everything but police routine bounces right off him. And he's always had it in for me. When I was on the regular cops, he kept me standing all the time."

"IT must be terribly thrilling," said Miss Fuller, "to be like you are, Mr. Mooney; I've often heard Mickey speak of you. And to have a job in the office of a detective, like her, must be absolutely wonderful!"

"It's no real place for a lady," said Jerry. "Sometimes the boys, when things aint going right, come prancing in and start to carry on. Usually in those kind of spaces, I send Mick out to see if it's raining or not; but often they outsmart me by starting their stuff as they come down the hall. At times like that I'm only able to reach for the brass knuckles, and get up from the desk. Some cases I get wouldn't look too well in the books, but something's always got to be done about them."

"Sometimes," said Miss Fuller, "when I think how the law is, I could just hate it. Take for example that thing that happened the other day to that little Ethel Codrey," she said to Mickey. "It's shameful."

"Who's Ethel Codrey?" asked Mickey.

"Oh, Mickey," said Miss Fuller, "you know her. She's in that little cubbyhole of a place near the Merchants' Trust Building: she has the Office Girls' Mending Shop."

"Oh, yes," said Mickey. "I know the place, Fully, but I didn't know her name. I often take things there."

"That little thing," said Miss Fuller to Jerry, "is one of the nicest, softest-spoken kids you ever saw. And she's terrible clever. When a stocking or a glove goes bad on you, and you think you've lost the pair, she'll fix it for you. And it'll look as if nothing ever had happened to it."

"I never thought she looked very strong," Mickey said.

"She's not," said Fully. "And that's not the worst of it. Her mother's been sick this long time, and they've had a terrible time getting along. The party that owns the building has a heart like a paving-block. So you know what that meant. As soon as they owed him something, he was all for tossing them out."

"Aint it a shame!" Mickey said. "People like that ought to have something done to them."

"Not only has the owner a terrible disposition, but he's got a party working for him that's worse," said Fully. "And it's this party that comes around after the rent. He not only went to their rooms and talked, but he went to the Office Girls' Mending Shop and talked a lot more. He had the poor girl almost simple. And now," said Fully, "here's the dirty part of it: The girl's mother had a picture. It must have been awful nice, because this little Ethel says her father had it, and just before he died, he told them to take care of it. He said sometime it might be worth a good bit of money.

"Well, this party—you know, the one that comes after the rent—he's one of the nosey kind: He sees the picture and asks about it. And then he brings in the landlord, and he looks at it too. And the next day the collector comes back and makes a speech and says he'll take the picture and give them a receipt for all rent up to date. About forty dollars. And he said if they didn't want to do that, he'd levy on their things and they could go live some place else. But where that would be, they didn't know."

"That picture," said Mickey, "was worth money—I can feel it was. And those dirty tramps knew it."

"It *was* worth money," said Fully. "And they *did* know it. And they got it. And then, do you know what? This man Malitoff sold it."

"Who did you say?" interrupted Mickey. She leaned across the table; she caught Fully's hand and held it tightly. "What was his name?"

"Malitoff," said Miss Fuller, surprised. "It tells about him in the newspapers, and I think he's an awful louse. Besides owning apartments that aint fit to live in, he has a diamond business. I cut the piece about him out of the paper." She fumbled in her handbag. "Here it is," she said as she handed the clipping to Jerry. "That tells all about it."

"'Diamond-dealer: Malitoff—located on the ninth floor of the Middle City Tower.'" Jerry sounded only the high spots of the newspaper story. "'Recently secured a Correggio, long lost. Who had it no one knew—one of the many romances of the picture game. Got it for a song, and, we are given to understand, not a very high-priced song. Disposed of at once. The selling price is named at six thousand dollars.'"

Fully looked at Mickey. "Would you ever believe anyone could be so filthy?" she said.

"Yes, I would," said Mickey. "I'd believe that man would. Because I've seen him do something even worse than that."

Jerry looked at her inquiringly; her face had gone white and her eyes blazed.

"Do you know this pretzel, Mick?" he asked.

"I mentioned him to you once or twice, but not by name. He's the man that lied my kid brother into jail."

"Yeah?" said Jerry.

"He was in a crooked business, and my brother worked for him. One time they needed a car quick, and the kid stole one. And he was caught. Tommy was just a wild kind of boy, and he might have got off. But Malitoff thought he'd be mentioned, so to stop anything that might do, he pinned a couple more things on the boy."

"Oh, Mickey, your brother's not—not now—in—there!" said Fully, wide-eyed.

"Yes, he is. He got five years."

"What a terrible thing that Malitoff must be!" said Fully. "You wouldn't think anybody could be so rotten."

"These parties always work with their fingers crossed," said Jerry. "I've never seen Malitoff, but what I know of his record says he's pretty tough. The first I heard of him he was said to be smuggling diamonds in from Europe. I think I remember two or three of his people going to Federal prisons; but *he* never did. Showing how slippery he is. He's probably been in other lines beside that, though not ever having had any business that he figured in, I couldn't say."

CHAPTER TWO

MOONEY was taking Mickey home, and she sat silently in one corner of the cab. He said:

"Thinking about the kid?"

"Yes—a little."

"Don't get too deep into it. You know, I mentioned we might build up a parole. In another little while we might have him out."

"To have him locked up in there," said Mickey, "and with that cough! It scares me."

"Listen," said Jerry. "He'll be rid of that when he's out a month or two."

"Yes," she said, "that might be so; and then it mightn't. But anyway, he's not taking up all my thinking just now. Who I'm going over is mostly that little Ethel Codrey."

"Oh, yeah," said Jerry. He drummed with his fingers upon his knees. "That wasn't such a nice thing, was it?"

"Couldn't something be done about it? Isn't there some kind of law? It seems funny to me that jobs like that can be put through and nobody say a word."

"It could be taken into court," said Jerry. "But Malitoff probably has money, and he'd fight it. This Codrey girl, as your friend hinted, aint got a dime. And I don't see how she could win."

"For something that's worth six thousand dollars," said Mickey, "this peanut gives them a receipt for two months' rent—and rent that's already worked out. In a little while maybe they'll owe him more, and then he'll get them out of the place anyhow."

"The flavor's not nice," admitted Jerry reluctantly.

"Something ought to be done about it," said Mickey. "If the police can't

do anything, and there's no law to cover it, something else ought to be tried. I think," she said, "we ought to do something, just so's we'd feel better about it."

"Well," said Jerry, "I've turned a few tricks in my time when some clever party had the gate locked. But things like that, being outside the rules, are not liked. It just happened this is the very subject Pash wanted to see me about awhile ago. He was all worked up, as usual, and said he's going to get me."

"I'm always scared of that old walrus," said Mickey. "Sometimes when he calls the office and you aren't in, I wonder what he thinks he is. He sounds like judge, jury and governor of the State. When people make all that noise over the telephone, I lose all confidence in them."

Jerry lighted a cigarette; and his head sank down between his shoulders in a way he had when working out a problem.

"This Malitoff attracts my attention," he said. "And I don't mind saying I'd like to step in close and drum on him, just to find out what he sounds like. That matter of your brother aint never been settled for, either."

"There's never been a chance to do anything about it," said Mickey.

"There'd be a chance now," Jerry told her. "Maybe kind of nice, too."

"Well," said the girl, and there was a whip to her voice that made Jerry lift his brows, "if there is, I'd like to hear it, and I'd like to help put it through."

"Suppose," said Jerry, "we think it over. He's on kind of a spot right now, and maybe something could happen to him."

They had reached the building where Mickey had her apartment, and were going in, when Jerry spoke again.

"Does Malitoff know you?"

"I've seen him only once—in court, the day Tommy was convicted."

"Do you suppose he saw you?"

"I was sitting among a lot of other people."

"All right," said Jerry. He went with her to the elevator and said good night.

AFTER she'd gone up, he stepped into a telephone-booth in the little lobby. He dialed a number, and when the answer came, said: "Is that you, Gootch?"

"Yeah, that's me," said a voice. "How are they coming at you, Jerry?"

"O.K. just now. And things being that way, I'm thinking of giving out jobs."

"Right away I know you got one for me," said Gootch. "But I hope it aint a hard one like the other time. Then I was scared."

"Never get that way," advised Jerry. "Always keep your head up and your chin out. If you do that, nobody'll ever say a word to you."

"I hope," said Gootch, "this time what you want is clever. I like my jobs where the brains are used. Mental work is a pleasure."

"So I've heard," said Jerry. "And maybe we can fix this thing so you can give the old head quite a work-out. And now give your best ear to this: There's a diamond-dealer in the Middle City Tower; name of Malitoff. He's on the ninth floor. Have a look in there tomorrow." Jerry then detailed the matter of the picture. "Talk with him. You're a friend of the Codrey family. Tell him the situation, just as it stands. Try and soften him up. Appeal to what's often spoken of as a person's better nature. And remember all the things he says in reply. If he stays cold, keep friendly with him, but put the brakes on; and when you have finished with saying how sorry you are, leave."

"It is such a nice assignment," said Gootch. "I'll be glad to engage myself with it. It has human nature. I will appeal to him. I don't think—confidentially—he'll be able to resist me."

"I hope that'll turn out to be so," said Jerry. "But don't be too sure. From what I know, he's a tough egg; and that kind don't give very easy. Anyway, when you finish with him call my office; make sure I'm there. And then come in."

Jerry left the place, and the cab rolled him to a basement eating-house on Fifth Street. A man stood behind a short bar. He was bald, had a pencil behind his ear and wore a white apron.

"Hiyah, Sid," said Mooney.

"Hello, Jerry," said the restaurant-keeper. "What you sparring around this time of night for?"

"A little business," said Jerry. "What's the chance of getting hold of Chubby?"

"I'll see," said the man in the apron. "He might be upstairs." He spoke into a telephone for a moment. Then he nodded to Jerry. "Yeah, he's there. And he'll be down."

In a few moments a short, round-faced young man came in at what seemed a private door.

"Boy," he said to Jerry, "this is what's called unexpected. Where've you been

operating? I aint put an eye on you in a month."

"I'm still pounding around," said Jerry. "Up and down, and sometimes sideways." They sat at a table and Jerry ordered a bottle of red wine. "I'd hoped I'd find you here," he said. "I've got a thing in mind."

"That's fine," said Chubby. "Because I'm that close-picked, I can't get any sort of grip on myself. Between ten o'clock and now I roll eighty-five bucks. Out of my pocket! And not only that, but out of the neighborhood. I always think that if you drop dough to somebody that's around, it aint so bad. You've got a chance of getting some of it back again. But when they fold it up and carry it away, it's just a heartbreak. Often it's so far you can't see it even with a spyglass."

They had emptied the first glass of wine and poured out the second, when Jerry said:

"There's a party I want looked at. Somebody that maybe you know."

"No friend," admonished Chubby. "Nobody I ever buddied around with, Jerry."

"No; I wouldn't ask you to do that. This is Malitoff. You know, the diamond-merchant."

Chubby brightened up at once.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Sure! Malitoff. Down there in the big tower. Yeah, I know him. When Sime and me were working together, we had that place all set for a going-over. But just then Sime had to leave town; they'd got something on him, and he thought he'd better let himself get cold."

"What I want you to do," said Jerry. "is step in at Malitoff's and see just how the shop's laid out. Are you following me?"

"I'm right alongside," said Chubby cheerfully. "But you aint thinking of opening that joint, are you, Jerry?"

"Well, in a limited way, maybe I am. But forget that. What I want is a report on how the place works from hour to hour."

"That would mean a daylight job, then?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll give it a good scouring. I've got notes on it right now, but maybe there's been some changes made since Sime and me was figuring on it."

"There probably are a great many," Jerry said. "So don't trust to any old possibilities." He looked at Chubby, who was tipping up a third glass of the wine. "When do you think you can see me in the morning?"

"Not before noon. It's best not to be there too early in these things. You got to give them a chance to start seeing people. Then they don't notice you so much."

"All right," said Jerry. "Noon, it is. I'll be sitting, waiting for you."

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN Jerry entered his office in the morning, he found Mickey already at her desk.

"I thought I'd be first," he said. "What's the idea of you moving around so early?"

"Well," said Mickey, "as this might be a busy day, I thought I'd get going an hour or so in advance. And it was a good thing I did. We had a visitor. And he was here before I was."

Jerry sat down on the corner of her desk, and looked at her.

"Anyone I'd be knowing?" he said.

"Yes; that man Engle who came after you last night."

"No!" said Jerry, surprised.

"He was here, and making himself at home when I unlocked the door."

"Pash must be teaching his boys new stuff," Jerry said. "Giving them false keys, and things. What'd he say?"

"At first," said Mickey, "when he saw me, he was surprised. Then he tried to laugh it off. But when he saw I didn't think it was comic, he began to get tough."

"He would," said Jerry. "That's the old formula."

"He was all for opening things up and going over your papers. But I wouldn't let him; and when he talked, I sassed him back. And that," said Mickey, "must have discouraged him. Anyway, after a while, he went away."

Jerry continued to sit on the corner of the desk; and he swung one foot.

"Pash wouldn't like anything better than to pile me up in a corner and stamp on me," he said. "And look at the things I've put right in his lap."

"I hope," said Mickey, "this doesn't change your mind on anything you've been thinking about that business of the picture."

Jerry sat looking at her. There was a quick, startled way about her that he didn't like.

"You weren't pleased with Engle being here, were you?" he said. "Don't let it bother you. People like him never count for much."

"Do I look pale, or anything?" said Mickey anxiously.

"Maybe a little off," said Jerry. "But not much."

"It must be I need more make-up," she said. "I thought as I was coming in on the subway I hadn't taken enough time."

She took her handbag from the desk and opened it. Jerry's eyes followed the movement; there was always something attractive to him in her way of doing things. He liked to watch her. But this time it was something else that held his attention after the first moment. For inside the bag nestled a squat, hard object: a thing that had a black, glittering surface. A small automatic pistol! He only had a glimpse of it, for in an instant a handkerchief was crumpled over it. Then Mickey took out a vanity-case and began examining herself in its small mirror.

"What say if we got this thing started today?" he said.

"It'd be the thing to do," she told him, as she touched her face here and there. "It'd be making it nice and snappy."

"Not frightened, or anything?"

"Why should I be?"

"Well, this'll be a little different from the things you've worked in."

"All right," she said. "I still want to do it." She laughed, and then closed the vanity-case with a click, and put it back in the bag. The sound and the motion made Jerry lift his brows. "I've been wanting a chance at this Malitoff," she said. "And this looks like a good one."

"Are you thinking about the kid brother?"

"Yes," she said.

"Don't forget," said Jerry, "if we start, we've got to go through with it. We mustn't stumble any place. We mustn't have other things in our minds, no matter what they are."

"I'll do what you want me to do," said Mickey. "Just tell me what it is."

"All right," said Jerry. He studied the pattern in the office rug for a moment. "Last night I talked to a couple of people. It may be things'll break right, and we can start this afternoon."

"Malitoff's is a pretty uppy place," said Mickey. "And if I have to fix up as somebody more than usual, I'd like to know it now."

"You'd better make arrangements," said Jerry, "so we can step into the thing right away if we have to."

A half-hour had passed before Ates Haley, the office-boy, came in, his freckles almost gleaming from a morning scrub, and his red hair alarmingly neat.

"Take charge," said Mickey to him. "I'm going out for about an hour."

MICKEY, in a snappy little hat and a tight skirt, small, bright shoes and astonishingly good-looking stockings, stepped briskly down the street. By and by she went in at a doorway at the side of which was a metal plate carrying the name: *"Hortense."* There was a long, poorly lighted passage; then came a huge room in which hung an absolute wilderness of women's costumes. A large woman sat at a table, and at sight of Mickey, she arose.

"Well, darling," she said, "I was thinking of you only a bit ago."

"How are you, Nora?" said Mickey. "You look very well."

"I'm all right, Mickey," said Nora Burns, known to the used-outfit business as "Hortense." "But I can't say that you look as though you were. You have worriment written on the face of you."

"Oh, it's not much," said Mickey. "Nothing at all, I suppose."

"What made me think of you," said Nora, "was that the other day I saw a piece in the paper about that wretch Malitoff. Isn't it the God's wonder how such things are let happen? Him making money hand over fist, after all the things he's done! And then I thought about poor Tommy, and then about you. And you've been in my mind, off and on, ever since."

"Well, don't think of me that way," said Mickey. "Just look at me as a customer. I've come in to hire a costume, Nora."

"I was hoping," said Nora, "you'd want to buy shoes. Only yesterday a girl, who is married to a harum-scarum rich fellah, sold me some things, and her only wearing them a half-dozen times. Her shoes are so small I thought they'd be a loss. Who has such a foot, I said to myself. And then I thought of you. You could wear them, Mickey."

"What I want is a gown," said Mickey. "For, maybe, this afternoon. Or it may be tomorrow, or the next day. I can't say just when. It all depends."

"It's an adventure!" said Nora. "Some of that big fellah Jerry's goings-on."

"I'm to be a rich girl," said Mickey. "I step out of my own car. And into a pretty swell place. And I must look the part."

Nora searched among the gowns.

"I have plenty," she said. She selected one. "Here is class," she said. "Money without end. It belonged to a girl who—"

But Mickey waved it away.

"That would go too far," said Mickey. "I want one that looks rich, but it mustn't raise hell."

"Well," said Nora, "give a look yourself. You have taste, darling. You'll be sure to see something."

Mickey moved along the line of hanging gowns; she paused here and there; and at length she pointed to one.

"That looks nice," she said. "I'd take that if you could make it fit."

"I can make any of them fit," said Nora confidently. "I wasn't twelve years with Madame Henri for nothing, darling. This," she said, taking the gown from a hanger, "belonged to a strip of a girl who makes a fool of her father. She buys enough clothes in a year to outfit a dozen—and sells them almost at once for pocket-money! Try it on, Mickey, and we'll see what must be done."

MICKEY did this; and while doing it, she talked with Nora.

"Listen," she said: "I came over here to get a dress, but besides, I wanted to tell you something."

"Well, that's nice," said Nora. "Because I see very little of you, darling, and anything you'd have to say to me'll be welcome."

"I don't think this will be," said Mickey. "It's a thing that'll make you feel jumpy."

"What is it?" asked Nora alertly.

"Do you remember that day in court? When Tommy was sent to prison?"

"Yes," said Nora, and her eyes were suddenly troubled.

"After they'd taken him away," said Mickey, "you and I stood in the corridor. Do you remember why?"

"No," said Nora. And there was fright in her voice. "No, I don't."

"You do," said Mickey. "You do, Nora, but you're afraid to admit it. We were waiting until Malitoff came out. I wanted to see him close, so I'd remember him. And when he did come out and passed by, and I'd had a good look at him, do you remember what I said?"

"Darling," said Nora, "it's not good for a person to keep foolish, excited things like that in their minds."

"I said the time would come when he'd suffer for what he'd done," said Mickey. "More than that, I told you the day was coming when I—"

"Don't say it again!" cried Nora Burns. "Don't, Mickey!" She took hold of the girl. "It was the distress in you that made you say such a thing."

"I know," said Mickey. "I remember that you put your arms around me then, just as you're doing now; and you made me promise something."

"I did," said Nora. "I made you promise you'd never step a foot in any place where that man was. And you being a truthful girl, darling, I knew you'd keep your word."

"You've forgotten something," said Mickey. "There was more in that promise than you've said."

"You promised me—"

"I promised," interrupted Mickey, "that I'd never go anywhere I knew Malitoff would be, without coming to you first and telling you I was going to."

Nora looked at her, frightened.

"You did, Mickey. That was it, dear."

"I came here this morning, Nora, not only to get a dress to wear on this little office business, but also to tell you the place I'm going to is Malitoff's, in the Middle City Tower."

Nora's face was white; she released the girl, and stood looking at her.

"Mickey," she said, "I'll never forget your words that day, or the way you spoke them. It put fright in my heart, and that fright is still there. You are not thinking of that saying now, darling, are you? You haven't such a terrible thing in your mind?"

"One of our office proceedings," said Mickey, "takes us to Malitoff's. It's business, Nora. But as I made you a promise, I thought I'd better tell you I was going there."

DURING Mickey's absence from the office, the telephone rang and Ates Haley answered.

"Mooney: Proceedings," said Ates in an official voice. "Yessir, Mr. Mooney's here. Who's calling? Yessir, I know: everybody's business is private. But you tell what your name is to people, don't you?"

"Put him through," called Jerry from the inner office. "Never fight with the trade about anything but a bill."

It was Gootch who spoke in his ear. "O.K.," said Jerry. "How'd you make out?"

"I have many small facts," said Gootch. "Also there is to report an important conversation."

"That's nice," said Jerry. "Suppose you run in? I'll be waiting."

SHORTLY afterward Gootch reached the office. He was small, neatly dressed and looked like an Armenian, and he smoked a heavily scented cigarette while he talked.

"I did not wish to speak to Malitoff too soon," he said. "So in the early part of the morning I searched for outside information. At first it looked like work that was easy; but in a little while I found it was not so. There were places where there was nothing."

"Blank spots," said Jerry. "I know what you mean. I keep running into them myself."

"As I searched," said Gootch, "I saw there were places where he'd done things to cover other things up. Three times I found he'd changed his name; but there was, once or twice, more that I could not be sure of. He has been in many things; almost always things where the shadow of the law fell on him. Precious stones were the things he liked best. He carried on an importing business, and never paid the customhouse a dollar unless they found something out. Twice the Federal Government had him, but could prove nothing. Always," said Gootch, "it was someone else they proved it on. Malitoff"—admiringly—"is clever."

"So I've heard," said Jerry.

"What I have found out," said Gootch, "is all along these lines. The other things, what you call blank spaces, I'll look into later if you think it necessary."

"Let's have your talk with him," said Jerry.

"When he talks," said Gootch, "he is cheerful, and careful. Not once would you think him a rascal. He is smooth like glass, and hard. I found that out right away. He smiled when I began telling about the two women, the young Miss Codrey and her mother. His eyes smiled, but deep down in them I saw he was watching me. And waiting. He has fine hands," said Gootch. "Long fingers with pointed tips, and polished nails. They are the kind of hands people have who work with diamonds and other expensive things. And while I talked with him, he rubbed them together."

"When they do that," said Jerry, "I always get extra careful."

"It is a sign," said Gootch. "It tells you they are aware, they are meditating, they are examining every word you say."

The man told Jerry he'd opened his talk by explaining to Malitoff how the girl and her mother happened to have the painting. He told them of the dying father—of how that father had told them to treasure the painting because it was not only beautiful, but valuable. But they were innocent. They knew nothing of such matters. Even when they were bitterly poor, the picture never came into their minds. They suffered grievously and all the time, unknowingly, had this thing of price in their possession.

"All the time while I told of these deplorable situations," said Gootch, "this man smiled and rubbed his soft hands together. But when he spoke, his words were the words of a man who had no pity. He was a business man. He said that to me while I stood wiping the tears from my eyes. You know my temperament; I had been so affected by the words I'd said that I wept. As a business man, he said, he always worked in a business way. Where there was a profit, he always tried to get it. In no other way, he said, would he be doing himself justice."

"And then what?" asked Jerry.

"I could not move him," said Gootch. "He had made a nice deal. If someone suffered, how could he help it? It was not his fault. He told me that, and smiled when he said it. And so, when I saw it was no use, I left him."

"All right," said Jerry. "I thought it would be something like that, but I wanted to give him a chance."

GOOTCH had departed when the telephone rang again. It was Chubby.

"I've looked at the shop," Chubby said. "Also, I've asked a few questions here and there in places I know. And I'm all ready to give."

"Where are you?"

"Downstairs, in your own building."

"Run along up," said Jerry.

Chubby, when he came in, looked quite cheerful.

"What this does to me is make me feel good," he told Jerry. "Like old times, when me and Sime were getting somebody ready."

"Were you in the shop?"

"Yeah. I walked around and examined a few small things. They looked

at me a couple of times, me not being in the class that they mostly see there. And to keep them off me, I got one of the salesmen aside and hinted that I knew where they could buy a little ice at a low figure. Of course, he said no; they only bought in the regular places—which was a laugh to me, though I didn't do it out loud."

"What did you see that I'd want to know?" said Jerry.

"The place is just about like it was when Sime and me looked at it. There are six people there, not counting Malitoff. All of them are the kind you'd expect to see working in a place like that, except the doorman. He's got two thick ears; looks like he'd been belted around in a ring a good bit at some time."

"He's probably there to handle any trouble they might have."

"That's what I thought, but I'm going to look him up," said Chubby. "I like to keep the run of parties like him. Sometimes it's useful." He looked at Jerry in silence for a moment, and then he said: "I don't know what you've got in your mind about this place, but it's got tables where you sit down and look at jewelry or stones, and any of them'd be a nice place to leave a button, if you're thinking of that."

"I'm not sure," said Jerry; "not yet." He looked at Chubby for a moment. "What did you pick up outside?"

"There's always guys who keep their eyes on the trade," said Chubby. "And I talked to a few of them. Kind of on the side, you know. Not letting on I was meaning anything in particular. Was Malitoff doing a good business? Did he sell good stuff? Was he pushing anything just now? Anything he thought was tops? And I find," said Chubby, "that he's got a ruby that he's holding at twelve grand."

"A ruby?" said Jerry.

"It must be awful nice," said Chubby, "because that's a real price. The thing is what you call a Burma ruby, and that's supposed to be the kind people go nuts about."

"Sounds good," said Jerry. "It might be worth reaching for."

There was a pause; then Chubby said:

"Listen, Jerry. No kiddin'—what're you letting yourself in for? This aint just a crooked job, is it?"

"No," said Jerry. "You ought to know that."

"Because," said Chubby, "I'd hate to see you turn mooch."

"So would I," said Jerry. "But don't get nervous. What I'm going to try is to get something back that this Malitoff took from someone else."

"O. K.," said Chubby. "I thought it must be something like that. But listen: look out for Pash. I hear he's been asking questions about you, and I know he'd like to get you down."

Jerry grinned.

"There aint been a day since I opened this office that he's not done something along that line," he said. "But he don't step fast enough. Pash and his boys are all right at bulldogging, but real refined work's over their heads."

MALITOFF'S, in the Middle City Tower, was a gleaming sort of place; the lights shone determinedly; the floors glittered; the showcases shot their hard rays everywhere; the chairs, tables and wall-panels reflected every movement in the place. The attendants were well-mannered and suave; and toward noon, when the doorman swung wide the door to admit a large young man, carefully dressed and with a heavy, rather pontifical manner, only one salesman approached, the others standing at a distance, with polite attention.

"Can we serve you, sir?" said the attendant.

The big young man leisurely drew off his gloves.

"This morning," he said in a voice even more pontifical than his manner, "I'm looking for some unset stones."

The salesman indicated a seat at a table; but the young man preferred another.

"The light here is better," he said.

"Diamonds, perhaps, sir?"

But the big young man hung his stick on the edge of the table and looked bored.

"No," he said. "I'm tired of diamonds. I'd like something with color. An emerald, maybe. Or a ruby."

"Quite so, sir," said the salesman.

In a few moments he had a tray of unset emeralds of good size on the table for the patron's inspection. The young man handled them indifferently; they did not appear to be at all to his liking.

"I've been seeing stones just like these for a long time," he said. "What I'm hoping to see is something different."

"Yes sir," said the man. "I understand."

He removed the tray, and in a few moments returned with another. But the interest of Jerry Mooney was no greater than before.

"What you're doing is not exciting me," he said. "These have more size, but they are dull-looking." He motioned languidly with one of his big hands. "I warn you," he said, "that I'm hard to please. Another thing: maybe emeralds are not at the top with me this morning. A ruby might come nearer the spot. I've noticed that the fire of a ruby sometimes stimulates me. It wakes me up. So, what do you say if you show me a ruby or two?"

"If you are considering stones of a higher price—" the man was saying; but another movement of the big hand stopped him.

"I said nothing about price," said Jerry. "If you have a stone that might please me, let's see it. I think what I need this morning is to be startled."

"Yes sir. Just a moment." The attendant took away the tray. And he returned with a man who had a cheery face, round, and with soft, long-fingered hands.

"This is Mr. Malitoff, sir," said the attendant.

"Mr. Prawn tells me you are looking for a fine ruby," said the proprietor. "Well, sir, you are very fortunate, for at this time I have in my collection the highest quality stone of that character I have seen for several years. To have the gem"—with a cheery smile—"and the person who will appreciate it, is always the merchant's hope. Prawn"—to the attendant—"have the small safe opened, and get out the Burma ruby."

The man proceeded to do as directed, and in a few minutes a big stone, in a silken nest, was produced. It blazed on the table before Jerry; in the cunningly placed lights, it had a notable aspect.

"There is no stone in the city that I know of," said Malitoff, "and I make it a point to keep posted on such things—that could hold a place against this one. Its natural quality makes it an admirable gem; but the manner of the cutting gives it added importance. It was thought, years ago, that gem-cutting had then reached its highest development; but we have since found"—with the same cheery smile—"that a newer generation had something to add."

Jerry hovered over the ruby, not touching it, but shaking his head, impressed.

"A very nice piece," he said. "A rare chunk of stone. I think I like it."

"Take my word for it," said the gem merchant, "it is an exquisite adornment. Or it would make a cabinet piece without a peer. You'd go far, sir, before you'd find its equal at the price."

But at the mention of price, Jerry gestured impatiently.

"I think," he said, "I'd like to see a few other stones—also rubies—alongside this one. Very fine ones. I always believe in playing one thing against another."

A tray of rubies was placed upon the counter. They seemed excellent stones, but Jerry regarded them with disapproval.

"Haven't you some closer to the top?" he said. "With more stuff in them? These seem to have been cut for size, and like most stones so treated, are mostly aluminate of magnesium—quite soft and unlike the true corundum gem."

Jerry had spent an hour poring over an article in an encyclopedia dealing with precious stones; and he had an excellent memory. Malitoff looked at him, and then at Prawn.

"Take these away," he said, "and bring the tray from the inner compartment."

"Yes sir," said Prawn.

"Bring," said Jerry impressively, "some real pigeon-bloods." And as the attendant went to the safe, the young man looked at the proprietor. "When you've once had a look at a real Kyat Pyen stone, any other kind looks shabby."

"Quite true, sir," said Malitoff. "I agree with you."

THE man brought another tray; but Jerry, keeping quite close to the book, went on talking.

"Inferior stones have fluid cavities, and in those you see enclosures of minerals not corundum. Rubies like those are no better than garnets. For purposes of exhibition," asserted Jerry impressively, "they are not nearly as good as the ruby of chemistry, made with an oxyhydrogen blowpipe."

"I can plainly see," said Malitoff, "that you know your rubies. But here are some stones with which the Burmese gem may actually be compared."

His hand went automatically to the silken nest in which the big ruby had

rested since it had been taken from the safe. But it was not there! The man's brows lifted; his face went a sudden dirty white. But Jerry Mooney was still talking.

"These," he said, hovering over the newly brought tray, "are fair; and I think they prove what I've been saying. I dislike mentioning price; but to finish up a transaction, it must be done, and so—"

The face of Prawn, the clerk, was rigid.

"The Burma stone!" he said. "Mr. Malitoff, have you it?"

Jerry looked at the empty nest.

"Maybe," he said quietly to Prawn, "you put it in the tray you just took back to the safe."

"Look!" said Malitoff to Prawn. "And look carefully."

As Prawn turned to the safe, agitated, he signaled the doorman. At once the man threw an electric control, and the big doors were fast locked. Malitoff was breathless; his delicate hands shook.

"No one," he said, "shall leave until the stone is found." He stared at Jerry. "It was here a moment ago. Directly in front of you. Things do not vanish of themselves, you know."

Jerry gazed at him.

"Listen," he said, "if I were you, I'd keep at least one foot on the ground. That sounded a good deal like something I don't care for. There are other people here in your place"—and he indicated a half-dozen persons who had been examining articles in other parts of the room. These were looking toward the center of disturbance, startled and concerned. "They can hear what you say. If you make any charges against me, don't forget that the courts are still open and doing business. And people often collect damages in them."

Here Prawn turned from the safe.

"The stone is positively not here," he said.

"Call the police," said Malitoff. "At once!" And then as Prawn touched a button in the wall, the proprietor said to Jerry: "The lock is on the door. The officers will be here in a few minutes. You can't frighten me, sir. This is not the first time I've been placed in this position. It is you who needs to be afraid of the courts, not I."

In a very little while the police were knocking at the door; and with them was Engle, the plain-clothes man who had picked Jerry up at the Algerian Moon the night before. And he listened with popping eyes to Malitoff's story.

"Well," he said, as he stood, his derby hat on one side and a cigar in his mouth, looking at Jerry, "will Pash be glad to see you, or won't he!"

"With a disposition like his," said Jerry, "all out of shape that way, he will."

"Brother," said Engle, "he'd rather put a real tight hand on you than on ten grand. That's just how much he thinks of you."

He called Headquarters, and in a moment had Captain Pash.

"He's just as pleased as hell," said Engle as he put down the telephone. "And now"—to Jerry—"let's see what you got on you. —Take him into one of those offices." He indicated a row of rooms. "We'll go over him real good."

Jerry was taken into Malitoff's office and stripped. Every article of clothing was gone over with the greatest care, but with no result.

"How could you find anything," suggested Jerry easily, as he pulled his shirt over his head, "when there wasn't anything there? But if you were a good cop" —this to Engle—"you'd start now going through some of these other parties."

"All right, smart guy," said Engle. "We're not done with you yet. —Take him away," he said to the policemen. "I'll be right after you."

When Jerry had finished dressing, he adjusted his hat at the angle he liked; and he hooked his stick over his arm.

"Let's see that," said Engle. He took the stick, twisted at the hooked end and the ferrule to no purpose. After eying it suspiciously, he returned it. "You've got the stuff some place," he said.

"What you want to do is stop being impulsive," Jerry told him. "You listen to Pash so much you're beginning to act a good bit like him."

IT was at exactly twelve-forty-five that a car drew up before the Middle City Tower, and Mickey got out—Mickey, dressed wonderfully, and carrying herself with an air. And a few minutes later she was entering the shining rooms of Malitoff, dealer in gems.

"Madame?" said Prawn as he came forward.

Under the plentiful lights, Mickey was beautiful; her costume was beautiful; she gave off an air of wealth, of place, of reserved, remote class. She loosed a wonderful fur neckpiece and sat down at the table where Jerry Mooney had sat an hour or so before.

"I want to replace a lost stone in a setting," she said. "A diamond." She took a small clasp out of her handbag, which she permitted to lie open in her lap. "The stones are cut in peculiar shape, and I have not been able to duplicate the missing one. But I've been told that you might have one that would answer."

Prawn took the clasp and examined it through a glass which he screwed into his eye. As he was doing this, Mickey leaned against the table; one of her hands was feeling under its edge while she looked at the man with the glass. The searching fingers of the quietly moving hand touched something under the projecting top; it was something soft—a button of gum, and pressed tightly into it she felt a stone. Instantly she detached both the button and the stone and slipped them into a handkerchief which was in the bag on her lap.

"I'm afraid," said Prawn, "we have nothing cut like this. As you've said, madame, it's a character of cutting that is most unusual."

Mickey received this coldly.

"Possibly," she said, "the proprietor might be able to make a suggestion."

Prawn removed the glass from his eye.

"If you'll pardon me," he said, "I will speak to him."

Mickey arose; her eyes followed him to the far end of the room, where she saw the name Malitoff upon the door.

At a showcase some little distance away there was a girl holding a small black spaniel in leash; she had been looking at something in the case, and as Prawn started down the room she had said to the attendant who also stood at the case:

"No, do not bother to get it out now. Tomorrow I will come again. With my husband, perhaps. He will like it. It is very beautiful."

They came down the room, the little black dog moving before her. Prawn was going into Malitoff's office as the girl arrived at the place where Mickey stood, and what seemed like a sudden move on the part of the spaniel caused her to stumble. She caught at Mickey for support.

"Oh, please pardon me!" she said as she recovered her balance. "This little dog of mine does such very unexpected things!"

Mickey made no reply; she stood quite still, her face set, her eyes fixed upon the door of Malitoff's office. The girl with the dog passed on and out of the place. And in a moment or two more, Prawn returned.

"If you will come this way," he said to Mickey, "Mr. Malitoff will see you." He led her to an office next Malitoff's, where a communicating door stood open. "Please be seated," said Prawn. "He'll be with you in a moment or two." He closed the door, leaving Mickey alone.

There were only a few patrons in the salesroom; they were sitting at tables, or standing at the cases examining pieces of jewelry. Only an hour or so before, the place had been in a turmoil; the police had been there; the doors had been locked; those patrons then present had been detained despite their protests. But now a quiet had settled over everything; the thick rugs deadened what movements there were; voices were hushed to a gentle murmuring.

AND then, suddenly, a high, sharp sound—a pistol-shot. The unexpectedness of it, its blasting explosiveness, split the quiet in a frightening way. And then a second shot!

A woman patron screamed. One of the salesmen, possibly with the incident of a little while before still in his mind, called out to the doorman, who instantly threw the fastenings upon the exit. Feet thudded upon the floor; excited voices lifted. The shots had come from the offices; Malitoff's door was thrown open, and there was a swift crowding into the room. The proprietor was huddled upon the floor beside the desk as though he'd slipped, stricken, from his chair. A few yards away stood Mickey, her face set, her hands clenched, staring at the prostrate form. . . .

And at about this same time, Jerry Mooney sat at the desk of Captain Pash at Headquarters; there were a number of uniformed men in the room. And Pash, his chin thrust out, was talking in his sharpest and most accusing tones.

"You walked into that place," he yelled, "just like you walk into every other place; and right away something happens!"

"Maybe," said Jerry, "it would be as well not to go so far. When you say

'every place,' aint you bearing down a little too hard on an old pal?"

"You go into Malitoff's and ask to see the finest item he has—a Burmese ruby worth an armful of dough. And in a few minutes the stone disappears—right under their noses. Both Malitoff and one of his clerks were standing right there, but you got away with it."

"Now, wait," said Jerry. "Don't let's get ahead of the facts. You try to pin this thing on me just because I was there when it happened. Don't forget, Malitoff was also there."

"The stone was Malitoff's property," said Pash. "A man don't steal what already belongs to him."

"Now, listen," said Jerry, "you're a cop that's had experience. Don't let yourself go on record saying a thing like that. Dig around a little. How many cases do you know of where parties got the idea they'd like to collect some insurance?" Jerry tilted back in his chair. "Before you get me down and start stamping on me, why don't you take a look into Malitoff? The boy might have a record."

Pash glowered on him.

"You talk nice," he said. "But keep this in mind: You're not going to talk yourself off *this* spot." He pointed his bony finger at Jerry. "What were you doing in that place, looking at expensive jewelry? Is business so good with you you're going to start collecting rubies?"

"What I wanted," grinned Jerry, "was a little relaxation. You know, I'd begun to feel all tightened up, and had started to worry. When I get that way, I like a place where they show prosperity. See what I mean? A place I can go into and sit down and make believe I'm in the chips."

"The next thing I expect to hear," Pash said with derision, "is that you've got yourself a bean-bag and are playing catch out in the alley."

"That's one I never thought of," said Jerry. "But I'll keep it in mind."

"First," said Pash with relish, "I'm going to slate you. And when they get here with the rest of the facts, we'll start puting the pressure on."

"THERE'S another thing that won't stand up," said Jerry. "What do you mean by 'the rest of the facts?' What facts have you got? I dropped in at Malitoff's for a pleasant half-hour. Looking and asking prices. A kind of window-shopping, only carried higher up. While I'm there, a valuable stone is missed. No one saw me take it. When I was searched, I didn't have it. Where does that get you? If you went to the D. A. with a group of facts like that, he'd laugh so loud he'd get the stomachache."

"We aint going to let you be the judge of that," said Pash.

"That's all right with me," said Jerry genially. "But don't forget, you're not going to judge it, either. Friends of mine are passing a few words in the D. A.'s office right now. Also, some other items of that kind are being looked after. You'll find, Captain, I'll be walking out on my word to appear when wanted. Afterward, maybe, I'll be asked to give bail; but I don't think so."

Pash glared at him; he looked like an old cat whose prey was being taken from it. And just then the telephone on his desk began to ring. He picked it up and yelled:

"What do you want?"

There was a mumbling at the telephone. Captain Pash's gaunt face was stiff with sudden attention.

"Wait! Say that again, and say it slow!" A grin came upon his face as he listened, and his eyes turned upon Jerry with a gleam of satisfaction in them. And finally when the voice ceased, he said: "O. K. Have the party brought in. And you get over here yourself as soon as you can."

He put down the telephone; and he planted both elbows on the desk and stared at Jerry.

"I know," he said, "you've got friends who usually can do things; but listen, fellah: they're not going to do much in this case." He wagged his bony forefinger at the young man. "I said I'd get you sometime when I'd have enough to indict you. And now I've got it."

Jerry, as he looked at the face staring into his own, a face full of satisfaction and almost savage triumph, felt a sudden stoppage in his nerve-centers. Mickey! Something had happened! She had gone to Malitoff's to get the ruby. She had been detected! She had been arrested! She was even now on her way to Headquarters! There was a rising clamor in his mind, a roaring in his ears. But his expression didn't change; he sat looking amiably at Captain Pash, apparently quite undisturbed.

"Something's happened?" he asked.

"*Something* only tells a little of it," said Pash, grinning. He was still pointing his big finger at Jerry. "The dia-

mond-dealer, Malitoff, was murdered in his office about fifteen minutes ago. And that girl who works in your office has been arrested for it."

CHAPTER SIX

JERRY MOONEY spoke into the telephone to Steve Curren of the district attorney's office.

"I don't know much about it, Steve," he said. "The Headquarters' man who telephoned in hasn't reached here yet; but from what they tell me, this Malitoff's been killed, and Mickey's been arrested."

"As the killer?" asked Steve, astonished.

"Yes. Of course the whole thing is as screwy as hell. But the police always want their way in these things."

"She hasn't been brought in yet?"

"Not yet."

"You'd better have your own attorney there."

"I've thought of that, but Pash won't listen to it. He'll not let me call him."

"All right," said Steve; "I'll get him for you. Downs or Burgess?"

"Get me Downs; he'll know this kind of a trick better than Burgess."

"And I'll see you myself," said Steve Curren.

"Good kid," said Jerry, and he put down the phone.

"You'll find," said Captain Pash, "that talking to attorneys is going to do you no good. You'd better sit down and let things take their course. Now that we've got a chance to go over you, we're not going to let it go by without making use of it; you may depend on that. Murder, you know, is a thing that gets a lot of attention—and you're right in the middle of this one." He checked the counts off on his fingers. "You go into Malitoff's place and are accused of stealing a valuable ruby. Also, you're arrested. About an hour later this girl, a friend of yours, appears in the place, and Malitoff is killed. What was she doing there? Did her errand have anything to do with the robbery? Are the business of the ruby and the killing of Malitoff separate jobs, or are they one? Until that's made clear, we're going to have a pretty free hand with you." Pash nodded his head and looked exultant. "There's a lot of things you've been keeping to yourself for some time that we're going to hear about now—things having to do not only with this case but with some others."

The telephone rang once more.

"Yes," said Pash into the transmitter. And then: "All right; let him come in."

Engle entered a few moments later; and when he saw Jerry, he laughed.

"Still here?" he said. "Well, this is one rap you're not going to duck."

"Don't waste your time guessing," said Jerry as he leaned against the Captain's desk. "Don't you see Pash is watering at the mouth, he's so anxious to get his teeth into what you know."

"It's as clean a case as I ever handled," said Engle at a sign from the Captain. "Everything fits like the works of a clock. The girl comes into the place at about twelve-thirty. One of the men, named Prawn, waits on her. She wants a stone to replace one that's been lost. But it seems they didn't have one that would do. Then she asks if she can see the proprietor, Malitoff. Prawn takes her into an office next to Malitoff's to wait. And he leaves her there for a couple of minutes. There are two shots. The people of the place run into the office. Malitoff's on the floor; the girl's standing almost beside him. The door between Malitoff's office and the one she'd been in while waiting, is open."

"The gun?" said Pash. "What about the gun?"

"That was the first thing we looked for," said Engle. "But we couldn't find it."

"Have you searched her?"

"Right away. She didn't have it. Her handbag was on the floor; it had a vanity-case in it, a handkerchief, a cigarette-case, a bill-fold with four one-dollar bills in it, and some small change."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

Jerry Mooney leaned against Pash's desk. He was seeing that same handbag as he'd seen it quite early in the day when Mickey had opened it in the office. He saw the small, shining, wicked-looking automatic that lay in it; again he saw her draw the handkerchief over it.

He tried to think of what had happened at Malitoff's. He pictured Mickey, beautifully dressed, bright-eyed and charming, seated before the table where he had been sometime before. He saw her talking with one of the salesmen; and while she talked, she drew off her glove: leisurely, with no haste. Her hand moved

along under the table's projecting edge to the place where the ruby was embedded in the lump of soft gum. She had it—in her handkerchief! He had gone over the whole proceeding with her a dozen times. The next thing he'd told her to do was arise. And her getting up was the cue for Cora. And he saw Cora, some distance away, small, dark, with the little spaniel on a leash.

But with that, the film moving across his mind stopped. . . . Pictures were in his mind, to be sure: but of the automatic gun in the handbag; a boy in a prison cage serving a sentence of five years. And Mickey, with a look in her eyes he'd never seen there before.

And now he heard Pash speaking into the telephone.

"Tell them to bring that girl in." Then the big beak was pointed at Jerry. "It's all pretty evident," he said. "The reason we couldn't find the ruby on you was that you'd planted it somewhere in the store. The girl went there to pick it up. And somehow Malitoff had found out what was going on; he accused her, and she shot him."

The door opened, and Mickey came in, a policeman on each side of her. At sight of Jerry, a policeman at his elbow, she stopped, startled. Then she laughed.

"To think," she said, "of seeing you here!"

Jerry waved his hand.

"From this distance, how are you?" he said.

"I'm all right," Mickey told him. "But these people are hard to convince. They insist on keeping right with me."

Pash scowlingly regarded the girl.

"Has she been searched?" he asked.

"The matron and a woman assistant examined her," said one of the policemen.

"What did they find?"

"Nothing."

Pash pointed a long finger at Mickey.

"What did you do with that revolver?"

"They've all been asking me that," Mickey told him. "Mr. Engle asked me about it a couple of times, and he never seemed satisfied when I told him I never kept a watch out on such things. Once he put his fist in my face, I suppose thinking that would make me remember better."

Jerry Mooney shifted his look from Mickey to Engle; the man saw the threat it held, and he said to the girl:

"You'll tell before you're through. They usually do."

"Early this afternoon you went into Malitoff's place in the Middle City Tower on a little matter of business," said Pash to Mickey. "Your boy friend had planted a valuable ruby somewhere there, and you meant to pick it up."

"Mr. Engle told you that, Captain," said Mickey. "He's been telling it to everyone. He's even told it to me. It seems to be his favorite joke."

Pash grinned at her wickedly.

"When you went there," he said, "you thought you had the thing pretty well sewed up. But people like Malitoff are seldom dumb. He was waiting for you. And when you found out he had, you shot him."

"You go to too many movies, Captain," Mickey suggested. "And they're really throwing you off balance."

"That sounds a good bit like one of Mooney's clever sayings," said Pash. "But we're not handling that kind of stuff just now." He glowered at her. "What kind of statement are you willing to make about Malitoff's death?" he asked.

"I don't know anything about it," Mickey said. "Anyway, no more than the others who were in the place when the shots were fired. I was sitting in the office next to Mr. Malitoff's: I'd been shown there and was asked to wait."

"Yes; and then what?"

"I was waiting. When I heard the first shot, I got up. When I heard the other, I ran into the next office where the sounds seemed to have come from. And I saw him lying on the floor."

Pash wagged his head.

"I don't think we'll have much trouble breaking that down," he said. "You're in a jam, young woman, and you'd do yourself a good deal more good if you told the truth."

HE put his elbows upon the desk and began asking questions. He could be brutal and merciless; also he could keep up a constant fire of interrogations.

"How often have you been in Malitoff's?" he said.

"Never before," said Mickey.

"I understand you went there to get a setting replaced?"

"Yes."

"How come you picked out an expensive place like that for a little job?"

"I was talking to Mr. Mooney this morning just before he went out. He said if business didn't get better he'd have to go back to wrestling again, or something like that."

"What's that got to do with your going to Malitoff's?"

"That's what I'm going to tell you," said Mickey sweetly.

"Answer briefly, and to the point."

"Yes, I know that's a good way to do," said Mickey. "I've always believed in it. But as I was saying, Mr. Mooney was depressed, and he said he thought he'd take a few hours off, and just stroll around. His idea was that he'd look at jewelry. He likes jewelry. He says it always does him good to go into places where they had rich settings and fine gems, and just sit and talk about them, and look at them."

"Yeah," said Pash, "and then what?"

"After he'd gone out," said Mickey, "I thought of a clasp I have, with a stone missing; Mr. Mooney's talking about jewelry must have made me think about it. And it might be"—smiling and nodding at Jerry—"that his talking about high-priced places made me think of Malitoff's, and how I ought to go there and see if they had a setting like the one I'd lost. I'd tried all the low-priced places, and they didn't have it."

"You left your work in your office to do that?"

"Malitoff's is not far from our place. And I went there during my lunch-hour."

Exasperated at the easy plausibility of this, Pash began a barrage of questions; he was in the midst of it when there was a knock, and the door opened.

"Now, wait," said one of the policemen. "You can't come in here."

"Brother," said a young man in the doorway, "don't be so sure." He flourished a paper. "How are you, Captain?" he said cheerfully. "An order from Judge Anderson."

But Pash furiously gestured the document aside.

"How are police to run things if someone's always interfering with them?"

The young man with the paper laughed. And Jerry said:

"You see, Pash, it's only the policeman's idea he should run things. The courts know he shouldn't."

"I don't want any criticism from you," said Pash. "You're up to your neck in trouble, and you'd better start thinking about yourself."

"Believe me," said Jerry, "that's what I'm doing—though at the same time, my trouble is mostly all in your imagination. In a half-hour I'll be walking out of here, and telling you good-by."

"If you walk out, Mooney," said the Captain, his eyes going to Mickey, "you'll do it alone. And in the end you'll be coming back. You're in this thing, and well we know it. You've outsmarted us before; but this time we've got you pretty well tangled up."

"I've often showed you how wrong you were," said Jerry. "And I don't think I'll have to start making changes in the act now. Before they turn the lights on over the door tonight, Captain, I'll have you chewing at your thumb and admitting that sometimes, as a cop, you're pretty cold."

CHAPTER SEVEN

BUT when Jerry talked with young Huntly Downs, of Burgess & Downs, a little later, in a side room, he wasn't nearly so confident.

"As far as *I* go," he said, "everything's all right. But this thing about Mickey's got me down."

"Who's he?" asked Downs.

"What you mean is who is she?" said Jerry. "My secretary. Didn't you see her out there?"

"Oh, yes," said young Downs. "Awfully nice-looking, too. But what's she got to do with this thing?"

"You know this jewelry place I was in," said Jerry; "I suppose Curren told you about that. Well, it just happened that Mickey was there about an hour or so after I was. And while she was there, the proprietor was knocked off."

Downs stared at him.

"Not murdered!"

"Yes," said Jerry. "They say he was cold when the people reached him. Shot twice. The thing that gives it a nasty twist is that Mickey was in the next office to Malitoff's at the time. She runs in to him when she hears the shots; and when the others come piling in, they find her there. And the police are all for holding her for murder."

"It looks ugly," said Downs, "but as long as there was no reason for her doing such a thing, I suppose we'll be able to straighten it out somehow."

"Now, wait," said Jerry. "The police haven't got this—not yet, anyway—but it's something you'd better know. This Malitoff has been in a lot of things that

haven't looked so good. Mickey's brother worked for him, and in some kind of a job he stole a car. And Malitoff, afraid the boy'd squeal, shifted some other stuff on him and sent him to jail. It'd be just like Pash to dig that up and work it up into a plausible reason for what's just happened."

Young Downs' expression was serious.

"I've seen less made to look pretty bad."

"What I want you to do right now," said Jerry, "is to have the doors thrown open so we can move out. There's work to be done on all this, and we must have a chance to do it."

But Downs shook his head.

"I can fix it for you, but they'll hang on to the girl—for a day or two, anyway. But I want to have a talk with her. Maybe there'll be some angles that'll turn the thing around in her favor." There was a pause, and then the young attorney said: "What started this going, Jerry? Is it one of your romantic adventures?"

Jerry grinned. "What do you think?" he said.

"What I think," said Downs, "is that Robin Hood, and Brennan on the Moor, lived a long time ago. Their kind of stuff's not generally understood nowadays. If you keep playing at it, you'll get yourself in a jam some day that no one'll be able to get you out of."

"O. K.," said Jerry. "But why can't a guy have a little fun?"

IN Pash's office once more, Downs said: "I'd like to speak to the girl now, Captain."

"Not with Mooney standing by," said Pash suspiciously.

"He'll not be," said Downs. "I'd like to have him taken into Judge Anderson's court right now and arraigned for a hearing tomorrow."

"And in the meantime, to have him running loose," grumbled Pash. "And making more trouble."

Jerry waved his hand to Mickey.

"Sit tight," he said. "Mr. Downs'll see that you're treated right. And I'll be back in a couple of hours. If I'm not, I'll call you up and report how things are going."

After Judge Anderson had admitted Jerry to bail, Downs returned to Headquarters for a talk with the girl. Mooney called a cab and was hurried to his office. Ates was there, and as Jerry came in, he got up and looked at him with wide eyes. Jerry saw an early edition of an evening paper lying on Mickey's desk.

"I see you've been reading the news," he said.

"Where is she?" said Ates, his freckles seeming to dissolve and reappear again.

"She's at Headquarters," said Jerry. "And," he added bitterly, "hoping we're going to do something."

"Let's start doing it right away. She can't be in that place. Not in a cell," said Ates. "They've got rats in cells; and Mick's afraid of rats."

"All right, kid. Take it easy," said Jerry. "She's not in a cell. And she'll not be. We'll have her out." He lit a cigarette. "Anybody called?"

"Yeah—Mr. Chubby, and Mr. Gootch. And the newspapers. I told them you were out. That friend of Mickey's in the dress shop called a couple of times. She was crying. She'd heard what's happened, and she said she wants to talk to you about something important."

Jerry hunted out the telephone number, and in a moment or two had the used-gown shop on the wire.

"Oh, Mr. Mooney!" said Nora Burns. "I was just going to call again. This terrible thing about Mickey! What shall we do? How can we help her?"

"All we can do just now is try and think," said Jerry. "I've found when I do that I most always find something."

"I called because I have something to tell you," said Nora. "It's something you ought to know."

"I'll be over there in a few minutes," said Jerry, and he called to Ates:

"Hold on for a while. I'm going out. If anybody comes in, ask them to wait. If anybody telephones, you don't know anything."

"I'm dumb," said Ates.

"You're especially that way if any reporters come talking around. You work for me and get fifteen bucks a week. Outside of that, nothing has ever happened in the place."

In a little while he entered the Hortense Shop; and he found Nora Burns, her eyes red with weeping.

"I think I'll go simple," she said to him. "I've cried ever since I heard them tell about the thing over the radio."

"Well, try to quit it," said Jerry. "And tell me what you've got to say."

She began to relate, disjointedly, what the girl had said earlier that day.

"Now, wait," said Jerry, after a few moments. "What's this about a promise? A promise to do what?"

"She promised me to never go near Malitoff. I said to her that day—"

"What day?" interrupted Jerry. "Keep the thing pinned together."

"It was the day poor Tommy was sent to prison," explained Nora, sobbing. "I thought she'd die, she looked so white and sick. And we were standing there—"

"Standing where?"

"In the corridor at City Hall. We were waiting for Malitoff. She wanted to see him. She said she wanted a close look, so she'd remember him. And when he'd passed us, she took hold of my arm and pointed after him: she was shaking, and could hardly speak. And she said she was going to kill him!"

"Now, get your breath," said Jerry, disturbed. "And keep down the excitement. You're saying something serious, and I want to know how to value it. Mickey said she was going to kill Malitoff. She said it on the day her brother was sent to prison on Malitoff's evidence."

"Yes. And I begged her for God's sake not to do it. But she said she would. She told me," said Nora Burns, her hands clasped together, "if she had anything to do it with, she'd follow him right then and fix him before he got out of the building."

"Mickey said that?" Jerry stared at the woman.

"Mr. Mooney," said Nora, "I'm saying this because I think you ought to know it. I wouldn't tell anyone else."

"Yeah, I know," said Jerry. "It don't make me feel very good; but just the same, telling it to me was the right thing to do." He lighted a cigarette. "What else is there? Tell me more about this promise."

"I tried to make her promise never to go near Malitoff. But she wouldn't do it. Then I asked her to promise if she ever did, she'd tell me before she went. She said she'd do that. And this morning when she came to look at the dresses, she told me where she was going."

"She said she was going to his place to shoot him?"

"She didn't say it, no. But she had the same look in her face that I saw in it that day after the trial."

WHEN Jerry arrived at his office about a quarter of an hour later, it was dark with cigarette- and pipe-smoke, and crowded with young men who sat upon the chairs and desks and talked loudly. One of them, armed with a camera which had a flashlight attachment, backed him against the wall as soon as he arrived.

"Get your pan all straightened out, Jerry," the young man advised, "because this is going to be in the last edition."

"Where's the cane you had on when you went into Malitoff's?" asked another of the young men. "We've heard you got there looking like the grand duke of some place. Get it out, Jerry, and hook it on your arm for a little class."

"Now, listen," said Jerry; "I'm not feeling any too good, and I'd rather not hear any remarks."

A young man with a pipe, who sat hugging his knees on top of a desk, said:

"What's the idea of you feeling poorly? I've had inside instructions on the value of that red ice. Twelve grand! Nobody with that value on them could feel anything but fine."

"What drawer have you got it in, Mooney?" said the youth with the camera. "I'd like to take a slam at it. They could make the page up with the ruby on one side and you on the other, looking at it across four columns of story telling just how you pulled the job."

Jerry grinned; he'd given many a good story to this crew, and he knew they were friendly. But at the same time he knew a news-hawk was completely a news-hawk.

"What I was doing this morning," he informed them, "was amusing myself. Fresh air, and a stroll around town. Also a drop-in, here and there, to refresh the eyesight, and put a new edge on the appreciation for art objects. Just that. And I happened to stop at the wrong place. How could I tell, ahead of time, that somebody had fixed up a little trick on the worthy merchant? And what's a good bit more, how could I know that I was going to get an armful of publicity by way of Headquarters?"

"Your story, then," said the thin-nosed youth, "is that you were not tempted."

"The only thing I like to do about rubies," said Jerry, "is look at them. Slipping them into the side pocket is a trick I leave for somebody else."

"What about the girl?" asked another reporter. "Being held for sinking two bullets into the Malitoff system and putting it permanently out of commission?"

"That," said Jerry, "is something else."

"It's been hinted that it isn't," said the reporter.

"Pash doesn't hint it," said the young man with the long chin. "He tosses it right out where everyone can see and hear it. One job, he says, and it ought

to be one pinch. He looks to have you in the calabooza almost any minute."

"Pash has so many ideas that none of them have a chance to operate," said Jerry. "He sits on them the way an old hen sits on a group of eggs, hoping one of them'll hatch."

"How long has this girl been in your office?" said a youth with a soggy-looking cigarette hanging from his mouth.

"A couple of years."

"I hear," said the youth, shifting the soggy cigarette skillfully, "she jumps out with you now and then to a dance."

"Not as often as I'd like," said Jerry.

"Was it funny, or wasn't it, that she happened in at Malitoff's just a little after Engle picked you up?"

"Things do happen," said Jerry. "And that was one of them."

"Then you deny that the ruby had anything to do with the two slugs?" said the young man with the thin nose.

"How could I deny it when I don't know anything about it?"

"But you have heard about it, haven't you?"

"I was listening while Pash bounced the idea up and down on his desk awhile ago. Engle had handed it to him. But they're both wrong more times than they're right."

THERE was a fire of questions for the best part of a half-hour; Jerry answered good-humoredly, and the group gradually began to fade out. The thin-nosed young man with the long chin was among the last. And he said to Jerry:

"From a news point of view, you've been highly unsatisfactory. And I think you'd have done better if you loosened up a trifle. Because the late editions'll not look so good to you. There'll be a pretty close-knit and abrupt little gang of facts: Mooney went to Malitoff's, looked at some high-priced gems. One, valued at twelve thousand dollars, is missed. Mooney is arrested. An hour later his secretary, who is remarkably good-looking, appears in the place. Malitoff is shot. The girl is found beside him. Protests she is innocent, but is also arrested. Mooney is released, but it's expected he'll be taken into custody again before the day's over." The young man pulled down his hat and settled himself for departure. "How does that sound to you?"

"It's not too agreeable," grinned Jerry; "but I've taken worse, and come through without springing a wheel."

After the office had been cleared of reporters, Jerry went into his own room; he put his feet upon the desk and began to smoke and think. What he'd lately learned was gnawing at his vitals. That Mickey had actually shot Malitoff, that she'd waited coldly and patiently for an opportunity; and when that came she'd put two bullets in him, was now hardly to be denied. She'd put the pressure on the night before to go into the case of the mending-shop girl. She'd wanted something done: and she'd seemed to want to figure in it herself. In the second place, there was this thing about her saying she'd shoot Malitoff for loading those five years on her brother. In the third place, she'd had a gun in her handbag—Jerry had seen it. But when the police searched her after the shooting, she didn't have it.

There were windows in the office, of course; if one of them had been open she might have tossed the gun through it. But a weapon missing in a room always associated itself with an open window in the minds of the police.

Jerry called to Ates, but there was no reply. He looked into the other office; The boy was curled up in his chair as though asleep.

"Hey, listen," said Jerry. "What's the idea of sleeping in office hours?"

"Excuse me," said Ates. "I wasn't asleep. I was thinking."

Jerry grinned. "Pretty deep," he said. "That much thinking ought to get you something. But before you go into it again, see if you can get Gootch for me."

After a few moments of telephoning, Ates reported:

"The last they heard of him was fifteen minutes ago. He told them he was on his way here, and to tell you so if you called."

The boy stood in the doorway as if reluctant to leave.

"I'm thinking about Mickey," he said. "I can't get her out of my mind."

"Me and you," said Jerry. "I've been thinking so hard about her my brain's worn clean down to my eyebrows."

"I hope," said Ates, "where she is they've got good lights and magazines to read, and things like that. Mick aint the kind that cries about things, but she worries."

"Have you ever had any idea what it's about?"

"Listen," said Ates, "but don't ever tell her I said it. She might get sore at me. I think she's got a tough brother.

Do you know what I mean, Mr. Mooney? I aint sure if he's younger or older than her, but he must be kind of knotty. And she's thinking about him when she worries."

"What does she say?"

"She don't say anything right out. But the brother must be in some kind of a jam. Somebody's riding him. Do you know anything about that, Mr. Mooney?"

"Yeah, a little."

"Would you know who that party is?"

"I couldn't be sure."

Ates shifted his feet, and looked down at them. Then he said:

"Do you think it could have been this Malitoff?"

"What makes you think of him?"

"Mick was sore at somebody. She went around to Malitoff's, and he was shot."

"Yeah—and what next?"

Ates was white; he put his hand on Jerry's arm, and lowered his voice:

"This morning, here in the office, she had a gun."

"Mickey had?"

"I saw her take it out of her handbag; she put it in the drawer in her desk."

"Well?" said Jerry.

"After I read in the paper what had happened, I got scared. I looked in the drawer. And the gun wasn't there. When she went out, she must have taken it with her."

Jerry looked at him.

"You like Mickey, don't you, Ates?"

"She's always been swell with me. I was a mutt when I first came here. And she helped me."

"That being so," said Jerry, "you're keeping everything you've seen or heard to yourself. You're telling no one."

"I'm not," said Ates. "Nobody'll find out anything from me."

CHAPTER EIGHT

A SHORT time later Gootch appeared in Jerry's office; he sat by the desk and smoked a high-smelling cigarette.

"After I read the news of these things that have happened, I did not wait to speak to you. And I was not sure if that was possible because of the police," he told Jerry.

"They had me for a while," said Jerry.

"So, right away I went out again to these Middle City Tower, and began to ask questions. Very careful, you understand. I did not want to make suspicion. There were things I knew you'd like to hear. What had happened in Malitoff's place before the shots were fired. Also, what happened afterward."

"Very important things," said Jerry.

"Also," said Gootch, "there was something else I wanted to know: who were there—what people were present in the showroom, and in the offices when the shooting was done."

"How did you make out?"

"I have questioned, and I have analyzed," said Gootch. "I found the girl entered the office at fifteen minutes of one o'clock. That is also the time the police have for it. It is a slack period. Most people shopping have stopped to take lunch; also some of Malitoff's employees have gone out for theirs." Gootch took some slips of paper from his pocket. "At 12:20 a man and his wife came in. They left at 12:48. A girl came in at 12:28—a stranger. She had a small dog. She left at 12:55. A messenger-boy delivered a telegram at 12:50 and left at once. At 12:52 a young man came in to price an engagement ring. Two old ladies stopped in to see a diamond brooch which one of them had looked at the day before. They came in at 12:56. These two old ladies, the young man who was pricing rings, and the girl from your office, were the only patrons in the place when the shots were fired that killed Malitoff."

"You are sure of that?" said Jerry.

"I am positive," said Gootch. "Also I know that the police, after checking up, have said the same thing."

"Nice close work," said Jerry.

"The doorman," said Gootch, "threw the lock on at exactly 12:58. I read it on the automatic device on the door."

"How'd you manage to get in?"

"I said I was a friend of Malitoff's," said Gootch. "I had been there earlier in the day. These people of the store had seen me. Engle questioned me. It was while he was doing this that I learned most of the things I have written down."

Jerry grinned.

"Engle's not a bad cop," he said. "But he does talk too much." He looked at Gootch for a moment. "How many of the store's people were there at 12:58? And who were they?"

"The doorman was there," said Gootch. "Mr. Prawn, the head sales-

man; Plutstine, the diamond setter; and a porter. Four in all."

"And it wasn't possible for anyone to get out before the lock was taken off the door?"

"No."

"When was it taken off?"

"When the police arrived. At 1:08," said Gootch.

"Take them all together—customers, employees, police. Who do they think did it?"

"The girl. The idea is no one else could have done it. Engle was very sure. He threatened; he shook his fist."

Jerry pulled down one corner of his mouth in scorn.

"He thinks that gets him something."

"Also," said Gootch, "I found that Malitoff had enemies."

"Who?" asked Jerry.

"It was not said. Maybe they did not know."

"People like Malitoff always have a lot of ex-friends," said Jerry. "And often they are enterprising people. A bullet or two don't mean much to them."

When Gootch had finished and gone, Jerry had Ates get him a number on the telephone.

"Hello, Sid," said Jerry, when a voice spoke in his ear. "This is Mooney."

"Are you still at City Hall, Jerry?"

"No. I stepped out of there."

"I was laying money you would. Right away, when I heard about it, I said: 'They aint got no rummy in Mooney. He'll be out before they can turn around.'"

"I wonder if you can get hold of Chubby for me?"

"Sure."

"All right. Tell him I'll be at your place in fifteen minutes."

"Right away."

CHUBBY was sitting at a corner table when Jerry entered Sid's restaurant; Jerry sat down opposite him, put some cigarettes on the table and ordered red wine.

"Have you seen Cora?"

"Yes; and everything's all right from her end. It's good you had her planted there to take the stone when the other girl made the pass. That'd've been a hard spot for anybody to talk themselves out of."

"There are some others just as hard," said Jerry. "This killing's got an ugly angle. For the last hour I've been trying to think how I might get working on it; but nothing seems any good." He sipped at his drink and then put down the glass. "What word have you had from Doxey?"

"I saw her an hour ago. When I told her about the ruby, her eyes just laid out on her cheeks. But she asked me where it came from, and when I told her, right away she started to get nervous—I guess about Malitoff being knocked off."

"Did she make an offer?"

"Yes. She thought about eight grand."

"Take it. And get cash."

"O. K.," said Chubby. "But somebody else might offer more."

"The people who are to get this money can't wait."

"I'll get it," said Chubby. "Inside an hour."

Jerry sipped at his drink once more.

"When I saw you this morning, you said there was a party at Malitoff's you were going to ask about."

"That was the doorman. Yeah, I found out about him. His name's Sudler. Was one time a boxer. Not much good, I hear; he got the thick ears mostly working as a sparring partner."

"Anything else?"

"No; but if you want more, I'll go a little further."

Jerry got up and went to a telephone-booth at the back of the room. He dialed a number, and when the reply came, he said:

"Georgie?"

"Yeah; that you, Mooney?" The voice was full of excitement. "Where are you—down at the D. A.'s? Work on him, big boy. Don't let him get set."

"I was wondering if you'd heard what's happened."

"I got it about an hour ago," said the voice, "and I left a guy on the rubbing-table, with him still sweating, and took a cab for City Hall to tell them what I thought. A girl like Mickey in the can! For knocking somebody off! Aint they got no sense? Does a person have to be that dumb to be a cop?"

"Sometimes," said Jerry, "they get excited."

"They were that way with me," said Georgie, "and were for throwing me out."

"Did they?"

"Well, they did get me out, with about six of them pulling on the oars. But I wouldn't call that throwing. And now, listen," said the voice, "what are you doing about this thing?"

"I'm on that right now. I called to ask if you know a party named Sudler."

"Sudler?" Georgie considered. "Seems to me I do. What's he like?"

"He used to be a fourth-rate pug. He's got the ears and the scars, but never had much else."

"Sudler," said Georgie, still thinking. "Yeah, I know him. But I don't know where from. And listen: the only thing I'm sure of is that he's some kind of a heel. Just hold on a while and let me turn him over. I'll get him, nice and bright, for you."

"I'll be running around to your place in another ten minutes," said Jerry. "Keep after him between now and then."

He hung up the receiver and returned to Chubby.

"I may get something about Sudler myself," he said. "But I'd like you to keep him in mind. Also, see what you can do with the other employees at Malitoff's. There may be something useful."

He talked awhile with Chubby; then he left the restaurant, and after turning a few corners entered a building on Arch Street. In a huge room fitted as a gymnasium, he found Georgie Lotts, big, blond and with a shock of hair hanging over one eye, superintending the efforts of a half dozen stout men, past middle age, who lay in a row upon a wrestling mat, lifting and lowering their legs in unison.

"Hey, listen," said Georgie; "I'm all up in the air. These parties must all be crazy. If I ever get a chance at that pretzel they call Engle, I'm going to tie his ears under his chin."

"Take it easy," advised Jerry. "Don't do anything that'll make her more trouble than she's got already."

Georgie had forgotten the row of stout performers upon the mat.

"That Sudler you phoned about: I've got him pegged. I used to see him at Rudy Salvo's place. I thought he worked there, and one time I asked Rudy what he had a guy like that on the pay-roll for, and Rudy told me he wasn't. He said Klem paid him."

"What Klem?" asked Jerry.

"That Klem that has an office in the W. M. Z. Building—you know, he buys pieces of things: of horses, of bets, of fighters, of outdoor shows."

"Yeah," said Jerry. "Eddie Klem. What was Sudler's job with him?"

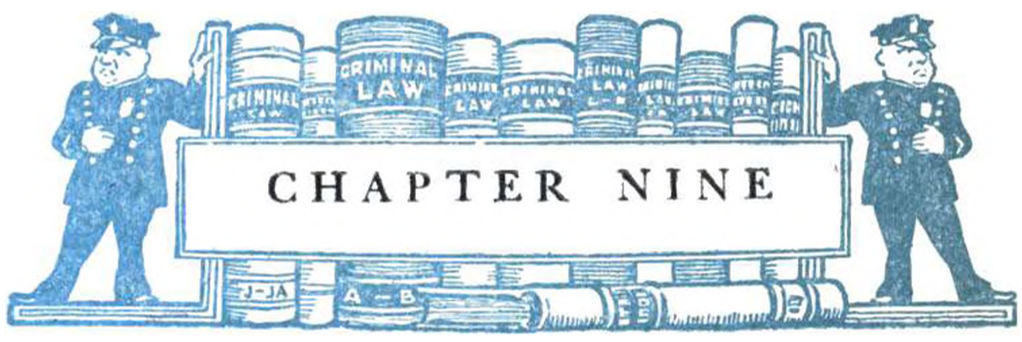
"I don't know," said Georgie. "But Klem's smart. He's got little turns the other fellow don't think of. And maybe he finds a dumb-bell like that comes in handy once in a while."

"Maybe you're right," said Jerry. "Though I don't think you could get me to follow you more than halfway on it."

"Sudler worked on the road with some of Klem's fighters," said Georgie. "Maybe he even boxed with some of them. Or he might have been a kind of a front in some of Klem's shows where the customers were rough."

Jerry looked at his watch.

"I think I'll slip around and have a talk with Eddie," he said.



JERRY MOONEY dropped in at a corner drug-store not far from Georgie's place, hunted out a number in a small book, and dialed it. There was a murmuring voice, a woman's voice.

"Mrs. Doxey?" Jerry asked.

"Who's calling?"

"Mooney."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Mooney. But you know, I never talk business over the telephone."

"I'm asking a question," said Jerry. "You've been in the jewelry trade for some time, and I thought you might be able to tell me. Do you know Eddie Klem?"

"I've done business with him."

"Was he interested, financially or any other way, in Malitoff's business?"

There was a pause; then the voice said:

"I've heard—though I don't know—that he was a partner."

"O. K.," said Jerry. "That's all. And many thanks."

He hung up and left the place, making his way north on Broad Street. He turned east a few blocks below and in at the entrance to a huge office building. Jerry looked at the long display of names in white letters upon the gleaming black wall, and located the office of E. B. Klem. Arriving at the floor indicated, Jerry went in at a door which carried a number only. A wide-headed man with a bulging stomach sat reading a newspaper at a desk. He looked at Jerry.

"What's wanted?" he said.

"Klem," said Jerry. "Where is he?"

The man did not seem pleased at the abruptness of this; he put down the newspaper.

"What's your business?"

"I forget," said Jerry. "But hurry in and tell him Mooney's here; maybe he'll get talking with me anyhow."

"He's not in," said the man.

"You wouldn't go out of your way to kid me, would you?" said Jerry.

The man got up.

"Suppose," he said, "you step outside."

"Listen," said Jerry; his voice lifted, its sudden volume filling the room: "Tell Klem that Mooney's here and wants to see him. And put away that sour look. It's not getting you anything, so why waste it?"

There was the sound of a chair being pulled back, and then the door of an inner office opened and a man appeared. "Hello, Eddie," said Jerry. "I haven't seen you for some time. How are they treating you?"

The man was thin-faced; he had black, dull-looking hair and smooth white skin. There was what might be called a habitual smile about his mouth, and his eyes were bright with a fixed derision.

"This is a surprise," he said. "I thought they had you in the can."

"All a mistake," said Jerry. "The boys were a little hasty."

"What about the glamorous office-assistant?" said Klem, lounging in the doorway. "Did they change their minds about her too?"

"Not yet," said Jerry. "You see, the way these parties are put together, they can only think of one thing at a time. But they'll get around to the other idea in a little while."

The derision in Klem's eyes was more marked than ever.

"Do you want to see me?" he asked.

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Jerry, "I did have that in mind when I headed in here."

HE followed Klem into the other office. The man didn't ask him to sit down, but closed the door and stood staring at him.

"What's it about?" he said.

"I thought it might be pleasant if you and me had a few words about Malitoff," said Jerry.

"What would that be for?"

"It was just a notion of mine," Jerry said. "Seeing you were in the business with him, I thought maybe a little conversation might work you up out of your depression. You know what I mean; when a guy you're pretty close to is suddenly sunk, right in the shop, you just naturally feel down about it."

Klem's eyes were half-closed now, and the smile about his mouth was ugly.

"I always pick the people I want to talk to about private matters," he said. "So if that's all you want, what say if you move on out."

"What's the hurry?" said Jerry cheerfully. "We've got all the rest of the afternoon ahead of us." He took out a cigarette and tapped it on the back of his hand. "You and Malitoff have been in quite a few things together, I hear."

"I've been in things with a lot of people," said Klem.

"Yeah, but none of the others have got two bullets in them. That's what makes Malitoff interesting just now. The police are busy turning things over. Of course, I know just as well as you, that their work's faulty; but if you give them time, they always dig up a little something. And the Federal cops'll be in on this case too. They'll be looking into the times Malitoff imported the ice and forgot to mention it to the Customs people. You'll figure in that, you see. And the talk might begin to go around. Which won't be so nice."

"Well, when I begin to find myself in anything I don't care for," said Klem, "I'll make my own arrangements. I'll not go to you looking for help."

"That," said Jerry, "is what's called prejudice. I know I've loaded you into a police car a few times when I was a regular cop. But things like that are of the past. I hurry around here this afternoon to split up some talk with you on important current matters, and right away you begin reaching back into the year before last to get hold of something that oughtn't to bother you at all."

"Alonzo!" called Klem to the man in the outer office.

The man appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Mooney's going out," said Klem.

"This way," said Alonzo to Jerry, with an air of satisfaction.

"The bum's rush!" grinned Jerry. He lighted the cigarette. "I know just how it's started. Many's the time I've been slammed through a door and up against an opposite wall." He blew out a rift of smoke and looked at Klem genially. "But you're making a mistake here. Alonzo sags too much in the middle to do the job alone. Why don't you hop to the phone for a minute and get that number at Middle City Tower? Maybe Sudler'd run over and lend a hand."

Klem looked at Jerry for a moment in silence. Then he motioned to Alonzo.

"That'll be all," he said. When the man had left the office, Klem smiled. "You move around, don't you?" he said.

"With me, everything's a proceeding," Jerry answered. "You were next in this one; and that's why I'm here."

"Yeah," said Klem. "I see that. But what's behind it?"

"As I go from one thing to another," said Jerry, "I come across items that I think ought to be looked into. That you were hooked up with Malitoff was one of those. That your bouncer, Sudler, is doorman in the Malitoff place, was another. The secret in getting along as a private cop," said Jerry, "is to give everything a good looking-up."

"Was that why you went to Malitoff's place today?" asked Klem. "And is that why the girl followed in after you, sometime later?"

"Things break badly sometimes," said Jerry. "This wasn't our lucky day."

"A twelve-grand stone disappears while you're looking at it. A man's shot while the girl's in the next room—a room with an open communicating door." Klem's eyes gleamed with derision. "If I was in the cops," he said, "I'd take a good bit of interest in those two things as a pair."

"Don't worry," said Jerry. "Headquarters is bearing down from all angles. That's the one thing they always do; and knowing that, is what made me get thinking about you. Of course, you being in the business with Malitoff, and your ex-bodyguard Sudler now working there, might not mean anything at all. What I mean is, nothing interesting. But you never can tell how a fellah like Pash'll see a thing."

"If the police get looking at me about the matter," said Klem, "all I'll do is have a big laugh." But he was not laughing at the moment; there was a scowling threat in his thin face as he looked at Jerry. "I don't like what you're saying, Mooney, or the way you're saying it. And I'm telling you to keep at a distance in my affairs."

Jerry grinned cheerfully.

"You wouldn't believe how far away I can get," said Jerry. "Because mixing in other people's business is something I never do. But then, sometimes I have affairs of my own; and when I'm working with them, I got to get in pretty close."

Klem said nothing for a space. And when he spoke again, his voice was cold.

"I understand," he said, "you've been running around a good bit lately with this girl that works for you."

With the unhurried motion of a big cat, Jerry moved toward the man. And he said:

"In a little while she's going to stand up with me and take on the job of being Mrs. Mooney. Aint that all right?"

"With me, it is," said Klem. "But what I'm working up to is this: seeing she's in trouble, you ought to be careful. Keep your ideas to yourself; don't go drifting around talking. A good bit could happen to anyone in a spot like she's in, you know."

"Yeah, I know," said Jerry. "It's a thing I've been having in my mind all afternoon. But," he said, "while you're thinking that way, Eddie, don't forget the things that could happen to any parties that tried to sew her up. They'd be plenty, and they wouldn't be easy to get away from."

"I see what you mean," Klem said. "And I'm glad you came in and passed the time of day. Nothing's really been done, but"—and his eyes shone with derision—"we understand each other. And that's something."

CHAPTER TEN

JERRY, on his way out, paused long enough in the lower corridor of the W. M. Z. Building to call Steve Curren at the district attorney's office.

"What's new?" he asked.

"We're moving," said Steve. "Slowly, though. The police are still yapping. We have to get most of that out of our ears before we can really get down to business."

"Did you look after Mickey, as I asked you?"

"Right away. I went into Pash's office, raised some hell and took her away from them. She's now in a room in the sheriff's department, with one of our men at the door to see that she's not disturbed too much."

"Good boy, Steve," said Jerry. "I'll not forget this."

"Pash's people have been looking for the gun," said Curren. "But as far as I know, they've had no success."

"Are they still at Malitoff's?"

"Pash is there himself just now. With a couple of his best workmen."

"When'll your people move in?"

"I'll be down there myself in the next half-hour."

"That'll be fine," said Jerry. "Because I'll be wandering along that way, and I don't know but what I'll be trying to squeeze in also. You being there'll save me an argument."

"O. K.," said the assistant district attorney. "Come right along. But don't forget, Jerry: in this office we deal in law, and law only. All comers, friends or enemies, are treated alike."

Jerry grinned at this. But he said:

"I get what you mean. And many thanks, Steve. So long."

WHEN Jerry reached his office, Ates Haley met him at the door.

"You've got a caller. He's inside."

It was Chubby, and when he saw Jerry, he got up out of his chair in swift excitement.

"Listen," he said. "Cora's in the hospital."

"What's happened?" asked Jerry.

"I called her place a while ago to tell her I was coming in to pick up the ice. And then I hear it from the landlady. She said she'd knocked on Cora's door, and she'd got no answer. Also the dog didn't bark, which was something it seldom didn't do. And then she went in. Cora was on the floor—completely out. Somebody had hit her on the head. And the whole place was torn up, as if somebody had been looking for something. Also," said Chubby, "the pooch was dead."

"Looks like the ruby's gone," said Jerry quietly. But his brows knitted.

"That's the first thing came into my mind," said Chubby. "I called up the hospital, but they wouldn't let me talk to her."

"Where is she?" asked Jerry.

Chubby named the hospital.

"I'll run down there," said Jerry. "Hold on here until you hear from me."

He got a cab in a few minutes, and in a few more he was at the hospital, and was shown to the girl's room. Cora had a bandage about her head, and her face was pale. But she greeted him eagerly; and when the nurse had left the room, she said:

"I guess the whole job's messed up, Jerry. But I did my best; I never thought of a thing like this."

"What do they say about you?" said Jerry. "I mean, the doctors?"

"It's just a bump," said Cora. "I'll be out in a couple of days."

"I don't feel too good about it," said Jerry. "Here I frame this thing, thinking I'm clever, and now look: Mickey's being held while the police look into a murder. And here this thing's happened to you."

"You don't mention the ruby," said the girl.

"I suppose it's gone," said he.

"It is. I had it hidden, waiting for Chubby. But they found it."

"Do you feel you could tell me a little about what happened?"

"My apartment bell rang. And a woman's voice spoke to me on the door telephone. She said she'd like to see me on some business, and could I give her a few moments? So I clicked the street door for her, and she came up. I had never seen her before. She was tall, an artificial blonde, and very well dressed. She spoke in a low voice and smiled, and was very well mannered. She wanted to know about her sister, who, she said, once lived in the house. She was agitated; I thought she was going to faint, and I went into the kitchen to get her a glass of water. While I was there, I heard a sudden and peculiar sound from my little dog Toto. When I came back into the room, Toto was stretched out on the floor, and the woman was standing looking down at him.

"She said she thought he had a fit; I bent over him and then she hit me with something. When I came to, the police were there and the people with the ambulance."

"She'd cleaned up on the dog first to make sure there'd be no noise," said Jerry.

"Yes," said Cora. "I think that was the idea. And when I saw how the place had been ransacked, I thought of the ruby; and before I'd let them take me away, I looked to see if it was where I'd put it. But it wasn't. The woman had found it and taken it with her."

Jerry talked with the girl awhile, and then, after he'd seen the people in the hospital business office and made all arrangements for care and medical attention, he left the building. At the first public telephone he called his office.

"Mooney: Proceedings," came the boyish voice of Ates Haley.

"This is Mooney," Jerry said. "Is Chubby still there?"

"Yessir. Waiting for you."

In another moment Chubby's voice sounded.

"Hiyah! Been expecting you."

"I've just had a little talk with Cora," Jerry said. "She told me how she came to get slammed that way. It was a woman."

"No!" said Chubby. "Listen, fellah, they're getting into everything, aint they?"

"You know some of Eddie Klem's people, don't you?"

"Not many; and them not much."

"What about a woman: tall, a made blonde. Very ladylike when she wants to be."

"That might be Sonya," said Chubby. "But look: don't tell me she's the party that leaned her weight on Cora?"

"That was the description. I want you to get busy. If you can, find out if Klem's had her on any kind of a job. Call up my place every now and then and report. And let me know where I can get you."

"Right," said Chubby. "You'll be hearing."

Once more in the street, Jerry headed for the Middle City Tower, deep in thought. When he'd heard the story of Nora Burns, and listened to what Ates Haley had said about the gun, he'd become convinced that Mickey, because of the wrong done her brother, had shot Malitoff.

But now things were changing. There were other threads in the fabric he was handling; surprising and exciting threads.

"Something's been going on inside," he told himself. "Maybe I'm getting too sunshiny, but it looks as if I could show Mick out in the clear, after all."

THERE was a policeman standing at each side of the door at Malitoff's when Jerry reached there.

"No visitors, brother," said one of them.

Jerry grinned amiably. "I'm wanting a few words with Mr. Curren, of the district attorney's office," he said.

"There's no one from the district attorney's office here," said the man.

Jerry's grin broadened. "Captain Pash is here," he said. "I'd like to speak to him. The name is Mooney."

The policeman opened the door a trifle and spoke to someone inside. And in a few moments, Pash appeared.

"What you want?" he asked.

"It came into my mind awhile ago that if I came down here I might be able to turn up a few things," Jerry said, agreeably. "So I thought I'd have a few words with you."

"Listen," said Pash, his nutcracker face screwed up tightly: "the only words I want from you will be when I tell you what cell you're going to be put in. This is one time, Mooney, that I've got the knuckles in your neck, and I'm going to make you say *uncle* before I'm through."

"The real fault I've got to find with you," said Jerry, "is that you take everything too much to heart. You believe too much. A man that's been around as much as you ought to take a little time and sort things out."

"Keep him away from the door," said Pash to the policeman. "If he insists on hanging around, treat him rough."

He was about to close the door when Jerry said:

"Just a moment. Here's a mutual friend. —How are you, Steve?"—to the young assistant district attorney who had just stepped out of the elevator.

"Sorry if I've kept you waiting," said Curren as he shook Jerry by the hand.

"Not too much," said Jerry. "Just long enough for me to have a pleasant little chat with Captain Pash."

"Now, look here, Curren," said Pash, glowering, "I don't want this man interfering in my business. I don't want him here at all."

"Well, that's too bad," said Curren, who evidently was a young man who'd not stand glowering. "But I think *we* want him, Captain, on *our* business. I hope it doesn't annoy you too much."

Jerry followed Curren into the big showroom. There were a number of people from Headquarters present, some of whom knew Jerry and nodded to him. Pash, who had been talking to the salesman Prawn when Jerry's arrival interrupted him, resumed his questioning where he'd left off.

"I'm to understand, then," he said, "you never saw this girl before she came here today?"

"To the best of my knowledge, I never did," said Prawn.

"Did she show any excitement while she talked with you?"

"No sir."

"Nothing that would indicate that she was thinking of shooting a man?"

"Not anything."

"What were your impressions of her? What thoughts were in your mind while you talked with her?"

"I don't recall any marked impressions. She was a beautiful girl, handsomely dressed, and with nice manners."

"Did she ask to see Malitoff?"

"Not at once. She had some work—remounting and replacement; we talked about that for a while," said Prawn, anxiously. "But it was a piece of work that would be difficult to carry out. It was when we'd reached that place in the matter that she asked to see Mr. Malitoff."

"What did you do then?"

"I went into his office to ask him if he'd speak with her. He said he would. So I took her into one of the rooms that you see there, and told her Mr. Malitoff would see her in a few minutes."

"And then?"

"She sat down in a chair at the desk; and I went out of the room."

"Did you close the door after you?"

"Yes sir, I did."

"All right," said Pash, "that'll be enough for now. Maybe I'll listen to you again after a while."

"If you don't mind," said Jerry to Pash, "I'd like to have a few words with him." And before Pash could speak, he went on to Prawn: "How long have you worked for Malitoff?"

"I'm not sure," said the man. "But I'd say a dozen years."

"While you've been here, has he ever been in any other line of business?"

"Well, yes," said Prawn, after a moment's hesitation.

"Do you remember his being in trouble at any time?" Again the man hesitated. "Think hard! Trouble with the Government? Smuggling?"

"Yes," said Prawn, "I believe there was something of that kind."

"Have you known any of the people who were in that line with him?"

"No, I have not."

But here Pash interrupted. "What I want to know," he said to Jerry, "is what this has to do with your secretary?"

"It has nothing to do with her," said Jerry. "And that's the idea. I'm trying to get a few facts together somehow, that'll show she had nothing to do with this thing you're holding her for."

"The trouble Mr. Malitoff had with the Government," said Prawn, "happened some years ago. Mr. Malitoff has done no importing since then. His time has been given to this place, and to the buying and selling and renting of real property."

"Has he another office for that part of his business?" asked Curren.

"No sir. All Mr. Malitoff's affairs were carried on here. I had the management of his real-estate accounts; and I collected the rents."

Jerry was about to resume his questioning; but Pash gestured him aside.

"Now, wait a minute!" he said. "As I see it, this is only a waste of time." To Curren: "I can't allow this man to interfere in my case, because he's practically in custody himself on a charge that we feel pretty sure will hook him up with the killing."

Jerry beamed genially at the Captain.

"No interference meant, Captain," he said. "The police may go on just as though I wasn't here."

"Oh, we may, may we!" said Pash. "Well, that's pretty nice of you, aint it? What I thought was you were going to squeeze us out into the corridor!"

"No," said Jerry, "I wouldn't ever think of a thing like that. The police are often useful; I'm always for letting them stay, just to see what they'll do."

HOWEVER, as Pash's questioning of the other employees proceeded, Jerry seemed to lose interest. He spoke to a clerk, who was standing at one side.

"Where did the shooting take place?"

"There," said the man, pointing. "You see those offices? There are three of them. Mr. Malitoff's was the one in the center. The girl was shown into the one to the right of that."

"And the other one?" asked Jerry.

"That's used by Plutstine," said the man. "For repair work and such."

Jerry went into the room where Mickey had been shown by Prawn. His eyes went about carefully, point after point. There was the desk where she must have sat when Prawn closed the door. There was the doorway, leading into Malitoff's office. He noted the two windows; these seemed to attract him. He lifted one of them and looked out. There were no fire-escapes or projections by way of which any one could pass from one suite of offices to another.

There was a narrow traffic way below, and opposite was a low-built, shabby-looking building with a broad and much cluttered roof. He closed the window and went into Malitoff's office.

"Hello, Nugent," he said to the policeman stationed there.

"How are you, Jerry?" replied the policeman.

"Everything going right?"

"Except that the old man aint making much headway," said Nugent.

"He never does," Jerry said. "That old buzzard would rather use his needle any time than act like an intelligent cop."

He looked around the room. There was a spot of blood, showing where Malitoff had fallen; the stain was dark and ugly-looking. He threw up one of the windows and looked out.

"A long drop," he said.

"No chance there," said the policeman. "We've been all over that."

"What's been done about the gun?" asked Jerry.

"They're working on it, but no dice so far. Two men have combed everything, and they're going over it again. One of them was up here awhile ago for further orders, and he told me from the way people talk and act down there they not only didn't see that gun, but they never saw any gun."

"What building is that?" asked Jerry, pointing to the structure opposite.

"That's the Elysium Theater. The side of it. The front is around the corner on the next street."

Jerry went back to the room where the assistant district attorney was now working over the employees. He shook hands with Curren, who said in surprise:

"What? Going so soon? I thought you'd be snooping around here for the next hour or two."

"I may be back before the day's over," said Jerry. "But I'm thinking of some outside things just now, and, unless I'm mistaken, there's light beginning to show."

"I'm glad you think so," said Curren. "Things don't look so promising here."

"I didn't expect anything new when I came here," said Pash. "We had a case already. What it needs is putting together. The party that knocked off Malitoff is at Headquarters."

"The party *will* be at Headquarters," said Jerry. "Sometime in the next few hours." He smiled at Pash. "Be expecting a call from me, because I'm going to let you make the arrest."

"You'll always be a smart guy," sneered Pash. "But listen to this: I *am* going to make an arrest today. And the party I put my hand on will be you!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JERRY MOONEY called Sid's eating-place from a public telephone.

"What's the word on Chubby?" he asked.

"He called awhile ago and said if you phoned in, to say he was just finishing up, and he'd see you at your place in maybe a half-hour."

"O. K., Sid," Jerry answered. "Many thanks."

He reached his office in ten minutes' time.

"Chubby called," Ates told him. "He said he was on his way in."

Jerry lighted a cigarette and put his feet on his desk. The thing was opening up! The minute Chubby had mentioned Klem's name, things had started.

"There had to be a party like Klem in it," Jerry said to himself. "Also, there had to be a blonde in it, just to keep the books straight."

THE Burma ruby! That was the thing to start from. When he'd walked into Malitoff's that morning, all fixed to take the gem from the diamond merchant, it had never entered his head that there might be some one else thinking the same thing.

"Of course," he admitted, "if I'd really got my mind operating, I'd have known there must be. Because, when a thing like that is known to be locked up in a safe somewhere, the whole intelligentsia begins to buzz. Dozens of smart boys begin to edge into the section. There was some one," he mused, "all fixed, ready to pull their little trick. And me, like a big stiff, had to have Mickey walk in and take the shock."

There was one thing he agreed with Pash upon. The ruby and the murder were hooked together. He was still turning this over when Ates came in from the outer office.

"I've been reading a two-star," said Ates. "And it tells how the gun aint been found yet. It wasn't any place around the offices, or in anybody's pocket. Not in Mickey's, or any of the people's that worked in the place, and none of the customers had it. So, the paper prints, it must have been thrown out of the window."

"Yeah," said Jerry. "They're working on that."

"That little place down behind Middle City Tower is McCaldrum Street," said Ates. "If anything like a pistol was chucked out of a window and fell into McCaldrum Street, somebody'd see it. And they wouldn't keep it, for they'd hear about the murder; it'd be a hot gun, and might get them into trouble."

"Right," said Jerry.

"So," said Ates, "seeing nobody aint turned it in, I think it didn't fall into the street. Whoever heaved it out of the window, if anybody did, maybe gave it plenty of power, and maybe it fell on the roof of the theater across the street."

"It might be so," said Jerry. "But the police have thought of that too. And they've covered it, just as they have everything else."

"Did you look down on that roof?" Ates asked. "It's got all kinds of stuff on it—junk that once was things they used in plays. If anything was thrown there, it might slip under something else. If you'll let me off for a half-hour, I'd like to go down there and hunt on that roof."

"You'd not be allowed up there," said Jerry.

"Yes, I would," said Ates. "I know I would, and that's what made me think of it. Tony Cenzi's the watchman there; he lives in our street, and I know him. I've been up there with him a couple of times."

Ates was smart, and the office knew it. Jerry looked at him, and while the thing was still turning in his mind, the outer door opened and Chubby came in.

"All right," said Jerry to the boy, "give it a try. But remember, no talk. Not to anybody, or about anything."

Chubby seated himself beside Jerry's desk.

"I think I've got a little something," he said.

"Let's have it," said Jerry. "And I hope it's good."

"If you remember, as soon as you mentioned what this dame looked like—the one who socked Cora—I thought of Sonya," Chubby said. "Tall, plenty of shape, a made blonde, and with a lot of nerve. The first time I saw her, she was doing the hostess thing in a night-club that Klem had money in. Then I saw her running a swell place for him in Miami one time when Sime and me were down looking over a prospect. She's been stringing along with Klem ever since."

"Has she ever been in anything the police had hold of?" asked Jerry.

"She's been on the edge a couple of times. Only lately the Wranglers—a cozy kind of clip-joint she managed—was pulled, but she battled her way out of court, with Klem's help, as she always does. She lives at the Etruria. An old pal of mine, Tweedy—I think you know him—is a kind of a house cop there, and I went around and talked to him. He told me Sonya's been jittery ever since the Wranglers sunk. Money's short with her. Some days she keeps the telephone hot for a half-hour at a time trying to stick the label on somebody. But it never seems to work. But today she got a call that must have had stuff in it. For she phoned for a cab, and tore out of the place in a terrible hurry. And in about an hour she came back as fast as she'd gone, and as excited as hell."

"What time was that?" asked Jerry.

"The nearest Tweedy could put it, was early this afternoon."

"I think," said Jerry, "I'll step around to the Etruria and try and get up a conversation. Maybe it'll not turn out to be what I think; but Sonya's leading somewhere, and I've got a lot of interest in her. Put the lock on the door as you go out," he said, his hand on the knob. "The kid maybe'll not be back for a while."

But before he could open the door, the telephone rang. He went to it.

"Hello," he said.

"This is Steve Curren."

"Hello, Steve. What's going on?"

"You're going to be picked up. Pash has already sent Engle and another man out after you."

"Can't you talk him out of it? You know I've got a lot of going-around to do," said Jerry. "I've got to put enough stuff together in the next couple of hours to get the girl out of the can."

"I'd like to oblige you," said Curren. "But something happened since I saw you last. The police have dug up information that puts a kind of a new face on this whole thing. It seems the girl has a brother who got in trouble sometime ago, and this fellow Malitoff testified against him and sent him up for a stretch. The boy said the charges were false. And the girl threatened to kill Malitoff. Also, it's known that just a few days after she'd made this threat, she got a gun. Some one in the apartment she lives in has seen it, and reported it."

McCaldrum Street, directly behind Middle City Tower, was quite narrow; the huge office-building overhung it gloomily. The side wall of the theater was dingy-looking; at some long-past time it had been painted, but the paint had now peeled off in uncouth patches; the windows were high and dusty, the doorways battered.

Ates Haley appeared in the street about a quarter of an hour after he'd

left the Mooney office; with his hands in his trousers pockets, and chewing gum, he moved along with a careless air.

"It's best not to look too smart," he told himself. "That's the way you get people to taking notice. And I don't want to do that."

McCaldrum was a squeezed-up little street. Most times when you went along it there were broken packing-boxes, cartons, discarded excelsior and a lot of other junk at back doors waiting to be swept up and carted away. But this day the guys must have been in there early, for the whole street was looking tidy.

Ates moved on until he reached the rear of Middle City Tower. The ninth floor was a terrible way up; if anybody had heaved a gun out of a window up there and it hit the stones, it would've broken apart. It couldn't help it.

But Ates didn't think any of this had happened. His idea was, when anybody shot anybody else, especially in a place where there were a lot of other people, they were excited. They'd want to get the gun away as soon as they could. Being excited, they'd throw it hard. And if the gun that did this shooting was thrown hard out of a ninth-floor window of the Tower, it'd sail right across onto the roof of the theater.

So the boy opened the stage door and went in. It was gloomy and depressing inside; he knew where the light-switch was, and turned it on. And instantly a voice came from the interior:

"Hey, who's that?"

"Hello, Tony," said Ates. "Where are you?"

There was a halting step, and a small distorted shape appeared.

"How're you, Benny?" said Ates. "I thought it was Tony."

"No, it was me," said the twisted man. He leaned against the wall to take his weight off a crippled leg. "But I made believe it was Tony. I got so now I can talk just like him."

Ates grinned.

"You cert'n'y had me fooled, Ben," he said. "I was sure it was Tony."

"I'm getting better all the time," said the crooked man, much gratified. "I've been practicing an imitation of a stage carpenter sawing through a plank. And you ought to hear my finish for that—where the sawed-off piece falls on the floor."

"Boy," said Ates, "I'll bet that's a nice one! You get a lot of stuff like that together, and you'll have something."

"You better believe I am," said the crooked little man. "And I'm practicing on the pigeons. You know how they go when a lot of them get together."

"That ought to be easy for you," said Ates, "there's such a lot of pigeons around these buildings." He looked at Benny, his face blank of ulterior meaning. "You ought to get up on the roof sometime so's you can hear them better. There must be some of them have their nests there."

"I get up there every time I can," said Benny. "I'd be up there this afternoon if it wasn't for the police."

"What police?"

"AIN'T you heard what's happened?" said Benny. "Somebody's been shot across the street, and the police think the gun was thrown out of a window onto our roof. They're up there now, hunting for it. It's the second time they've been here."

"I wonder if I could go up?" said Ates.

"Nobody's allowed to," said Benny. "Nobody but the cops. That's what I'm doing here at the back door. Tony told me to stay here. But just when you turned the light on, I was going outside to take a smoke. The fire-insurance people don't let us smoke inside here—and when I've got a cigar, I like to sit outside with it; I always enjoy it that way."

"I'll be waiting till Tony comes down," said Ates, "so I'll sit with you."

They went outdoors, and Benny coiled his crooked body and leg in a fearsome knot on the wooden steps. He took out a long, pale-looking cigar, and lighted it.

"This is the last one," he told Ates. "I had three of them, but I smoked the others."

"You must be in the chips," said Ates, "buying cigars three at a time."

"I didn't buy them," said Benny. "That's the best part of it. I got them for nothing. Gravy, the dishwasher down here at the Short Order Café, gave 'em to me. . . . He didn't know I was here," said Benny, chuckling. "I had the door open just a little way, looking to see if Tony was coming. He was out for a minute—I think down at the corner. And the street-cleaners were here. And just as I looked, I saw Gravy come up out of the basement at the Short Order Café. Then he climbed up on the guard of the back wheel of the truck and got something out of it. He put it in his apron pocket," said Benny, now laughing. "And he looked around to see if

anybody noticed him. Then he saw me."

"What'd he do then?" said Ates, trying to keep eagerness out of his voice.

"He went into their place with a carton of something he'd brought up out of the basement. But he came out again, right away, and walked down here, and he said to me it wasn't much he'd got; it was just something in the junk he thought maybe he could use. So he gave me the three cigars and said not to mention it to the street-cleaners. They were always tough with him, he said, and he didn't want no trouble."

"Maybe he was right," Ates said. "Gravy aint so strong, you know."

Ates talked with the crippled man a little longer, and then moved on down the street. He paused before the Short Order Café, then went inside, seated himself at the far end of the bar and ordered a glass of milk and a cut of lemon pie. From where he sat, he could see a portion of the kitchen. Especially he could see that portion in which Gravy appeared every now and then to pick up the soiled plates and cups and cutlery. Finally he caught his eye and beckoned; and Gravy came out into the bar.

"Hello, kid!" said Gravy. He was very tall and very thin; he had a slack jaw and there was in his bearing something furtive and mouselike.

"How're you getting on?" asked Ates.

Gravy looked toward the barman and saw he was paying no attention.

"I aint making no money," said Gravy. "They don't pay me nothing here."

"Listen," said Ates, "don't you make nothing on the side—no pickings at all?"

"Sometimes I get something," said Gravy. "But not often."

"Now, listen," said Ates, "what about today?" He poked Gravy in his lean ribs and made him grin. "I'll make a bet you turned a little something. I can tell by the way you look. You've picked up something that maybe's not so bad."

"Don't let that guy back of the counter hear you," said Gravy. "He's down on me. He hates to see me make a cent."

"Some pineapple!" commented Ates. "But listen: what'd you collect today? I know you're a sharp old cheese, but you can't fool me. You've turned something for yourself. Something nice."

Gravy grinned once more.

"I made two dollars," he said.

"How?"

"I aint saying anything. I don't want the cops onto me."

"Cops! What they got to do with it?"

"I didn't know they had anything to do with it till afterward," said Gravy. "Not till I'd sold it. I got two bucks, right down." He looked toward the barman. "And nobody else don't get any of it."

"Did you steal something?" asked Ates.

"No," said Gravy, alarmed. "I don't ever do that. It was a pistol," he said in a whisper. "Somebody threw it out of the Tower, and it fell into the street-cleaner's truck. I saw it fall, and I got it. And I sold it," he said. "Then the cops come around hunting, and I heard somebody had been shot."

"What kind of a thing was it?" asked Ates. "Was it an automatic—you know, flat and black?"

"Yes," said Gravy. "And little."

"Who'd you sell it to?"

"Do you know Joe Nipper, that drives the cab?"

"What's he look like?"

"He's thick. Sometimes he fights in places."

"Oh, yes," said Ates. "I know who you mean."

"Sometimes he stops here and eats," said Gravy. "Always on the days when we have sour meat and dumplings. Well, he was in today, and I thought maybe, him being a cab-driver, he'd like to have a gun. So I showed it to him. And he said how much? I said two bucks, and he gave it to me."

"And afterward the cops came around, and you heard somebody'd been shot?"

"Yes," said Gravy. "And when I heard it, I was scared as hell."

"Well, listen," said Ates: "what you got to do is keep quiet. Don't tell nothing to nobody. If the cops heard you had that gun, you'd be in a jam. Keep shut tight. You don't know anything about any pistols at all."

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHEN Ates Haley left the Short Order Café, he hurried back to the office. He let himself in with his key, and found the place empty. He telephoned several of Jerry's customary stops, but no one knew anything of his movements. Ates sweated and bit at his nails. He had to do something! He had to get

that gun! Mickey was locked up in City Hall. And if the police got the automatic, she'd be worse off than that. He couldn't forget how she'd stood there by the desk some hours before and taken the weapon out of her handbag.

"She did put it in the drawer," Ates repeated to himself, "I saw her. But afterward she must have changed her mind. . . . Mick didn't do it, though. . . . Just the same, I want to get hold of that gun. If the police get it, they might find things out about it. And that Joe Nipper, if he—"

The telephone rang. "Hello," said Ates, into it. "Mooney: Proceedings."

"I want to speak to Mr. Mooney," said a woman's voice.

"He's not in at present," said Ates. "Is there any message?"

"When will he be in?"

"I couldn't say," Ates told her. "He's out on a case. But maybe there's something I can do?"

"I must speak to him," said the voice. "I'll call again." And the phone clicked.

"She had something," said Ates aloud. "I could tell by the way she said her words."

He gnawed at his nails; and he again thought of Mickey in the hands of the police; he thought of the gun, and he thought of Joe Nipper. A tough egg! He had fights in the ring, where they paid him to do it!

"If I could get him and have a talk! But I'd only be a kid to him, and he'd shove me away. If I knew somebody that was acquainted with him, somebody that—"

Ates didn't finish; he was up on his feet, had the phone receiver in his hand, and was dialing a number.

"Mr. Lotts," he said when a voice had spoken to him.

"Right here," said the voice.

"Hey, Georgie," said Ates, "this is Ates Haley, at Mooney: Proceedings."

"Listen," said Georgie excitedly, "why don't I get an answer when I call? Four times in a half-hour! Where's Jerry got to?"

"He's out trying to help Mickey."

"Well, somebody better try to do something. He said he'd call me if he wanted me. What's he done—made up that thing he calls a mind that I'm no good?"

"I don't know," said Ates feverishly. "But Georgie, I've been out trying to get a line on something about this case. And I've got it! But I can't swing it myself. The guy's tough, and I got to have help."

"Tough, eh?" said Georgie. "O. K., big fellah! Which way is he? Up here, or down there?"

"He's down this way."

"Well, hold on. I'll be there in ten minutes."

In a little more than that time, Georgie thundered down the corridor and in at the office door. He put Ates into a chair with a strong hand, and sat down in front of him.

"Now, break it," he said. "What is it? And who's the guy?"

OCCUPYING a very solid spot in the front of the boy's mind was Jerry's warning—to say nothing, to anyone. And so he sparred cautiously.

"You know," he explained, "we got office secrets here. Things come in that're other people's business, and we've got to keep them under cover."

"Yeah, I know," said Georgie. "But listen, fellah: This is about Mickey, aint it? And Mickey isn't a customer. Besides that, she's in the calabooza, waiting for her friends to do something. Well, I'm one of them, and I aint going to do any more waiting. I want her out so she can breathe what you call the free air. So, whatever you've got, let go of it."

"It's a gun," said Ates. "An automatic. The one Malitoff was shot with."

Georgie looked startled.

"Well, all right," he said. "And then what?"

"I want to get it. I want to get it so the police can't get it."

"Is this an idea of your own?" asked Georgie.

"Yes. I want the gun so's to be sure they don't have anything on Mick."

"Now, wait," said Georgie. "What could anybody get on her, even if they had this shooter?"

"Maybe nothing," admitted Ates. "Maybe not a thing. But just the same, maybe yes. Cops know how to twist things."

"They can take nothing and do plenty with it," agreed Georgie.

"I've been out, asking around," Ates said. "And I found out where the gun is. I know who's got it."

Georgie tightened his hands into fists until they looked like mallets.

"This tough party?" he said. "The one you mentioned on the phone?"

"It's Joe Nipper," said Ates. "You know, the fellah that drives the cab, and sometimes fights."

Georgie seemed pleased.

"Oh, him!" he said. "Well, now, that fits in awful nice. I've been wanting to see Joe. He done a nice job of double-crossing on a couple of my pupils in the last Golden Gloves, and I'd like to have a conversation with him." He arose. "Let's go."

But Ates took him by the sleeve.

"We'll call him," he said. "It'll look more professional, and it's the way Mr. Mooney always does. We'll ring him at the cab-rack. I've got the number. That's where we always get our cabs."

This idea pleased Georgie, and Ates dialed the number.

"Is Nipper there? Well, we want him sent around here. No, we don't want another driver; we want him." The boy gave the name and the office number. "Tell him to come up. We've got something for him to handle."

In a short time, Joe Nipper came in. He was short, thick-set, had heavy cheek-bones, and small eyes.

"Cab?" he said. "And I aint supposed to run up in elevators after people."

"I know," said Ates. "But we wanted to see you. Take a chair."

"No chair," said the man. "I aint staying. Where's the bags? If I have my bus standing out there more than a minute, I'll get a ticket."

"Sit down," said Georgie. "It'll keep your feet from flattening out."

Nipper looked at him in surprise.

"Why, hello!" he said. "I didn't recognize you."

"O. K.," said Georgie. "But you've got me now. So let's get down to business."

"I aint got no business with you unless it's cab business," said the man. "So if you're going to ride with me, let's get started."

"There's a couple of things I want to talk to you about," said Georgie, "but I'll put that gun up first."

"What gun?" said the cabman.

"Listen," said Georgie; "don't get it set in your mind you're going to kid me, because you aint." He looked at Ates. "Who was the party he got it from?"

"A fellow they call Gravy," said Ates. "He works at the Short Order Café."

"This Gravy sold you a gun—an automatic—for two bucks," said Georgie to Nipper. "I got the two bucks right here now—" taking some bills from his pocket. "Let's have the shooter."

"Don't talk simple to me that way," said Nipper. "I aint ever owned a gun in my life."

"I'm not talking about what you own," said Georgie. "It's what you've got. I'm asking for it." He put two one-dollar notes on the desk and held out his hand. "Give," he said.

"Aint I telling you I aint—"

Georgie suddenly seized the man and twisted him sharply toward him.

"Now, look," he said: "I've got it in for you anyhow about the double-crossing of them kids, so don't get me sore. Where's the gun?"

"What the hell do you mean—gun? Don't I tell you—"

Georgie shifted his grip; he was now behind the man, had him by the ears and was twisting his head slowly around.

"What you're doing is getting me out of temper," he said. "And I don't like to get that way, because when I do, I never know—"

"Hey, you'll break my neck!" protested Nipper, struggling.

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Georgie. He eased the twist, and waited. "What're you saying?"

"I did have a gun," said Nipper, rubbing his neck. "And I think it *was* that party at the Short Order sold it to me. But I haven't got it now. I got rid of it as soon as I'd heard what'd happened in the neighborhood."

"What'd you do with it?" asked Ates.

"I sold it to Ciggy: he runs that basement place in Vine Street near Eighth."

"Did you tell him anything about it?"

"Naw," said Nipper, still working with his neck. "That guy knows what to do with things. You don't have to tell him nothing."

"All right," said Ates. "We'll see."

Nipper stood at the office door and glowered at Georgie.

"Maybe you think it'll get you something, getting a guy in here, and manhandling hell out of him," he said.

"All I ask is for you to keep your mouth shut," said Georgie.

"You don't want much, do you?" said the man. "Almost crack my neck, and then start giving me orders too."

WHEN Nipper had gone, Ates said: "Do you know this Ciggy?"

"No," said Georgie. "But don't worry. "I can get the gun."

"Listen," said Ates: "let's not make him mad. It'd be best to be nice with him. I know a party that might be a friend of his. Wait till I put in a call." He took up the telephone and spaced out a number.

"Hello," he said, "is that you, Sid?"

"Yes; who's this?" asked a voice.

"Ates Haley, in Mooney's office."

"Oh, yes; hello, Ates."

"Is Chubby around?"

"No, but I think I can get him."

"I wish you would. Does he know Ciggy, who has a place on Vine Street? Well, tell him to go up there. Tell him not to wait to phone here, but to go right away. Ciggy's got a gun he bought from a fellow named Joe Nipper. Yeah, this afternoon. Well, Mr. Mooney wants that gun. It's hot. No, he's not here; but if he was, he'd tell you the same as I'm telling you."

"O. K.," said Sid.

"Tell Chubby to get it, no matter what happens."

"I'll get him in a few minutes," said Sid, "and I'll tell him."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN a few minutes after leaving his office, Jerry Mooney was entering the Etruria. The place had a gay-looking front, a marquee extending over the sidewalk, potted plants on the steps and a good deal of pink-colored lighting in the lobby and office. Jerry spoke to the clerk, and in a few moments was approached by Tweedy, a medium-sized, compact sort of man with a sharp, hard face.

"Hello," said Tweedy, and didn't seem any too pleased about it. "Chubby said you might be stopping in."

"It's just a little thing: about this Sonya," said Jerry.

"I know," said Tweedy. "But listen, Mooney, I don't like talking to cops—any kind of cops—about people that live in the house."

"Yeah, I know," said Jerry. "Quite all right, too. I don't blame you. But this thing, in a way, is between friends. I'm not pining to throw Sonya in the can for anything: my principal notion is to get someone out of it."

"Well," said Tweedy, "Sonya puts on a good bit of heavy work around the hotel, and nobody likes her any too well."

"I understand," said Jerry, "she's not very well fixed just now."

"She's broke," said Tweedy. "When that place, the Wranglers', was closed, she hit bottom. She's been playing them high and low, all up and down the line. But nobody falls any more. Her jewelry went sometime ago. About a week or so back she sold some of her swellest clothes. She's in on the house for three or four months' rent, and the manager's wondering what he's going to do about it."

"Yeah?" said Jerry. "And all that puts her in a spot where certain things I've got in mind might have started happening. Does she see Klem often?"

"Not here," said the man. "But I understand she has him on the telephone a good bit. But about two nights ago he did come in; and they had a lot of words in her apartment. So many of them," said Tweedy, "that I had to ride up to her floor and shush them."

"I suppose you don't know what the little squabble was about?"

"Money," grinned Tweedy. "What most battles is about. But what kind of money, and how or where, I didn't hear. If you want inside details on Sonya's personal troubles," he said, "you'd better speak to Freda."

"Who's she?"

"The switchboard girl. I think she'll be willing. She's been making faces at Sonya for a long time."

"All right," Jerry said, "we'll go over and speak to Freda."

Freda was dark and spectacular-looking. And she was quite willing to discuss Sonya.

"I used to be friendly with her," she said. "But I got over that sometime ago. Awhile back she gave me such a run-around that my head's still turning! If I'd been looking for anything from her, it mightn't have been so bad. But I wasn't. She heard me sing one night in a place where I sometimes go. I was doing a number that was terrible popular at the time, and I will say for myself, I did make them take notice.

"Sonya comes up to me while I was standing there with a crowd around me," Freda went on, "and she says I'd handled the song awful nice. And she says she thought I ought to be using my voice in other ways besides in a telephone. And maybe she could get me a try-out at the Wranglers."

"Yes?" said Jerry. "That was her club."

"At the time," said Freda, "I thought it was nice of her; I didn't know she was just throwing a bluff for the crowd that was around. Afterward, when I found it out, I thought she was an awful louse."

"Often," said Jerry, "you can't take them at their words."

"You never can," said Freda. "They get you believing their stuff, and then they treat you something awful. After she spoke to me the way I just said, I started to practice; the exercises I took really got the whole neighborhood talking. They thought some opera company had made me an offer. But did she ever open her trap to me about anything again? Not once! She'd go through here with her nose in the air, and looking enough dressed-up to strangle herself, but she never even whispered Wranglers to me. And so one night I spoke to her, and asked her what about the try-out. And she had the nerve to ask me what try-out! Right away I knew she'd been kidding me, and I lit into her. I fried that doll to a turn," said the switchboard girl. "She was that surprised that she couldn't say a word for a while; but when she got her breath, you ought to've heard her conversation. She was that common you'd be astonished. She had the whole office here standing up, listening."

"Yeah," said Jerry. "From things I've heard, she's got a lot of stuff."

"Ever since then," said Freda, "I aint had any time for her. When I heard the Wranglers had been closed, and she'd gone broke, I tried to feel sorry for her—though not too much. But I couldn't make even that."

"Do you know Klem, a friend of hers?" asked Jerry.

"I've seen him a couple of times," said the girl. "And I've heard him talk over the telephone, often. It seems he aint nobody's fool. What he told her most times was that he didn't have the money."

"Have you ever had a party named Sudler calling her?" asked Jerry.

"Sudler?" said Freda. "It seems to me I do remember that name. Did he talk rough, kind of?"

"He *would* be a little that way," said Jerry.

"The one I think he might be," said the girl, "is in some kind of a jewelry place."

"That's him," Jerry told her.

"Well, he's called her up a couple of times, lately," said Freda. "Something about business."

"That interests me," said Jerry. "Did you hear what kind of business they talked about?"

"It was some kind of a proposition. She wanted him to go into it with her. Maybe another place like the Wranglers."

"What did Sudler say?"

"He didn't see how he could do it. He said he hadn't any experience in the line she had in mind."

"When was the last time he called here?"

"Today—it was somewhere around one o'clock. Maybe before, or after."

"Did you catch any of what he said?"

"Something had happened. He was excited. Somebody had beaten them to something. He wanted to see her right away."

"Yes?"

"She got me to call a cab," said Freda. "And she went through the office here like a bat right out of some place. She was away for about an hour. And when she got back, she was terrible nervous and excited; she didn't talk with anyone, but went right up to her room."

"Has she been out since then?"

"No."

"Any calls on the telephone, or any visitors?"

"None."

"Now, wait," said Tweedy, putting his hand on Jerry's arm. "Here comes one now."

And Jerry, casting his eye down the length of the office, saw Eddie Klem coming in at the street door.

Klem, as he approached the telephone desk, saw Jerry Mooney, and looked at him fixedly.

"How are you?" Jerry said. "Think of seeing you here!"

"I thought," said Klem, a sneer at one corner of his mouth, "there was a police call out for you."

"So I understand." Jerry looked quite cheerful. "It does beat all, the things they think of, don't it?"

"Sonya, Mr. Klem?" said Freda. He nodded, and she plugged in the room.

"Pash is no man to fool with," said Klem.

"Yeah, you'd know that, wouldn't you?" said Jerry. "He's knocked you over a couple of times."

"Mr. Klem's here," said Freda into the telephone. Then she looked at Klem. "You're to go up," she said. "Fourth floor, as usual."

KLEM moved away toward the elevator, and Jerry moved with him.

"I might as well be going up too," Jerry said. "I'm here on a little business."

Klem made no reply. They stepped into the small cagelike elevator; when it

got to the fourth floor, the man got out. Jerry followed right at his heels.

"Nice stretch of weather we've been having," Jerry suggested.

Klem, the hard look still in his eyes, and his mouth pressed tight shut in a thin line, walked down the corridor. He stopped at a door and touched a bell-button. The door opened, and a tall, well-made blonde woman, in an elaborate negligée, appeared.

"Why, Eddie, this is so nice!" she said. Klem entered the room, and Jerry was following when she added, a sudden ice in her voice: "I didn't know anyone was with you."

"There isn't," said Klem. "This big mutt's shoving himself in, as he usually does." He looked at Jerry, menace in his expression. "Some of these days," he said, "you're going to step into a lot of trouble."

Jerry laughed. He was now in the room, and had the door closed.

"Well, as long as it's not this afternoon, it's all right," he said. "But between the three of us, I'd hate to get tangled up just now. I've got a lot of things to do."

The woman had been staring at him while he spoke; and now she pointed at the door.

"Get out of here!" she said. "And do it right away!"

"I'd keep my wrap on if I were you," he told her. "You look awfully well in it. And besides, there'd be no use in me going out, because I'd only be coming right back."

He moved farther into the room; he sat on the corner of a center table and swung one foot, looking at Klem.

"You kind of surprised me," he said. "I mean—seeing you here on this business."

"What business?" asked Klem.

But Jerry waved a hand in good-humored protest.

"Listen," he said, "don't let's start that kind of thing. I know, and you know. Also"—his look shifting to Sonya—"*you* know. So let's play on top of the table and from the top of the deck. It's hitting close to three o'clock, and I've got a kind of an engagement to take a lady out to dinner, so what say if we don't waste any time?"

Klem smiled crookedly.

"If you mean the party I'm thinking of," he said, "you'll hardly do it. They've got her pretty well tied up. Maybe you haven't heard the news. She's known to have threatened Malitoff, and to have bought a gun to do the job with."

"Yeah," said Jerry, "I've heard that. Aint it funny how these things get around? And often there's nothing to them, at all."

SONYA had kept on registering indignation. "What do you want here?" she asked of Jerry.

"Well, getting back to that," he said, "I stopped in to have a few words with you. But you know, I can't get it out of my mind how surprised I was to see Eddie come in while I was standing downstairs. I thought if it'd be anyone, it'd be Sudler."

For a moment there was silence. The woman turned white under her rouge; Klem's eyes went from one to the other.

"What do you mean, Sudler?" he said.

Jerry looked amused. "Don't tell me you've forgotten him! Your old strong-arm guy? The fellah that used to front for you when the going got heavy?"

"What about him?"

"Well, I didn't really expect him," Jerry said. "But I did think if I ran into anyone it'd be him." He looked at Sonya. "My idea," he said, "was that the job was between Sudler and you."

Klem closed his eyes for an instant; then he said in a quiet voice:

"As there seems to be something to talk about, we may as well sit down."

"I wonder," said Sonya to Jerry, "if you haven't had two or three too many? What's all this about expecting Sudler? And especially, what's this idea you have about some kind of a job?"

"Well, you see," said Jerry affably, "as I get to proceeding around, little things pop into my mind. Of course, I don't know if it was you mentioned the ruby to Sudler in the first place, or he to you. What I mean is the Burma ruby," he said to Klem, "—the one they tried to pin on me when it disappeared."

The look Klem fixed upon the woman was as ugly as Jerry had ever seen. She said: "This big ape is having some kind of a dream."

"I never dream," said Jerry. He studied Sonya. "You knew this chunk of red ice was in Malitoff's place, didn't you?" he asked her.

"How should I have known about it?"

"Well, of course, I wouldn't be sure. But Sudler could have told you."

"Listen!" said Sonya. "For the second time: I want you to get out of here. And I want you to do it right now."

"Let's wait," said Jerry. "There's no hurry. Anyway, I haven't told you what's known as 'all.' I thought maybe, after I'd talked to you awhile, you'd hand the stone over, and I'd go quietly away."

"You've got a hell of a nerve to sit there and say things like that!" said Sonya. "What do you think I am?"

"I never was good at guessing," Jerry told her. "But you know the ruby is missing. And Sudler called you about one o'clock or so, and you slipped out to meet him."

Sonya looked at him scornfully.

"He'd taken it, I suppose, and wanted to hand it over to me?" she said.

"Oh, no! It wouldn't be as coarse as that. My notion was that the job was done by an independent party. Maybe a woman. And he wanted to tell you where to find her, it not being too safe to mention such things over the telephone. And after you talked with him, you went around to wherever the place was, and you got the ruby and carried it away."

SONYA, her hands clenched, but with fright in her eyes, turned to Klem.

"Are you going to sit there and let this man speak to me this way?" she said.

"It sounds like an interesting line," said Klem. "Suppose we hear the rest of it?"

"There is no more," said Jerry. "But I thought I'd bring that much around, so's you'd have some idea of how things are working." He got up from the table. "And now," he said to Sonya, "suppose you hand the thing over to me, and I'll be going."

"You're crazy!" said Sonya.

"If I figured up all the things I've been called," Jerry told her, "that one would be close up to the top." He pulled open a drawer and stirred up its contents. "Though, of course, you wouldn't have it here," he said. "Most likely it's in your bathroom—or bedroom, maybe under the mattress. That's a favorite place with women for putting things they don't want seen." He closed the drawer and opened another. "What I'm going to do is go through the place," he said. "One thing after another. What I hope"—and he nodded amiably to them—"is that you'll not think I'm going too far."

Klem said nothing; the usual derision in his eyes had deepened as he looked at Jerry. But with Sonya it was different.

"Nobody'll search my place," she proclaimed stormily. "And if you don't leave here at once, I'll call the police!"

"I wouldn't do that," said Jerry good-naturedly, and continued with his investigation. "When they get into a place, they go nosing around something terrible."

"Any more than you're doing?" said Sonya.

"Oh, yes! They're different from me. When I get hold of a thing, I can make a little deal of some kind, if the case calls for it. But they can't; when they turn up a find, they've got to make something of it."

In a fury, the woman snatched a heavy brass candlestick from the table. But Jerry smiled at her.

"Don't get rough," he advised. "That kind of thing might work with pet dogs, or with girls when their backs are turned; but I've been around too much for it to have any effect on me."

The look of fright was again in the woman's eyes.

"Are you going to let this gorilla get away with this?" she demanded of Klem. "I thought, from the way you've always talked, you had something."

"Be wise," said Jerry to her, at the door of the bedroom; "don't ask too much of a guy. You know Eddie went into the red with an awful smack when the Wranglers closed, don't you? And you've been on his neck ever since." He disappeared into the bedroom, and there followed the sounds of further search. "Why not give him a chance?" Jerry's voice continued. "Suppose he *is* part owner of Malitoff's? Does it follow that you ought to grab off the best thing they had in stock?"

There was a sound of Jerry moving around; then came the tinkle of broken glass, and a whistle of surprise. The woman moved swiftly toward the bedroom door, but Klem stopped her.

"The old light-fixture gag!" said Jerry's voice. "Well, well! And I almost missed it!"

"Let me go!" cried Sonya, struggling with Klem.

"If there's nothing there," he said to her coldly, "what are you worrying about?"

"Do you expect me to stand still and let that man paw over and break my things?"

Before Klem could make a reply to this, Jerry reappeared, buttoning up his square-cut coat.

"Luck does get through," he said with a good deal of satisfaction in his voice. "No matter how tough the going, we're

sure to get a break somewhere along the line." He took up his hat and pulled it jauntily down upon his head. "How sorry I am for intruding this way," he said, "I'll never be able to say." He grinned at Sonya, who was white and shaking. Then he turned to Klem. "Somehow," he said, "I had a feeling when I saw you downstairs, that you were going to be a help. Women are what is called impulsive—you never know just what they'll do; but the man-influence sometimes quiets them down." He'd opened the hall door by this time, and now waved a hand. "I'll be seeing you," he said, "but maybe not again today. Time's short, and packed tight with things to do."

The door closed upon him, and there was silence. Then Sonya turned a bitter look upon Klem, and said:

"If the thing he said happens to be true—if there was such a thing here as a stolen jewel, are you going to allow him to walk out with it and not lift a hand?"

He looked at her, and his eyes were like ice.

"I have no idea what was here," he said. "But if he has walked out with the thing he spoke of, he's carrying dynamite. Every police-car crew and every patrolman in the city is looking for him at this minute; and he's sure to be nabbed somewhere along the line."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A HALF-BLOCK from the Etruria, Jerry Mooney went into a phone-booth and called Sid's place. He wanted Chubby, and it was Chubby who answered.

"I've been waiting here, knowing I'd hear from you," said Chubby. "The last time I called your place, the police were there."

"I thought they might be. What's the news?"

"I think I'd better see you some place," said Chubby. "There's quite a bundle to pass on to you. What about Georgie Lotts'?"

"No," said Jerry. "They know Georgie's a friend of mine, and maybe would have a man with his eye on the front door. What do you say to the fish-chowder place in Moleyne Street?"

"Right," said Chubby.

When Jerry reached the place, a narrow doorway, with a long passage opening into a big, bare room at the back, there was a fat black man shucking oysters at a small bar; and another one, even fatter and blacker, was serving fish chowder. Chubby came in a few moments later. Jerry ordered beer and cigarettes, and they settled down in a corner.

"What is it?" asked Jerry after a moment's silence.

"Sid told me that about an hour ago he'd had a call from your office—from Ates. It was about a gun."

"Yeah?" said Jerry. "What'd he say?"

"He said for me to go to Ciggy's Bargain Basement. The gun had been sold there by a party called Joe Nipper, and for me to get it."

But it seemed that Sid hadn't found him until a half-hour had passed. And when he reached Ciggy's place, the police had been there before him.

"For the gun," said Chubby. "And they got it."

"What did Ates say about the gun? How'd he know about this Joe Nipper?"

Chubby related the story of the boy's experiences, and how he'd called on Georgie for help in dealing with Nipper.

"Georgie was the trouble," said Jerry. "He put the squeeze on when he shouldn't have. And then the guy called up the police." He considered awhile. "Did you speak to Ciggy about what kind of gun it was?"

"Right away, I did. I always make sure about things like that. Ciggy told me it was a Shanley automatic. A twenty-two. Ciggy told me he'd looked at it pretty close, because he'd seen a Shanley a good bit like that one before."

In his mind, Jerry Mooney pictured the small, dark, glistening weapon he'd seen in Mickey's handbag. It might very well have been a Shanley. Also a .22.

"Just a minute," he said to Chubby. He went to a phone-booth at the end of the bar, dialed a number and closed the door.

"Mr. Curren, please," he said as an answer came. "This is important."

After an interval he heard Curren's voice.

"Hello, Steve," he said. "This is a friend of yours."

"So I hear," said Curren, none too enthusiastically.

"Has the coroner's report come in? Especially has the laboratory put through the bullets found in the body?"

"The coroner's report was as usual," said Curren. "The police laboratory so far has only said the slugs were small. Twenty-two."

"Nothing about the gun?"

"It was an automatic. That was all."

Jerry thanked Curren; then he went back to Chubby, and asked:

"When you were asking about Sudler, did you find out where he lives?"

"Yeah. In that place they call the Cleveland House. A kind of polished-up flop-joint."

"I know it," said Jerry. He took a package from a pocket. "This is for Doxey," he said. "Find out what she'll give for it."

"The ice?" asked Chubby.

"Yeah. Get as much as you can. If there's any over, we got places for it."

He talked on with Chubby for some time; then he left the fish-chowder place and cut through the back streets, took a street-car and finally reached the establishment known as the Cleveland House. It ran a good deal to polished brass and wide spreads of shining window-glass. It was a stopping-place for people not altogether broke, but verging upon that condition. Behind a brass cage with an opening let into it was a small man with thin, sandy hair parted in the middle, and with paper cuffs drawn up over his sleeves.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he inquired softly.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Sudler," said Jerry.

"Mr. Sudler is not in. He is not here during the day."

"I think," said Jerry, "he's in now. What about sending up a little call?"

The clerk held up a finger, and a colored boy in a showy livery came forward.

"Has Mr. Sudler come in?" asked the clerk in a low murmur.

"Is Mr. Sudler that gen'l'man in 306?"

"Yes."

"No suh," the boy said. "Mistah Sudler aint in."

"Not in," murmured the clerk to Jerry.

JERRY turned away. There was an archway opening from the office into a wide, mirror-framed lobby; this had a red floor-covering and a large number of imitation-leather-covered chairs. At the rear he had noticed, as he came in, a flight of steps led upward. To turn to the right would bring him to the door and out; so Jerry turned to the left.

The boy had mentioned Sudler's room as 306; that would be the third floor and well toward the front. The stairs leading to the third floor were narrower than those leading to the second; the hall also was narrower, and there were two rows of white-painted doors with brass numbers upon them. At 306 Jerry paused, and following his custom, he tried the door. It was not locked, and he walked in. A burly man with ears and brows distorted by fistic pounding stood in the middle of the floor, buttoning on a shirt. He paused in the operation and looked at Jerry.

"What do *you* want?" he demanded.

"Pardon me for bouncing in on you this way," said Jerry. "Remember who I am?"

"Yeah," said Sudler. "But don't you ever knock when you come in places?"

"Well, do you know," said Jerry, "I never gave that a thought." He closed the door and stood with his back to it, looking exceedingly cheerful. "But I had a few words for you, and I thought I'd step in and drop them in your ears."

"The last time I saw you," said Sudler, "you were going out of a place with a couple of cops shoving you. And if you don't scram out of here under your own steam, big boy, this time it'll be me doing the shoving. And let me say, when I shove, I shove hard."

"I wouldn't wonder," said Jerry, still keeping the cheerful expression. "You look like a party that's bulled around a good bit. But at the same time, you look as if you got your share of slams in the puss. However, what say if we don't go into that right now? I've got some talk for you. Awhile ago I was speaking to a lady friend of yours, and it popped into my mind I'd better interview you also."

"Who were you talking to?"

"Sonya. Around at the Etruria."

Sudler turned up his shirt-collar, adjusted his tie under it.

"What was she saying?" he asked.

"What could it be but something about what happened at Malitoff's, this noon? And also about the way you got agitated afterward and went out and telephoned."

Sudler pointed to a chair.

"Sit down," he said.

Jerry sat astride the chair, facing Sudler; and he took out cigarettes.

"Sonya told you I'd telephoned her, did she?" said the man as he put a knot in the tie.

"Oh, no," said Jerry. He selected a cigarette. "I saw her, but she didn't tell me anything. I'd heard about the telephoning before I saw her."

Sudler grinned at him like an ugly-tempered dog.

"When I saw you lugged out of Malitoff's by the police," he said, "I figured you were another of those big dubs that can't keep out of trouble." He put on his vest and began to button it up. "But now I see maybe you've got some stuff. Who told you I'd telephoned?"

Jerry put this aside.

"I trade sometimes," he told Sudler, "but I never give things away. It's working around in my mind you've got some information that'd clear up this shooting; my idea is if you let me have enough of that to do some good, you and me'll start getting friendly."

SUDLER looked at him fixedly. "What are you interested in me for?" he asked.

"I'm interested in anything that happened at or around Malitoff's today about noon," said Jerry. "Now, look: here I go into that place to see some unset stones—just because looking at them makes me feel good. And then—bingo! —all of a sudden I'm in the hands of the police. Also I have my name and my picture in the paper."

"What are you stopping there for?" said Sudler with his ugly grin. "What about the girl? That friend of yours who shot a couple of holes in Malitoff?"

"Just now," said Jerry, "I've got the ruby on my mind. Maybe that's because Sonya's been thinking so much about it; maybe it's what's called thought-transference. Anyway, I'd like to hear you say just why, right after the shooting, you went outside somewhere and called Sonya on the telephone."

"Did she say I did?"

"Listen," Jerry said, "I'm just after telling you she said hardly anything. The party who gave about your phone-call was someone else. And I might add I got the time of the call and the number of the taxi Sonya took when she went to see you."

Sudler stared a moment, then said: "What I wanted to do when I called, was give her the news of what had happened."

Jerry laughed encouragingly.

"Well, anyway," he said, "that's an effort. But it don't get far with me. And I'd say it'd sound even flatter to the police. What did you mean when you said to Sonya that somebody had got to the ruby first?"

"I never said it!" Sudler was suddenly excited. "What'd I say a thing like that for?"

"That's what I'm asking you," grinned Jerry. "And you must have told her some other things, too, when you saw her. If you didn't, what made her go hopping around paying little visits—one of them, especially, to a party that had a little dog?"

Sudler shut his big hands tightly. But just as he was about to speak, the telephone rang. He took it up. "Oh, yeah! Come on up," he said. "I was just thinking about you; and I've got a couple of things to say."

"Don't tell me it's Sonya!" Jerry said enjoyingly as he waved away the smoke from his cigarette.

"She'll be up in a minute," said Sudler menacingly. "And then I'll have a little show-down with you."

Sonya, looking extremely blonde and stately, appeared a few moments later. She halted in the open doorway and looked at Jerry with startled eyes.

"It surely is queer how people run into each other, aint it?" said he agreeably.

The woman came into the room, and Sudler closed the door after her.

"What I said," he told her, "was that I was just thinking about you. But what I should have said was that I was talking about you." He indicated Jerry. "Do you know this big ape?" he asked.

"He came into my apartment this afternoon," said Sonya. "And he gave me a lot of talk."

"What about?" asked Sudler.

"He said I had a ruby. The one," she said, "the police had him up for taking. He said all kinds of dirty things to me. What I should have done,"—resentfully, —"was to have appealed to the police."

"I think you mentioned that," said Jerry. "Don't you remember? I said if you once got them in, you wouldn't be able to get rid of them? They're always rummaging around, and you never know what they'll turn up. It'd been a risk. I told you so at the time."

Sudler glowered heavily; he looked from Sonya to Jerry, and then back again at the woman.

"After you left me this afternoon," he said to her, "where did you go?"

"As soon as I got through with my shopping," she answered, "I went back to the hotel."

"And you did some visiting too, didn't you?" suggested Jerry. "Remember? We were talking about that. The girl with the little dog—you know, on a leash."

Sonya looked at Jerry with cold scorn.

"From the way you sound, that big head of yours must be awful soft," she said. Then she turned to Sudler. "I came up here to have a talk," she said. "Especially about this man here. He came into the hotel, and began to ask questions. He said—"

"Now, wait!" said Sudler, his battered face heavy with suspicion. "Before we get to that, let's hear about the girl and the dog. I talked to you about people that was in the store at the time the trouble was on today, and I mentioned a girl that had a dog. I said to you she was the only one in the place I knew anything about, but that she didn't get there until after the ruby was stolen."

"You did say something about a girl," said Sonya. "But I didn't know her. You mentioned her name, but it didn't mean anything to me. I didn't know where she lived, or anything about her. *Visiting!*" she said wrathfully to Jerry. "It's a wonder to me they let you go out alone."

"Well, of course," he said, "if you say you didn't, why, I don't know. When I mentioned her, I was just repeating what I'd heard. The girl I mean," he said to Sudler, "is named Cora. When I saw her about an hour or so ago, she was in the hospital with her head tied up."

"Cora!" said Sudler. "Did she tell you that was her name?"

"Yeah. And she said she'd got the hurt head through a woman who had dropped in at her apartment for a friendly cup of tea or something. And, Cora says, while she wasn't noticing, the dame bent what felt like a piece of railroad iron over her head."

"It's a lie!" stormed Sonya. "I never even saw her!"

"Of course, as I just said," Jerry told her, "I don't know. Only, the description the girl gave me was so close I thought I'd run around and find out what you knew about the thing."

"Didn't I tell you she couldn't have taken the ruby?" said Sudler to Sonya. "Didn't I? So what the hell did you have to go around and beat her up for and have the police looking for you?"

"The police!" said Sonya contemptuously. "They never find anybody that's got any sense. They're even worse than this big pretzel here."

"Talking about someone not having any sense," said Sudler to Sonya, "you don't have too much yourself. How could that girl've got away with the ruby when it was gone before she got into the place? Why didn't you try somebody that had a chance if you wanted to get to work? Why didn't you sock Klem if you thought—"

Sudler stopped suddenly, and Jerry looked at the woman; she was gazing at Sudler, her face like stone.

"I might have thought of him," she said, "if he'd been at Malitoff's today. But he wasn't."

There was a pause, and Jerry realized Sudler was groping about hurriedly in his mind.

"I know," said the man. "And a girl that didn't get to the place until after the stuff was stolen, hadn't any more chance to steal it than somebody like Klem, who wasn't there at all."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AS Jerry, a little later, stepped down the carpeted stairs and through the mirrored lobby, he pulled things alertly together in his mind.

"A slippery dame!" said Jerry. "She's stringing them both. Klem didn't know she was dealing on the side with Sudler; and Sudler didn't know she'd listened so close to what he'd told her that she'd seen a thing he'd never even thought of. Also, Klem was at Malitoff's about the time of the happenings! That big plowhorse was just on the point of saying Klem was there, when she stopped him."

A block along the way, Jerry slipped into a Chinese restaurant; in a phone-booth he called for Gootch, and got him instantly.

"I thought you might call," said the man. "I see the heat grows worse all the time. Pretty soon I'm afraid they'll catch up with you."

"Listen," said Jerry, "did you speak to the doorkeeper when you were at Malitoff's? Was it him gave you the information about what people were there about the time of the happenings?"

"Yes; and the police got their information from him, too."

"There's a clock record on the door, isn't there?"

"Yes; no one goes in or out at these place without it is seen on the tape. It's a ribbon of paper like in an adding-machine or a cash-register; everything is there, plain as a newspaper."

"You didn't see this ribbon?"

"Oh, yes; the doorkeeper had been showing it to the police. I looked at it very good."

"Did you check up on it, person for person, as they came in? With the time and everything?"

"There were places where the paper was broken. A couple of them. The man said he's nervous and excited when he took it out of the machine, and he'd torn it. But it was pieced together; I saw it all."

"All right," Jerry said. "That's about what I expected."

"If the police pick you up," said Gootch, "what am I to do?"

"Stay close to the phone, that's all I can say," Jerry told him. "I may call you any minute."

After he'd put down the receiver he hunted out the call number at the back door of the Elysium Theater.

"Hello. I want Tony," he said after he'd made the connection.

"This is Tony."

"Tony, this is Mooney. . . . I want to know if there was anyone around looking for the gun that was tossed out of the window across the street from you?"

"Five, six police, they all looked," replied Tony.

"Was there anyone else—not a policeman?" asked Jerry.

"I got a man here that says he talked with somebody. It was a somebody who gave him five bucks. Nobody," complained Tony, "ever comes around with anything while I'm at the door."

"That's the way it goes," said Jerry. "Some guys have all the luck. But anyway, Tony, some day I'll be seeing you, and I'll build you up a little."

Jerry put down the telephone and went out. The man who had spoken to Benny might have been Klem; but whoever it was, in return for the payment of five dollars, he'd been sent to Gravy; Gravy, in turn, was sure to have directed him to Nipper, the cabman. Chubby had told Jerry the location of the rack where Nipper hung his cab, and Jerry proceeded there at once.

"Which of these drivers is Joe Nipper?" he asked a hotel doorman.

The man pointed to Nipper, sitting in his compartment, smoking a cigarette. Jerry opened the door and stepped into the cab.

"Get going," he directed.

Nipper looked at him suspiciously; but he started the motor.

"Where to?" he asked.

"City Hall." They had gone only a few blocks, however, when Jerry told him to pull in at the curb. He handed Nipper a bill, and kept the wallet in plain view. "Who," he asked, "was the man who came to see you and asked what you did with the gun you bought in McCaldrum Street?"

"There wasn't anybody asked me," said Nipper.

Jerry took another bill out of the wallet, and held it so that the man could see its denomination.

"This is private business," he said. "Not police."

"Eddie Klem asked me a few questions," Nipper told him. "And I said I sold it to Ciggy, that keeps the place in Vine Street."

"O. K.," said Jerry. He passed the bill to Nipper. "Take me to about a couple of blocks from Ciggy's shop."

Within ten minutes Jerry was descending some dirty stone steps that led to a narrow, low basement. There was a clutter of secondhand goods of all sorts; and at a work-bench was a thin, sickly-looking man tinkering at a lock.

"How are you?" said Jerry.

The man looked at him in surprise. "Hello, Mooney," he said. "Aint seen you in a long time."

"What might happen," grinned Jerry, "is that maybe, if things don't break a little right for me, it might be longer still before you see me again."

"That," said Ciggy, "sounds like some kind of trouble."

JERRY leaned against the work-bench and looked about. "I hear you had the police here awhile ago," he said.

"Well, there's nothing new about that," Ciggy said. "I have them every day in the week about something."

"It was about a .22 automatic," Jerry said. "A Shanley. Chubby was telling me about it."

"Yeah; he was here. He didn't say who sent him. Was it you?"

Jerry nodded.

"It was him told me about the police. Was anyone else in, asking about the gun?"

"Yeah; a man came in to see about it a little while after I'd given it up."

"Did you know him?"

"No."

"Sure? Wasn't it Eddie Klem?"

"It wasn't. He was a big pot. I'd say about sixty or so inches around the middle. And he had a way of talking that made me want to sock him."

Klem's office man, Alonzo! Jerry instantly had a picture of this peremptory person in his mind.

"Did he want to buy?" he asked Ciggy.

"Yeah; and he was sore as hell because I'd turned it over. He wanted to know why I didn't cover up for a while until I seen what was going on."

"A Shanley automatic .22," said Jerry. "It's a shooter you don't often see."

"There were only a few thousand made. And it's hard to get ammunition for them now. The stuff for other .22 automatics don't fit."

"You never saw this copy before, I suppose?" said Jerry.

"Nobody can be in this business and talk much. If he does, he soon finds he's buying little and selling less."

"You have seen it, then?" said Jerry.

"This is a police thing," said Ciggy. "And the police always mean trouble for someone."

"The party I'm talking for," said Jerry, "is already in trouble. And I'm for getting her out of it."

"Well," said Ciggy. "I had that gun once before. I knew it as soon as I looked at it, because it had the number cut out of it. It was a very neat job, and I'd taken special notice of it."

"Who did you sell it to?"

"Guns," said Ciggy, "are things I always get rid of as soon as I can, because when they're brought in here, they're always hot. I sold that one to Max Korn."

"How long ago?"

"I couldn't say. Maybe six months. But I remember Max made a talk about it. It was too small. The people that come to him for guns mostly want the kind you blast with."

Jerry looked at his watch.

"Four-twenty," he said. "Some of the races are still coming in. I wonder if Max'd be at Foley's?"

"He mostly is, about this time."

LEAVING Ciggy's basement, Jerry cut through side-streets. At an old office-building, he ascended to the top floor in the heavy, slow-moving elevator, and went in at a door upon which was lettered: *"Office: Country Club."* A thick-shouldered young man in his shirt-sleeves greeted him in a room gray with smoke and crowded with men.

"Hiyah, Jerry?"

"Hello, Phil? Anything going on?"

"Two more races. If you want to play, there's still time."

"I've got a little business," said Jerry. "Is Max Korn around?"

"Yeah, I think so. But listen: I had two of Pash's people in awhile ago asking for you. I understand the word's gone out about you."

"So they tell me," said Jerry cheerfully. "But you know, Pash goes dull every once in a while. And this is one of the occasions."

"I'd say this thing about the girl must be kind of jerking you around. The boys that were in here seemed to think they had her practically indicted."

"They always take their stuff from Pash," said Jerry. "He yells, and they believe. But I'm going to have her out of the calabooza by nightfall."

"Well, good luck," said Foley. "She's a nice kid, and I don't want any of their talk to be true. —There's Korn now."

Max Korn was a barrel-like young man, with a head covered with heavy black ringlets; he had a round face like a clock, and he talked loudly.

"Get the pressure down," said Jerry as he led him aside, "because we're going to talk about something private."

"It's going to be about this trouble you're in," said Max confidently, "and I'm telling you right away I don't want any part of it. I can't afford to get under anything. I got all I can do to hold up what I've got already."

"All I want is a word or two," said Jerry. "Between you and me, I was around at Ciggy's place just now. And I was talking with him about a gun."

"Me," said Max, "I wouldn't know one gun from another; I never handle them."

Jerry grinned. "Listen," he said, "don't you think you'd better give? That way you'll have no trouble; it'll be one pal with another. The gun we were mentioning was the one somebody used on this Malitoff."

"You get into a conversation with me," said Max. "All right; I can't help that. What I'm asking is, what have I got to do with it?"

"As far as the trigger-work goes," said Jerry, "you're out in the clear and clean as a whistle. But the gun is something else. Ciggy once sold you that shooter. He didn't say so to the police when they

were around at his place; but he told me —because he knew it was the best thing to do."

"Sometimes I buy things," said Max. "A lot of things together, and I don't always know what's in it all. There may have been a gun in some goods I got from this Ciggy one time. I couldn't say."

"You'll remember this one," said Jerry, "because you and Ciggy had some talk about it. A Shanley .22. You said there was no sale for small guns."

"Oh, yes," said Max. "That Shanley! I *do* remember that. Quite a while ago, it was. That's when Hevy worked for me. It was him bought it; and I tell him he's a sap for bringing it in. I says to him: 'Now you've got it, let's see you sell it.'"

"Did he?"

"Sure," said Max. "Hevy wasn't a bad salesman. A woman bought it."

Jerry fixed him with intent eyes. "You wouldn't have the woman's name, would you, Max?" he asked.

"I wouldn't," said Max. "Hevy might remember. But where the hell is he? I haven't seen him for months."

For a while longer Jerry talked with Max; then he went to a phone-booth in a side room, called the Etruria Hotel, and got Tweedy.

"This is Mooney," he said. "I've been thinking about what you told me this afternoon about the night you had to go up to Sonya's room and put down a riot."

"You mean between her and Eddie Klem?"

"Yes. What went on there? Was there any heavy slugging?"

"That Sonya was awful sore. A dame like her most always gets that way when the wallet's tied up and she can't get into it."

"She didn't go so far as to pull anything like a gun on him?"

"How'd you know that?" said Tweedy, surprised.

"After I talked with her awhile, I thought she looked like somebody that'd do a thing like that."

"Well, you're right," said the house detective. "When I got into the room, she was laying plenty words on Klem. According to her, he was a prize heel. He didn't make much noise with his answers; but when he spoke, what he said must have hurt. Anyway, she got a gun out from under a sofa pillow. I tried to grab it, but Klem got there before me. He shoved it in his pocket."

"A small gun?" Jerry inquired.

"A little automatic."

Jerry finished with Tweedy and dialed another number. In a few moments he had Gootch, and said:

"The last time you were at Malitoff's you talked to some of the people who worked there, didn't you?"

"Most of them," said Gootch. "I'd have gone through them all if it hadn't been for the police."

"I know," said Jerry, "that you've got a habit of taking down addresses. That fellah that had the designing and resetting job, and worked in the room next Malitoff's: I hope you covered him."

"I'll see," said Gootch. There was a pause, and then came the voice once more. "I have him in the book. He is Isidor Plutstine, and he lives in Haymount Street. The number is 396."

"I know the street," said Jerry. "Keep where you are. I may call you soon."

JERRY took a street-car, transferred to another and finally got off at a street crowded with dealers in poultry, in cheese and eggs, with bottlers, and oil and hide merchants. Haymount Street was a narrow one-car way crowded with small houses and filled with the shouts of energetic children. He knocked at the door of 396; a woman with her head wrapped in a shawl spoke to him from a ground-floor window.

"Plutstine is never home in daytime," she told Jerry. "He works. At night you'll find him when you go inside and ring the bell with his name on it."

Jerry did not wait for the coming of night; he went into the hall, saw the bell with Plutstine's name on it, and rang it. And a voice shouted for him to come up.

Plutstine was a tall, thin young man with a shock of upstanding red hair that had begun to recede at the forehead. Jerry remembered seeing him at Malitoff's when he'd revisited the place.

"How are you?" he said. "Everything all right?"

"You're the fellah that was arrested out of the store today," Plutstine said.

"Right," said Jerry. "You remember things, don't you? Yes, I'm the fellah that thing happened to, but don't forget

I'm also the fellah they let go because they hadn't anything on him."

"What do you want?" asked Plutstine.

"A few words with you."

"About the murder? What else could I say that the police didn't ask me? Not any more," said Plutstine violently, "will I tell anybody anything!"

"I know what you mean. Those boys get awful rough when they're working on a case. They never think of a witness' feelings."

"I'm not a witness!" stated Plutstine. "Don't think it! I didn't see anything I should be a witness about."

"All right," said Jerry agreeably. "But I don't want you as a witness. All I want is a little information—any little thing you can tell me. You didn't see the robbery; you didn't see the murder: I know that. But you may have seen a few things that'll put some light on them. What say if we sit down and give matters a talking-over? You know," he said, as he saw refusal in the young man's face, "there's a girl in this; she's being held by the police, and she's not guilty of anything. I want to get her clear."

SOME of the scowl departed from Plutstine's face, and he said:

"Right away when I saw her, I knew she was a fine girl. And, extra, she's good-looking." He opened a door and went in; Jerry followed. There was a bed and some chairs and a work-bench at a window. "Any time at all," said Plutstine, "I'll do something that'll keep anybody out of trouble."

Jerry and the young man sat down. Jerry took out his cigarettes; they each lighted one and began to smoke.

"You set the stones for Malitoff, I hear," said Jerry; "and designed settings."

Plutstine said that had been his work.

"And I have done good work," he said. "For a long time. But what did I get for it? Look," he said, and waved a hand around the room. "This is where I live. I should get wages so's I could have two rooms, and maybe a bath. Malitoff was no good," he said. "I worked nights for him, as well as daytime, and he paid me not so much as he paid the doorman."

"That's the way it goes," said Jerry. "Sometimes they don't appreciate what a person does." He puffed at his cigarette. "You worked in the room next to the one Malitoff used, didn't you?"

"Yes," Plutstine said. "Just next to him, where he could lock the door on me when I had some stones to set that were worth money. He didn't trust me. He didn't trust anybody."

"What about Sudler?" said Jerry. "Did he trust him?"

"Him he didn't trust at all," declared Plutstine. "All the time they had words with each other."

"I wonder why Malitoff kept him on the job?" said Jerry.

"He had to," said Plutstine. "When you got a partner, the partner has often something to say about things."

"Klem wanted Sudler in the place, did he?" said Jerry.

"He made Malitoff give him a job. A couple of times they had a fight about it."

"Klem and Malitoff didn't always hit off together, then?"

"Lately," said Plutstine, "they were not friendly. Klem wasn't doing good. But he was a partner with Malitoff in other things—what, I don't know—and Sudler worked for them. How anybody would give work to a man like that, I wouldn't understand," averred Plutstine. "He is dangerous."

"How do you mean, dangerous?"

"He fights. Always he has the fist up. Even Malitoff he threatened. And," said Plutstine, "he's not such a friend to Klem. More than once I've heard him tell what was in his mind for that fellah. It wasn't nice."

"And you say that Klem and Malitoff weren't hitting it off together, either? What was the trouble—outside Sudler?"

"Money. Klem wanted plenty money, and Malitoff said no. Also, he called Klem things. But never," said Plutstine, "did they talk loud; every time, they made their fights private. Which is a good way; then nobody knows your business."

"But you knew about it," said Jerry.

"How could I help it? I'm in the next room, working; or should I put things in my ears? Today," said Plutstine, "they had a fight: but never have I heard them so extra quiet. Sudler was there, and I heard him trying to make them friends. Once they were whispering, and I got frightened. Right away it was so terrible I thought maybe they would kill each other. So I got up and went to the door that's between the two offices to give a look."

"You couldn't hear, but you wanted to see," said Jerry.

"On a coat-hanger, near the door," said Plutstine, "was Klem's overcoat. I'd seen him put it there awhile before, when I

was in Malitoff's room. As I stood by the doorway, that's all I could see—the coat and, extra, the thing it hung on. And then I saw Sudler's hand—I know it was Sudler's because it's thick and hairy and couldn't be anyone else's. And it went into the pocket of Klem's overcoat and took out a pistol."

"A pistol!" said Jerry steadily. "And then what?"

"There was nothing. I thought there might be, but there wasn't. It was just talk, and then Klem went away."

"He went away before Malitoff was shot?"

"He wasn't in the place when that happened. After they had the fight and called each other things, he went away."

"You're sure of that, are you?"

"I'm positive, absolutely. Afterward I was in Malitoff's room. And then I was in the store. And I didn't see him."

"It was Sudler that took the gun?" said Jerry.

"Also I am positive of that. But—how am I to know if he kept it or not? Maybe he took it so Klem wouldn't have it while he was mad; and maybe he gave it back to him when he cooled off."

"The last person you know to have the pistol was Sudler?"

"Yes," said Plutstine, "but he didn't shoot it. Sudler is no friend of mine; he always says things about me. But when the pistol went off in Malitoff's room, Sudler was at the door where his job is. I saw him there. When I heard the shot, right away I looked to see if he would put the lock on the door so no one could get out. And he did. When there was the second shot, he was still there; after that I saw him running toward Malitoff's office door."

"You're sure you don't know if he had the pistol?"

"How could I tell? Maybe, like I said, he gave it back to Klem. Maybe he gave it to Malitoff. And maybe Malitoff shot himself."

But Jerry shook his head.

"If he had, the gun would have been there when they found him."

PLUTSTINE agreed this seemed to be so. "But funny things happen in murders," he said. "When I read about them, it says you never can tell."

"Yeah," Jerry said. "And you can't. But listen: how much of this that you're telling me have you told to the police?"

"I answered questions. All the time," said Plutstine. "I told them the truth. But,"—with a grin,—"for why should I tell them what they don't ask, when I got a friend, a reporter on a paper, who makes it a scoop in the morning?"

"Isidore,"—Jerry grinned,—"you're not dumb. But let me hear this: what's the idea of telling it to me?"

Plutstine gestured.

"Aint I seen in the papers that you're a friend of the girl what's in trouble by the police? Also, aint I told you already that she's nice—and, in addition, that she's good-looking?"

FOR a few minutes longer Jerry chatted; when he went downstairs and out into the street again, he had a new look of determination on his face. From a public pay-station, he called a phone-number.

"Is this Doxey's?" he asked. He was told it was, and then he said: "If Chubby's there, put him on the phone." Chubby was there, and in a few moments spoke in Jerry's ear.

"Have you made the deal?" Jerry asked.

"All straight," said Chubby. "She'll pay eight grand."

"O. K. You know what to do with the six. And you know how to get it there."

"Same as with the other people?" said Chubby.

"Yes. And the two you've got over—what place was it Mickey said the next money over was to go to?"

"That home for crippled children."

"Right," said Jerry. "Send it there right away. Special delivery. And put in a note that it's from a party who don't want to be known."

"Yeah," said Chubby. "All right."

"Have you got anything else for me?"

"There was a message from the boy, before I left Sid's," said Chubby. "He says there's been a woman trying to get you on the telephone. She's been calling all afternoon. She wouldn't say anything, but the boy at last got her to give her name—it's Nora. Do you know her?"

"O. K.," said Jerry. "I'll look into it."

Within ten minutes he was in the used-gown shop that carried the name of "*Hortense.*" Nora Burns, her eyes red, and speaking in a frightened, broken voice, took him into her little office.

"Oh, I'm glad you've come," she said. "I called and called you, but no one knew where you were."

"Pash has made kind of a tramp out of me," said Jerry bitterly. "I've got to keep on the move."

"I read in the paper—I've been buying every edition all afternoon—that they were after you," said Nora. "And it scared me. Every time I called your office, I was afraid the police were there, and I was afraid to say anything."

"You calling me as often as that," said Jerry, "makes me think you've got something to say."

"I have," said Nora. "When I read that the police had found the pistol Malitoff was killed with, and that it was Mickey's, I was almost crazy. I knew she'd bought a pistol not long after she'd said what she meant to do to Malitoff. But I thought, as she'd said no more about him for so long, that she'd forgotten about the thing and maybe got rid of it."

"How do you know she bought a pistol?" asked Jerry. "She tell you?"

"No. But I knew the man she bought it from. *He* told me."

"Yeah," said Jerry. "All right. And then what?"

"When she came here this morning," said Nora, "and told me she was keeping her promise to tell me if she ever made up her mind to go any place Malitoff was, I was that frightened I was sick. I tried to persuade her," sobbed Nora Burns. "But she wouldn't listen. She seemed determined. And then she said good-by and started to go. When she got to the door," said Nora, "she stopped and came back. She asked me about some shoes I'd spoken to her about when she first came in; she wanted to know if I was sure they were the size I'd said. It seemed kind of queer to me that she should be thinking of such a thing as shoes at that time. But I went to the back of the shop where I keep them and looked. Then I came back and told her."

"And what did she do then?"

"I remember she smiled at me. Then she said good-by again, and went out."

Jerry sat looking at the woman, speculation in his eyes.

"All that seemed kind of odd to you," he said. "You got thinking about it?"

"Yes, I did," said Nora Burns. "I got thinking and wondering. It seemed to me what she'd done just before she went out meant something. But I couldn't make out what it might be."

"When I was here awhile ago," said Jerry, "you didn't mention this."

"I didn't think it was important then," said Nora. "But little by little it came to me that she'd asked about the shoes not because she was interested in them but because she wanted me to go back into the shop, where I couldn't see her. And while I was away there was something she wanted to do."

"Yeah," said Jerry. "I see what you mean."

"There were only two things, as far as I was able to see, that she'd want to do. The first was that she wanted to take something. But I put that out of my head right away; Mickey's a good girl."

"What was the second one?" said Jerry.

"She wanted to hide something. She had something she didn't want to take with her. She wanted to leave it here, and didn't want me to know."

"Did you find that was the fact?" he asked.

"She was standing right about where you are sitting: I was only gone a moment, and she hadn't much chance to move very far. So when I thought she might have hidden something, I began to search. And here," said Nora Burns, "in this desk drawer, where I keep my account-books, dropped down between two of them, I found this."

As she spoke, she lifted a newspaper that lay upon her desk; and there, small, black, and full of deadly competence, lay a .22 Shanley automatic.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

JERRY MOONEY sat looking at the weapon as it sparkled in the light on Nora Burns' desk. He picked it up: it was fully loaded; it looked new; on the band of metal that ran around the butt a number was deeply bitten.

"You think Mickey put this in your desk drawer?" he said.

"It must have been Mickey! Who else *could* it have been? I had all my books out this morning—I go over them in the morning because I have more time; people don't begin to come in before ten o'clock."

"You had all the books out, and the gun wasn't there?"

"It wasn't. If it had been, I'd most surely have seen it. When I opened the drawer to search for what Mickey might have hidden, it was the first thing I saw."

"All right," said Jerry. "I think we've got something." He put the gun care-

fully down upon the desk. "Have you handled it much?"

"No," said Nora, "because I'd heard about fingerprints. At first I was going to wipe it off with a cloth; but then I got frightened. I thought about what I'd best do so's to help Mickey. Then it came to me that she hadn't done anything with the pistol and so to wipe off the fingerprints might do her harm."

"It would have," said Jerry. "The gun they've got at Headquarters is likely the one that killed Malitoff. But it doesn't belong to Mickey. Her fingerprints here, if any, will go a long distance toward proving that this one does belong to her."

"Oh, I hope so!" said Nora fervently. "I hope so, indeed."

"A few moments ago," said Jerry, "you said you knew the man who sold Mickey the pistol some time ago. Would his name be Hevy?"

"No," said Nora.

"It wouldn't be Korn?"

"No," said the woman. "It was Leopold, who keeps that little hardware and sporting-goods place."

"Leopold, eh? And he sold it to her right over the counter?"

"Yes; that's what he said."

Jerry got up.

"All right, Nora," he said. "I think this is the break I've been hoping for."

Twice, in the half-dozen blocks he had to go, Jerry saw policemen; but they were of the settled, unimaginative type who troubled themselves only with routine things, and he got by them without much difficulty. At Leopold's place he talked with the gray-haired, spectacled proprietor at the far end of his small, crowded store.

"I read the things said about the Malitoff murder in the afternoon papers. And I have been expecting a visit from the police," said Leopold. "It is a terrible thing. I was shocked."

"No one has been here yet, asking about it?" inquired Jerry.

"No one. But I suppose there will be, and I will have to testify at the trial. And I am sorry. The girl is a nice girl. It is too bad."

"When did she buy the gun from you?" asked Jerry.

"One evening just seven months ago. I've looked it up in my books. She came in and asked for a small automatic. I was surprised. She had often been here to get things, and I had come to know her," said Leopold. "I asked her why she wanted a thing like that. She said she felt she ought to have one in her room, for protection. So I took down her name and address. Look," said the dealer, taking a book down from a shelf and opening it, "here is the entry: There is a routine, as I suppose you know. Before delivering the weapon to the purchaser, the merchant must send the name and address to Police Headquarters. Here you will see is the date when I did that. If the police find there is nothing against the person whose name has been given, they send a permit. The note giving that permission," said Leopold, pointing to a date written at the bottom of the entry, "is here."

Jerry studied the history of the transaction; then he wrote down the dates on the back of an envelope, took out the automatic which he'd got from Nora Burns and handed it to the man, saying:

"Be careful of the fingerprints. Is this the automatic you sold her?"

"A Shanley," said Leopold. "A .22." He looked at the butt. "And the number is the same I've got here." He looked at Jerry over the rims of his glasses. "There can be no doubt of it: this is the identical piece."

THINGS were meanwhile happening at Headquarters.

"We have every respect for the district attorney's office," said Captain Pash in a voice that plainly indicated that he, personally, had none at all, "and we want to get along with it as agreeably as possible. But also we must have a chance to get on with the business of the police department."

"The idea was," said Assistant District Attorney Curren, smoothly, "that we'd leave all questioning of the girl until tomorrow."

Pash pointed his long chin belligerently at the young attorney.

"That arrangement was made before we'd reached the spot where the case now stands," he said. "At that time we hadn't the gun; we hadn't the full police laboratory report."

"Mooney," said Curren, "is looking around. Why not give him a chance to do a little something?"

"Mooney," declared Pash, "is a party to this murder. And as you know, Judge Anderson's release of him has ceased to ride."

"Well, why not wait until your people bring him in? Then you can talk to the girl, and to him also."

"We haven't got him," said Pash, "but we have got her. Also we've got a definite case. And we want to fasten it down so tomorrow's newspapers will have no doubt about what's happened."

"Very well," said Curren, with a gesture. "If you must, I suppose you must. So let's have it."

They went into the room where Mickey sat reading; she looked up.

"It's all right," Curren said to her. "But Captain Pash thinks he ought to speak to you."

Mickey looked at Pash. She'd listened to his tirades over the telephone a hundred times.

"I hope," she said, "it's something interesting."

"You might find it's a good bit more than that," Pash replied. "You've been pretty lucky since you've been brought in. Anyone else—anyone who hadn't friends on the inside"—with a look at Curren—"would have had to toe the line and been asked to tell what they know, long ago."

"You've already been told what I know," Mickey said. "It wasn't much—because I don't know much."

"You know a good deal more than you've said," charged Pash. "And I'm warning you that you'd better get talking. If you don't give what you've got, we're going to take it from you."

"Well, I suppose you'll have to keep doing it," said Mickey. "And I'll be interested in seeing how you work, Captain. I've often heard of the way you put the pressure on, but have never been able quite to believe it."

Curren smiled at this; and Pash began to glare through his lenses.

"Maybe," he said, "it would be just as well, young woman, if you didn't put so much edge on your conversation. It'll do you no good in the long run, I'm warning you!" He stood facing her, leaning upon the back of a chair. "First of all," he said, "I'd like some information about the gun you used today. Where you got it—what kind of a one it was—and what you did with it?"

"I'll answer the first of those, Captain," said Mickey quietly. "And that answer will do for the others, also. I had no gun."

"Remember," bawled Pash, "I'm warning you! I'll stand for no nonsense!"

"I can see that," said Mickey. "And that's the reason I'm telling you the facts. I don't like to see anybody get excited."

Pash, with an effort, controlled himself. "All right," he said. "If you've made up your mind that we must squeeze information out of you, we can't help it. But if your feelings are hurt, and you feel you've been talked to not so gently, why, blame it on yourself."

"I don't expect anything but the very worst," said Mickey. "So let's be going along. But don't talk to me about guns. I had no gun when I went into the place in Middle City Tower. I saw no gun while I was there. I had none when your police arrested me."

"Do you deny you own an automatic?"

"I do own one."

"Do you deny it is a Shanley .22?"

"It is a Shanley .22."

Pash grinned at this. "Now," he said, "we're getting somewhere! —Zottman," he said to one of the two policemen, "let me have that pistol."

The policeman took a small automatic from a cloth bag; he gave it to Pash, who laid it upon a table.

"Take a glance at that," he said to Mickey. "Does it look like your pistol?"

"It looks very much like it," she admitted.

"Hah!" Pash glanced at Curren triumphantly. "It seems more and more as though we were getting somewhere." He turned to the policeman. "Let's have the slugs," he said.

From the cloth bag the man produced two bullets, both of them somewhat distorted. Pash put them on the table beside the pistol.

"These," he said, "are the bullets that were fired into the body of Malitoff. They were removed at the autopsy which was performed about two hours ago. Since then"—glowering at Mickey through his big lenses—"they have been put through the police laboratory, as has the weapon they were fired from. We have absolute proof that this gun which you have acknowledged as yours is that weapon."

"JUST a moment," said Curren. But he was prevented from proceeding by Pash, who turned upon him with a bitter look and an uplifted hand.

"This," said Pash, "is my investigation, and I must not be interfered with."

"Very well," said Curren; "I merely wished to set you straight."

"I know what was in Mr. Curren's mind," said Mickey to Pash. "He wanted to tell you that I *didn't* say this pistol is mine. And I didn't. What I

admitted, Captain, was that it *looks* like mine. For there have been some thousands of Shanley .22's made; and they all look alike."

"Yeah," said Pash; "I know you're smart. But whether you've admitted this weapon is yours, or no, makes no difference. The police laboratory tests prove these bullets, taken from Malitoff's body, were fired from this pistol. And that's a first-class beginning. You admit you had a Shanley .22?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get it?"

The girl was silent.

"All right; we'll find out." He glowered at her through his lenses. "You've said you hadn't that pistol with you at any time while you were in Malitoff's store. If you hadn't it with you, where was it? Did you leave it at your apartment?"

She didn't answer. He grinned at her like an old dog. "I don't mind saying we were there, and didn't find it."

"It wasn't there," Mickey said.

"Did you give it away at any time? Did you sell it? Did you loan it to anyone?"

She made no reply.

"For a few moments we'll put that part of it aside, and take up something else. You have a brother, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Some time ago he was arrested, tried and convicted of various robberies. He's now serving a five-year term in the penitentiary. Is that correct?"

"It is."

"It was the testimony of this man who has just been murdered—Malitoff—that convicted him. Am I right in that?" Mickey nodded. "Did you or did you not make threats against Malitoff on the day of, and directly after, the trial?"

She didn't reply, and Pash said to one of the policemen:

"Ask Scharf to step in."

A wide-headed man with a bulging stomach came into the room; he tried to seem at ease, but was none too successful.

"Is your name Scharf?" asked Pash.

"Alonzo Scharf," said the heavy-stomached man.

"What was it you reported this afternoon about this girl?"—indicating Mickey.

"I stood near her and another woman one day in a corridor in City Hall," said Alonzo. "It was just after a trial. Malitoff had been a witness. And as he went by, I heard this girl"—pointing to Mickey—"say to her companion that she was going to kill him—for testifying against her brother."

"That's all," said Pash. And after Alonzo had gone out, he turned to Mickey. "Who was the woman you said that to?"

The girl was silent.

"Listen," said Pash, "you're trying to cheat the law! When I ask a question, I want an answer!"

"Don't tell me you're judge and jury and everything else," protested Mickey. "Because I'm not going to believe it."

"I've got enough stuff on you to indict you a dozen times over," said Pash. "So have sense and tell what happened." He leaned toward her, one finger pointing. "What did Mooney have to do with this affair? He's in it! Neither you nor him can fool me. He's in it, and if you've got any sense, you'll make a clean breast of it."

Just then there was a knock on the door. One of the policemen opened it, and someone spoke to him. The man, an astonished look on his face, turned and said to Pash:

"Here's Mooney, now!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"WELL," said Captain Pash as Jerry Mooney walked into the room, "so they've brought you in, have they?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Jerry. "This little visit is all on my own." He waved a hand to Curren. "Hello, Steve! Glad you're here." Then he went to Mickey. "How are you, kid?" he said in a low voice. "Not feeling so bad, eh?"

"I feel all right," she said, and smiled at him, perhaps a little wanly. "I've been hoping you'd get back soon."

"I tried a couple of times to phone you. But they'd not let me."

"How do things look?"

"Nice," he said. "I think I'll fix it in the next few hours. Have they treated you all right?"

"Yes; Mr. Curren saw to that."

"Good boy, Steve," said Jerry. "He's a first-rate guy."

In the meantime Pash had gone out into the corridor, where a sergeant was standing.

"Didn't someone bring this party in?" asked Pash.

"Not that I saw," said the sergeant. "When I first got a view of him, he was coming in the door all alone. And he asked for you."

Pash locked his jaws and glared.

"I'd have given quite a good bit," he said after a pause, "if some big cop had dragged him in by the neck. But you can never get any satisfaction out of that big beef, no matter what it's about."

PASH returned to the sheriff's room, and his rasping voice filled it.

"All right," he said, "now you're here, Mooney, we'll see to it that you're tucked away good and safe. There'll be no more walking out and having us hunt all over Eastredge for you."

"Well," said Jerry cheerfully, "you always were the one for hospitality. No matter how many words I have with you, you never fail in your offer of board and lodging."

"Yes, I know," said Pash. "And this time, Mooney, you're going to get it."

"Something must have turned up since I talked with you last," Jerry said good-humoredly. "Who's been playing games with the facts and getting you all worked up again?"

"Look," said Pash, and he pointed to the automatic on the table. "Does that look like a joke?"

"A very competent little gun," said Jerry. "Looks like a nice one to carry, if a person needed such a thing."

"That," said Pash, "is the weapon Malitoff was killed with." Jerry approached the table, but the Captain waved him away. "Keep your hands off," he said. "I'll not have you touching anything around here."

"You're not thinking of fingerprints!" said Jerry; and he looked at Pash, grinning. "From what I've heard of this piece, Captain, it ought to have so many on it that none of them would be of much use to you!"

"What do you know about it?" asked Pash, eying Jerry like a hawk.

"Well, you know, when I get to proceeding around, I ask questions; and in that way I often get to hear of things. The history of this little shooter—anyway, part of its history—shows that quite a few people have handled it since the killer heaved it out of the ninth-floor window of the Middle City Tower." Jerry put his hands in his pockets and looked thoughtfully at Pash. "Now, let's see," he said. "First there was this fellah Gravy, in the Short Order Café. He got it out of the street-cleaner's truck. Then he sold it to a cab-driver. The cab-driver passed it on to a secondhand dealer. That's where you got it. Three people, when it comes to handling," said Jerry, "and finger-marking, can give a gun a pretty good work-out."

"We've got more than fingerprints," said Pash. "We know this girl owned a .22 automatic Shanley. Also we know that she threatened to kill Malitoff. She was in a room next his just before he was shot. She was found standing beside his dead body immediately after the shots were fired."

But Jerry gave little attention to this; he kept his gaze upon the pistol lying on the table.

"And this is the gun the shooting was done with, is it? I suppose you've looked at the number of it, and everything?"

"It has no number," said Pash. "People who do jobs like this always cut the number out. They think that'll get them something. They forget," he said with huge satisfaction, "that the laboratory gives us facts that are sufficient proof in themselves."

"You seem to have gone after all the points in this case, don't you?" said Jerry, his brows uplifted. "Laboratory and everything! I call that being pretty thorough. What did the firearms permits show you when you looked over the list of them?"

"Revolvers, or pistols, with the numbers cut out can't be traced on the permit-list," said Pash. "And people who make up their minds to do a piece of knock-off work like this never bother about permits. They get their guns from somebody who handles them under cover."

"If you'd taken a little trouble," said Jerry, "and opened the permit file, you'd have learned something." Jerry looked at Mickey. "You did have an automatic .22, didn't you?" She nodded. "Where did you buy it?"

"At Leopold's."

"Did he send in your name for a permit?"

"He told me he did."

"Do you know the number of the pistol you bought?"

"No," she said; "I never looked."

JERRY took a handkerchief-covered object from his pocket; he opened it upon the table.

"Here is the automatic she bought," he said to Curren. "The number is *x. b.*

1276. —Take a look at it, Captain. And then go to your pistol-permit file and look it up. Also put it through the laboratory if you want, and see what more you can find."

Pash gazed at Jerry stormily.

"The first thing I want done about this," he said, beating the table with his fist, "is to hear you tell where this pistol came from."

"All you need worry about," said Jerry, "is whether it's the piece I say it is. The file'll tell you that."

"You've had this, and have withheld it!" yelled Pash. "That's an old trick of yours, Mooney. And you know as well as I do it's illegal to conceal evidence from the police."

"Haven't I brought it in?" said Jerry. He turned to Curren. "When I bring a thing in openly and offer it as evidence, could you call that concealment—in court?"

"It might be *called* that," said Curren, "but it couldn't be made to hold."

"WELL, anyway," said Pash, "it's plain to me you've been up to something; and whatever it is, it's going to stop right here." He turned to the policeman. "Zottman," he said, "take charge of this man; have him booked for complicity in the Malitoff murder. And see he's put in a cell."

"Listen," said Jerry amiably: "let's take it a little more quietly. You say, Captain, I've been up to something. And that's right. I have been. I've been trying to open up this killing."

Pash snorted derisively.

"We don't need any help," he said. "We know who did the killing."

"Yeah," said Jerry, "you always know! And when it's looked over, it's mostly found to be a lot of stuff you want to believe because of something that hasn't got anything to do with the case. This time, and it's happened before, you want it to turn out so and so, because you're sore on me."

"Slam him into a cell, Zottman," said Pash to the policeman. "And don't be too easy about it."

"All right," said Jerry, "just as you please. But understand me, Pash, if you sling me in the can, you're going to get one hell of a blasting in the newspapers for it. If I'm in a cell, this whole thing will break tomorrow morning in a way you're not thinking of; and most of the pieces'll fall on your thick nut. Let me keep on the case as I've been going, and it'll break in a couple of hours, and you'll get the credit."

"All talk," said Pash, but with a sudden sharp look in his eyes. "What have you got? Let's hear it!"

"I'm telling you something," said Jerry, "but I'm going into no details. You people always fly to bits when you try to work with them. What you did," Jerry proceeded, "was to stop thinking as soon as you'd found I'd been hooked. And right away when they told you that they'd also put the hand on my secretary, you let yourself be riveted down hard."

"Why shouldn't I?" said Pash. "No one goes hunting for a thing after he's found it. Those two arrests were enough for me."

"Yeah, I know: and that's what I'm talking about. No good cop'd let himself dry up that way. As soon as he got his breath, he'd looked around: he'd found that Malitoff was a crook, that he had a record as long as your arm. Besides that, he'd have found there were crooks employed in Malitoff's who'd done their bits: he'd have found all was not well in the control of the place, and that the boys did not like each other any too well—and he'd know almost anything could come out of a set-up like that."

"We know about Malitoff and his diamond-smuggling," said Pash, "and we know about Sudler. And we know enough not to be pulled to one side by anybody's phony talk."

"O. K.," said Jerry. "I'm through. That's my last. Go ahead and make a jackass of yourself. With a little coöperation, I could clear this thing up in the next couple of hours."

"Any showing how smart you are," said Pash, "will be done in a cell. You can have a nice comfortable seat," he said with a grin, "and maybe you could dictate to somebody who has a pad of paper and a pencil just what you'd want them to do."

"Personally," said Curren to Pash, "I don't see what purpose it'll serve to put Mooney under arrest just now. If he's at large it'll do no damage. It's quite evident he doesn't mean to run away; his coming here on his own shows that. I'm in favor of giving him room to work in. My opinion is that he'll bring in something that'll put a new face on the whole matter."

Pash burst into a long and strenuous objection to this; and Curren finally said impatiently:

"All right. But Judge Anderson is still in the building, and I'll speak to him again. You know, Captain, he has never looked on police methods favorably, and I feel pretty sure he'll disagree with you in this, and let Mooney run."

Pash blazed up. But Jerry, disregarding the man's remarks, began to talk through them.

"Here's a job to do," he said. "I'll make you an offer. I'll not only do this case up in a neat bundle, as I just said, but I'll lay it in your lap. And you can open it and show it to all the morning-paper boys as your own."

"I don't have to depend on you or anyone else for my write-ups," said Pash. "I'm known. My record's written down for over thirty years. I don't have to take anything from anyone else. But I don't want Anderson lecturing me. I can only take a little more from him without blowing up. And remember, at seven o'clock be all ready with whatever you've got to show, for that's the time the bell's going to ring on you, and I'm going to give my story to the papers."

Jerry grinned.

"Tough guy, to the last," he said. He turned to Curren. "O. K., Steve. I'll remember this." And then to Mickey: "Keep your chin up. I'll be back before long, and you'll be out of this." He was turning away, and then paused. "What say to the Algerian Moon after you have a chance to get home and dress?"

Mickey's beautiful teeth showed in a smile as she looked at him.

"We were there last night," she said. "Remember? This time, let's go to the Lombardy."

"There's no dancing there, you know," said Jerry.

She nodded.

"This is one time I'll not want to dance," she said. "I'll want to talk a little about things."

"O. K.," said Jerry. "We'll do that."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WHEN Jerry reached his office, he found Ates surrounded by editions of the evening papers. The boy arose hastily.

"Listen," he said, "you hadn't ought to've come here! The police have been around almost all the time since you went away. And maybe they're watching some place now."

"It's all right," said Jerry. "They've laid off me—for a while. Anyone else been here?"

"Reporters," said Ates. "A lot of them. There were a good many phone calls. I put them down."

He handed Jerry a list.

"I've been hearing from them while I was out," said Jerry as he glanced at the slip. "But try to get Chubby for me, now."

In a few moments Chubby answered and Jerry said:

"What have you found out?"

"I've got a little bagful," said Chubby. "Want to hear it now?"

"No. I'm going home to get a bath and some clean clothes. Run up there; then we can talk."

Jerry, at his apartment, had a warm bath with plenty of soap and rubbing; he had slipped into his pajamas and a house-robe and had lighted a cigarette when his doorbell rang and he admitted Chubby.

"I'm getting to be a big help to you," said Chubby, as he sat down. "When things begin to break you never know how far they'll go."

"Something about Sonya?" said Jerry.

"Yes; but besides that, I picked up a nice little item when I went to see the mending-shop girl with the money. I was lucky when I went in for there was no one in the place but herself. When I asked her was she Miss Codrey, she said she was. And then I said I'd come for a few words with her on business—about the picture she'd sold to Malitoff. And right away," said Chubby, "she started to get a little shaky. She said she'd thought maybe something would happen, and she'd get part of the money Malitoff has sold the thing for. Even a little of it. And now that he was dead, she supposed she wouldn't.

"I had to talk to her awful easy," said Chubby, "because I saw if I didn't, I couldn't get the money over to her without her thinking something was wrong. I knew if she ever got it into her head that the murder was in any way hooked up with it, she'd never take it. But I stepped along nice and quiet," Chubby said, "and made her believe the thing had been fixed up yesterday: that people who didn't like the way the thing had been done had put the squeeze on Malitoff and made him give."

"You told her not to talk?" said Jerry.

"Yeah; I said Malitoff's going out might make trouble in things that came just about the same time: his heirs might ask for explanations. She said she'd say nothing, not even to her mother. But there was one person—she thought he'd be sure to ask questions. That's the party who collects Malitoff's rents. I asked her about him, and what I got I thought was kind of funny." He took out a little loose-leaf memoranda book, tore out a page and handed it to Jerry. "Take a look."

JERRY read what was on the page, and then tucked it in his pocket.

"I heard about that awhile ago," he said. "And I've been thinking of dropping in on him just to see what might be going on."

"After I left the money with the girl," said Chubby, "I sent the rest of it, just like you said. Then I went over to the Etruria and talked with the people there. Tweedy got me a chance to listen to the telephone-girl, Freda. And does she like this Sonya—or does she?

"When I once got her started on the subject, I had trouble keeping her in control. But when I got her down to it, she gave me the facts. She'd talked to Klem. That one," said Chubby, "I fixed at just about the time you called me, awhile ago. Klem said you had been reported as coming out of Headquarters, and his idea was that you'd gone there to turn in what you'd taken at her apartment and to try and fix yourself right with Pash. And that you must have done it, or you wouldn't be coming out as you did."

"Well, anyhow, the boy's got a head to think with," grinned Jerry. "What else did he say?"

"He told her you doing like you done made him sure he had something to settle with her, and that he was going to do it soon. Right away, when he'd stopped talking," said Chubby, "she puts in a call for Sudler. And it seems what she wanted from him was protection. She wanted him to come to the Etruria, and to come soon: for almost any minute Klem might get there, and she was afraid of him."

Jerry looked up abruptly.

"And of course, Sudler being a real tough boy, said he'd be there?"

"He said he would," said Chubby, "but not right away. He had some business about eight o'clock, uptown. And where do you think it is he's going a-calling?"

"I'd never know," said Jerry. "Where?"

"It's that address I wrote on the paper I gave you a couple of minutes ago."

Jerry sat apparently turning this over in his mind, and then he said:

"Sudler's going up there too, is he? That might make it kind of nice; if he drops in while I'm there, maybe he'll be interested in what I'm going to say."

After Chubby had gone, Jerry slept for a while. Then he rose, dressed and called Headquarters.

"Captain Pash," he said.

But the Captain had gone home. Jerry got his number, and in a few moments the Captain's querulous voice was rasping over the wire.

"In fifteen minutes," said Jerry, "a cab will stop in front of your door. I'll be in it. And on my way to visit the party who shot Malitoff. If you are ready and waiting and want to go along, that'll be your chance."

He put down the telephone while the Captain was still yelling and demanding; he then called a cab and smoked a cigarette until he had word it was at the door.

IN less than the fifteen minutes named, he drove up to the home of Captain Pash; the man was standing at the gate, bundled in a big coat, his hat pulled down on his head.

"Before you say a word," said Pash, at the cab window, "let me tell you I'm not going to be jockeyed around by you or anybody else. And furthermore—"

"All right, Captain," grinned Jerry. "Get in. We'll not have any talk; this time we're going to do things. So let's be on our way."

Pash got into the cab. "Where are we going?" he asked as he adjusted himself, and the taxi crept away from the curb.

"What name?" asked Pash.

"Why bother with names?" said Jerry. "But I hope, Captain, you've put a gun in your pocket."

"Don't worry about me," said Pash. "I've been in the police business too long to overlook a thing like that."

Presently Jerry called to the cabman to stop, and he and Pash got out.

"Drive around the next corner," said Jerry to the cabman, "and wait about a block farther on."

The cab drew away and then disappeared.

Pash was looking about glumly.

"Which way?" he said.

"Straight ahead," replied Jerry. "The number is 9014." They moved on until the number showed in the fanlight over the door of an apartment house on the opposite side of the street. "All right," said Jerry. "I'm not sure just how the thing stands at the moment. So let's settle down here for a little and see if anything happens."

They had waited about a quarter of an hour when they heard a cab. It stopped before the door across the street, and a man got out.

"Sudler!" whispered Pash, turning his look upon Jerry. "The doorman at Malitoff's."

"None other," said Jerry. "I wasn't sure if he'd gone in or not; that's why the wait."

Sudler paid the cabman and entered the building.

"Now," said Pash, "what's next?"

"In a few moments we'll also go in," said Jerry. It was perhaps ten minutes before he stirred, and Pash waited patiently. "That'll be enough," said Jerry. "I always like to let them get well into their business before I move in on them."

The elevator was shown to be at the basement level; Jerry, who had looked at the list of names at one side, said:

"Let's take the stairs. The party we want is on the third floor."

Pash said nothing, but followed him up the flight to the second floor; at the third floor, Jerry paused.

"We want 324," he said. "I'll do the talking, and you keep your eyes on the party that's re—"

The sentence was broken by the rending report of a heavy revolver; before the shock of the sound had settled, the two men were rushing down the hall. The door of 324 opened, and Sudler, a revolver in his hand, appeared. Instantly, Pash, with the true police instinct, struck him with a blackjack he'd drawn while on the way; and as Sudler collapsed, Jerry entered the room. Prawn, head clerk at Malitoff's, was sitting in a chair, his hands pressed against his middle. Jerry bent over him.

"Did he shoot you?" Jerry asked.

"Sudler did," gasped Prawn. "He said he'd do it, and he has."

SUDLER, fallen in the doorway, partly lifted himself; he grinned at Prawn through a mask of blood.

"You dirty double-crosser!" he said. "You always wanted the best of things, didn't you? I told you nobody could make a sucker out of me."

"He's wrong!" gasped Prawn. "I never got anything but wages from Malitoff; and not much of that."

Sudler got to his feet, with the help of Pash. The house was in an uproar by this time, and tenants of the apartment filled the hall; the excited elevator-man was demanding to know what had happened.

"Keep your voice down," said Pash. "And telephone for the police. Tell them a man has been shot."

He shoved Sudler's gun into his coat pocket, shoved the man into a chair and shut the room door. Prawn was sunken deep now in his chair, his head hanging, and he was moaning.

"That guy," said Sudler, "will die with a slug in him, and he'll go on lying. It was him that shot Malitoff. And it was him that got away with the ruby this mug"—indicating Jerry—"was arrested for stealing. Malitoff found it out, and was shot to keep him quiet."

"Prawn shot Malitoff?" said Pash. "And is that what you shot Prawn for?"

WIPING the blood from his face, Sudler grinned.

"Not me!" he said. "Anybody could have taken a wham at Malitoff, and it would have been all right with me. What I wanted was a piece of the ice. Prawn wouldn't do anything, so I fixed him—as I said I would."

A knock sounded on the door.

"I called the police. They're coming," said the voice of the elevator-operator.

"All right," said Pash. "Keep that hallway clear."

Jerry spoke to Prawn.

"Did you shoot Malitoff?" he asked.

"Yes," said the man with a gasping effort. "But not because of the ruby. I don't know what became of that. I thought you took it. Or maybe Malitoff himself, for the insurance."

"Don't forget," said Pash, "you're making a statement to the police."

"I know—I am," said the man.

Pash opened the door and called in the elevator-man.

"Listen to this," he said. "I'll want your testimony as a witness to this statement." And then to Prawn: "You admit you shot Malitoff?"

"Yes. Yes—I shot him—twice."

"What did you do it for?"

"He never gave me more than wages. I—I turned over things to him that he

made big money out of. I never got anything. He made six thousand dollars out of a picture—the other day. I located that for him, just like I've done—lots of things. But I didn't get a cent. That's—that's why I made up my mind to kill him."

"What did you do with the gun?" asked Jerry.

"I—I threw it out of the window."

"Was it your gun?" asked Pash.

"It was in his office. I got the idea when I saw it."

"How did you get it?" asked Pash. "How did you get into the room, and out so quickly?"

But the man could not answer; his head sank still lower and his whole body seemed to fold up in the chair.

"Has he passed out?" asked Sudler.

"No," said Pash. "But he will; and you'll cook for it."

"It was self-defense," grinned Sudler. "The guy was a killer. You just heard him admit it. I came in to talk about this business I just mentioned, and he tried to get me."

A few minutes later the police arrived. Prawn was carried out, and Sudler was taken in charge by a pair of stalwart patrolmen. For a moment Jerry stood alone in the room with Pash.

"Well," said Jerry, "there it is. All done up in a neat package, as I said. And laid in your lap."

Pash's lean jaw worked; his hawklike beak pointed at Mooney.

"It lets the girl out," he said. "And as far as I can see, it's going to let you out. But listen, fellah: in spite of that, you're not fooling me any. You've been in this thing. How, I don't know, but you've been in it, and only your usual luck got you out. So I'll be watching you; don't forget that."

THERE were violins at the Lombardy; also there were clarinets, a 'cello and a wonderful piano. But no dancing; Silvestro had always thought his music was enough.

Mickey sat with Mooney at one of the tables.

"We'll not stay very long," she said. "Maybe an hour. I took an awful pounding today, and I need sleep."

"Yeah," said Jerry, "you'll want a night and a day of that to catch up."

"If it hadn't been for that pistol," said Mickey, "and the way I lost control of myself that day at the courthouse, I think things wouldn't have been so bad. For I'd got over that idea of being a law of my own a long time ago. I brought the pistol to the office with me today to get it out of my rooms. When I went to Nora's place, I took it with me, thinking I'd turn it over to her. But when the time came, I couldn't. I was ashamed of the threats I'd made. I said nothing to her, but hid the pistol in her desk, meaning to tell her about it at another time."

"There's one thing I haven't been able to understand," said Jerry, "and that's why you asked to see Malitoff personally when you were in his place."

"That was another thing I had in my mind," said Mickey. "I wanted to see him, to speak to him, and then go away. I wanted to *prove* to myself that I never would think as I had been thinking, again."

"I saw in the pistol in the office," said Jerry. "Ates saw it; and your having it made the whole thing look pretty bad. It knocked me further than I'd care to say, and I hadn't an idea about what had really happened."

"YOU seemed as if you knew what you were going to do when you left Pash's office," said Mickey. "Telling me not to be scared—and everything."

"All a bluff," said Jerry. "I hadn't an idea. And I didn't have one until I talked with Georgie, and he told me that Sudler, the doorman at Malitoff's, had been a strong-arm man for Eddie Klem. And then when Mrs. Doxey told me Klem had a piece of Malitoff's business, I thought there might be something. When I talked to Klem, I could see there *was* something: there was a kind of glimmer, but I didn't know what."

"But I'll bet you let on you knew a lot," said Mickey.

Jerry grinned at her.

"You have to do it," he said. "Let them once see you're stuck, and it's awfully hard to do anything afterward. But when I talked to Cora at the hospital, and she told me what the woman looked like that had called at her place and slugged her, and when Chubby said the description was like Sonya, a friend of Klem's, I really began to take hold of things.

"When I heard Sonya was broke and had been trying to raise money, and that she'd had a fight with Klem because he wouldn't put any through, I began to figure on a possibility. Klem didn't know who had the ruby! Sonya was

working with Sudler, and Klem was being kidded. That idea was what made me talk plain, as I've told you, in Sonya's apartment, and begin to rummage around, and at last to walk out with the ruby. Klem wasn't sure of anything, and Sonya wouldn't give herself away while he was around listening.

"I went to see Sudler to find out about the tie-up with Sonya—if any. He had seen Cora in Malitoff's place and knew her. He mentioned her to Sonya; and Sonya, saying nothing, stepped around to Cora's and played a few cards that Sudler knew nothing about."

"THAT dame!" said Mickey. "She was working with Sudler against Klem, and by herself against Sudler."

"Yeah," said Jerry. "And it looks as if she didn't hesitate any, either. And when Sudler got sore when he heard what she'd done, he dropped the hint that Klem had been at Malitoff's around noon, and afterwards tried to cover up. Sudler didn't seem to have anything against Klem, personal, because he also tried to cover him by tearing the piece out of the clock record on Malitoff's door."

"Why did he do that?" said Mickey. "I don't see any reason for it."

Jerry shook his head doubtfully.

"It must be about the gun he took out of Klem's pocket. Plutstine didn't know what became of that, but Prawn says the gun was on a shelf in Malitoff's room; he saw it there and got thinking about it. Then he used it. So, I think, Sudler gave the gun to Malitoff after Klem went away.

"I figure it out," said Jerry, "that when Klem heard about the shooting, and found the gun had been taken from his pocket, he got nervous. If it was found by the police, they might trace it to Sonya; and to save herself, she'd tell how he'd taken it from her. So he must have begun a hunt for it just about the time we did.

"It was Plutstine who first told me of how Prawn felt about the shabby deal Malitoff was giving him, and how sore he was about it. Also he told me how he, from another part of the store, saw Prawn coming out of his room after everybody else had rushed into the room where the body was found. And when you remember there was a communicating door between the two rooms, you can see how Prawn managed the job."

"And to think," said Mickey, "that I sat in that right-hand room while he came into the other one with that terrible thought in his mind!"

"WELL, you're in the clear, kid," said Jerry, "and maybe it'd be best if you got your mind off it." They listened to the swelling of the violins, the soft blowing of the clarinets, and the deep background made by the piano.

"Nice, eh?" Jerry commented.

"Beautiful!" said Mickey.

"Ace in the Hole," by Jackson Gregory, will be our book-length novel for March.

PRIZE OFFER FOR REAL EXPERIENCES

THERE is material for a novel in every person's life, it has been said. Whether this is true or not, we do believe that in the lives of most of us some experience has occurred sufficiently exciting to merit description in print. With this idea in mind we shall be pleased to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of $50.

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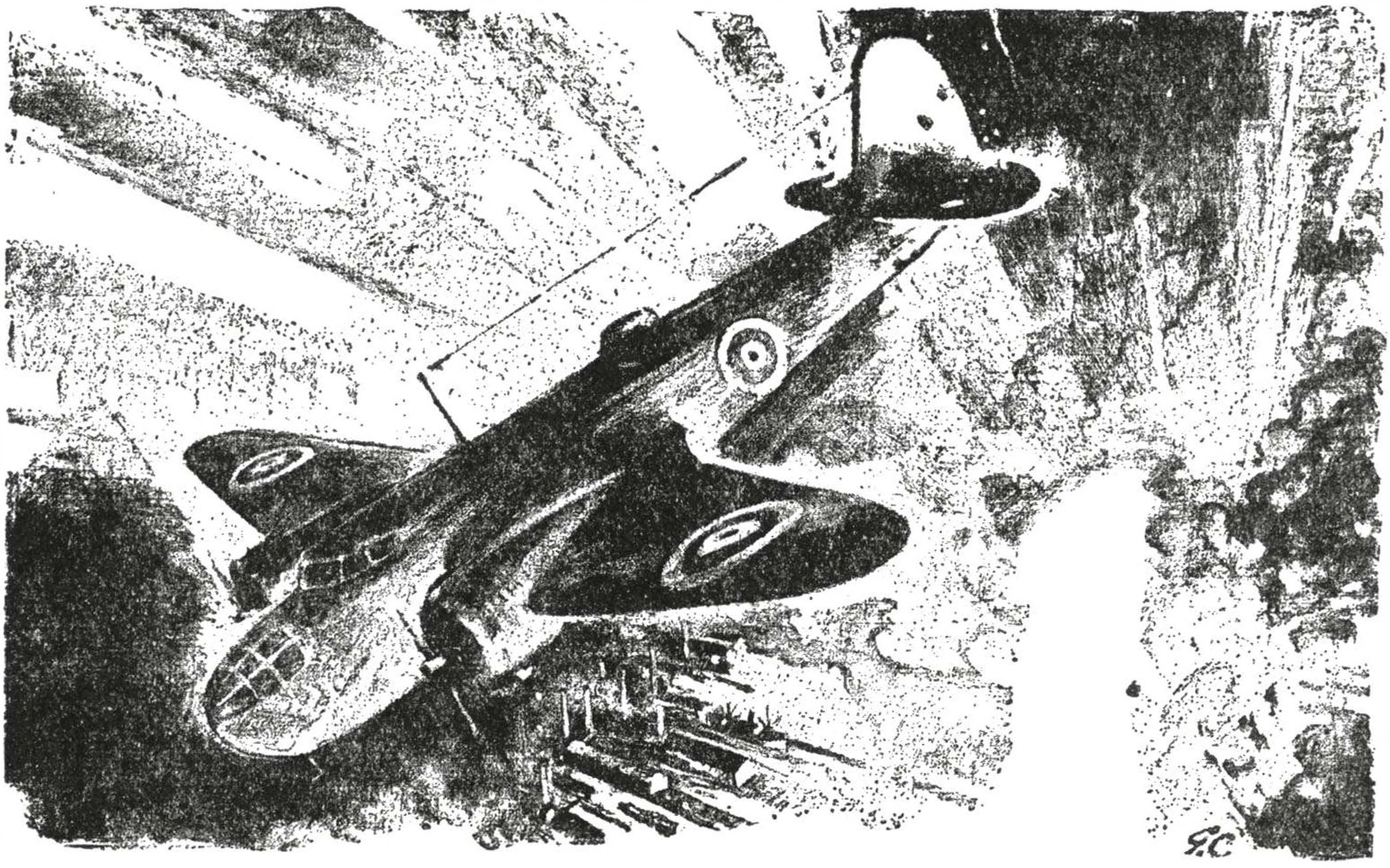
A pen name may be used if desired, but in all cases the writer's real name and permanent address should accompany the manuscript. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story, and keep a copy as insurance against loss of the original; for 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.

Fact stories from participants in the war are specially desired.



"Bombs Off!"

The pilot of a "medium bomber" tells a flame-vivid story of his part in a recent British raid on the "invasion bases." . . . As told to—

RALPH MICHAELIS

THE Squadron Leader said, "You're for Antwerp tonight, boys," and we knew it was an invasion-ports show.

Then the Intelligence Officer gave us our instructions and pointed out our objectives on the target map. He told us where to expect anti-aircraft fire, and where we would meet the most intense searchlight concentrations. We were to bomb the docks, barge concentrations and shipping. The whole show had been worked out meticulously by the staff before we started on it.

Each captain of the planes comprising the bombing force was given his zero hour, at which he was to attack his target. He was given the direction from which he should approach it, and the direction by which he should leave it, together with the minimum height below which he must not fly over the target, and the time allowed him to find his target and carry out his bombing. . . .

It was bright moonlight as we roared across the airdrome with a "useful" bomb load to dump on the invasion fleet.

My wireless operator was busy checking his instrument with a message to the ground station, while my bomb-aimer was giving the once-over to his gadgets and the front guns, which are also his job.

The country below was almost as clear as daylight as it rolled beneath us like a patchwork quilt bathed in a silver light. Over the coast, lighthouses flashed and shot out their beams, while our own searchlights stabbed about the sky on the lookout for German raiders.

As we approached the Belgian coast, searchlights reached up their long silver fingers at us and the barking *woof-woof* of bursting anti-aircraft shells under our port wing announced that German gunners had spotted us.

We're comparatively little chaps—medium bombers, they call us; and we fly

a good deal lower than the big fellows. Consequently we get a lot of stuff fired at us that can't reach the height at which the big fellows fly. In fact they seem to loose off everything at us except hand-grenades.

As we approached the target, we could see that somebody, probably the big fellows, had been there before us; for there was a regular bonfire blazing among the dock warehouses. Every now and then there was an explosion which sent out another gush of flames. The searchlights caught us in their blinding concentrated glare, and we became the center of a real Brock's Benefit. Strings of red and green tracer bullets came sizzling up toward us; there were flaming onions strung together in clumps of threes, with pom-pom and anti-aircraft shells galore.

The plane began to rock crazily from the bursts of anti-aircraft shells, and I changed height and direction quickly to put the gunners off their aim. I shook them off for a bit, but they picked us up again as we flew over the target.

DOWN below in the light from the blazing warehouses I could see a bunch of barges waiting to go through the lock into the dock basin. Inside the machine I could just see the legs of my bomb-aimer, as he lay full length, face downward, peering through his window under the nose of the machine.

"Left — right. . . . Left — steady!" came his voice over my telephone, as he directed my steering over the target. Then he told me we had overrun it, and asked me to fly over again.

I dodged round for a few minutes to get away from the searchlights and the gun-fire, and then ran over the target again.

"Left. . . . Left. . . . Right!" directed my bomb-aimer. But just then there was a terrific report behind me as a shell burst, and the nose of the machine pitched downward, as if a giant foot had given us a tremendous kick from behind.

I regained control with some difficulty, and the rear gunner reported that he could see holes in the tail-plane. However, as the plane still answered to controls, I flew once more across the target.

"Left—left. . . . Steady!" chanted the bomb-aimer; then: "*Bombs off!*"

I threw the plane over in a quick dodging turn as soon as I heard "*Bombs off!*" for I knew that the bomb-aimer had done his job, and it was not healthy to stay in that neighborhood any longer.

I was too busy dodging searchlights and anti-aircraft fire for the next few minutes to be able to look back and see what damage we had done; but the bomb-aimer and rear gunner reported that there had been a tremendous explosion among the barges, and that they had seen what appeared to be a chunk of one of the lock-gates pitched clean over the wharf into a neighboring dock basin.

The searchlights picked us up again; and a shell, bursting at close quarters above our starboard wing, fairly stripped the fabric off it. What with this, and the hole in the tail-plane, we began to lose a bit of height; and as I was reluctant to strain the injured machine by throwing it about to dodge anti-aircraft fire, we collected all that was coming to us.

My rear gunner spotted a flaming-onion battery that was making itself particularly objectionable, and begged to be allowed to have a shot at him. I let him have his shooting, and he silenced the battery, for we did not hear from it again.

As we flew home across the North Sea, the clouds were gathering and I told my wireless operator to ask our home station for a "fix." That is to say, he would send out our code number to the home station; and they, using a system of wireless detection which need not be explained here, would work out our position on a map.

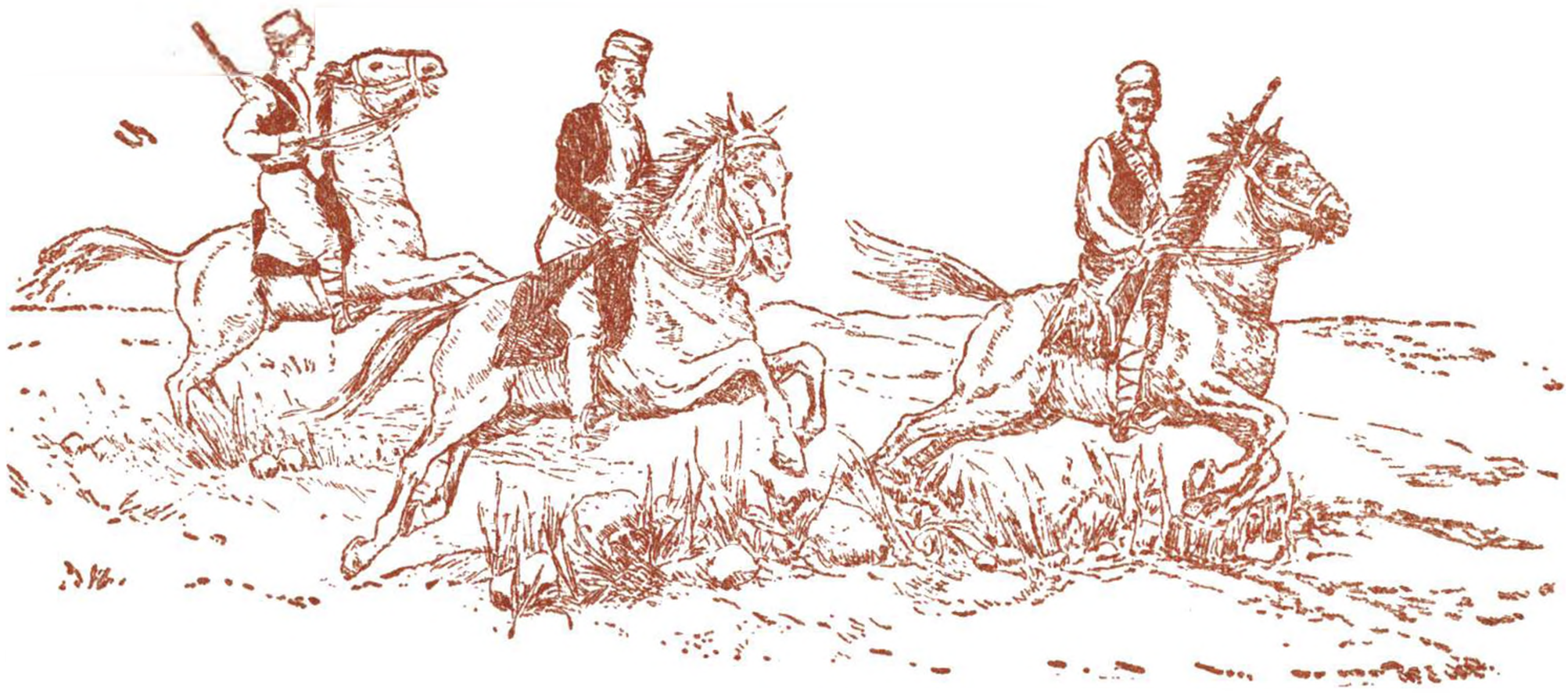
A few minutes later back came the reply from our home station, giving our position, and I set our course for home.

There was a bit of ground-mist as we approached our airdrome. We could see through it quite clearly until we got down to about one thousand feet, and then it got thicker, and I could see that it was not going to be an easy landing. I told my wireless operator to ask the airdrome for permission to land; and as soon as they gave it, they put a flare-path out.

THE lower we got, the more confused the flare-path appeared in the ground mist. As I wound my flaps down and flew in to land, they looked as if they were shining from the bottom of a pool, and I had to guess our height above the ground, for it was impossible to see it through the thick ground-mist.

However, we touched down nicely, and taxied away to our parking-place.

The tender rumbled out to meet us, and we drove back to the office to report our night's work to the Intelligence Officer, and to our Commanding Officer, who always waits up for us to come home. Heaven knows when that man sleeps.



Balkan Bandits

An American citizen tells of his boyhood in that wild mountain land where the Greeks and Italians are fighting today.

By STOYAN CHRISTOWE

FOR a long time I had been coaxing my father to take me on one of his regular trips to Prilep, the distant town where he went to buy oxen to sell to the peasants of our valley. Finally, when I was about twelve, he did take me. It was the first time I had ever been away from the village for more than a day.

We traveled on foot across the mountains until we reached the city of Monastir. There we hired two horses for our journey across the plain to Prilep. They were two fine mounts, black as coal. My father promised their owner we would take good care of them. It was a whole day's ride from Monastir to Prilep, and we started out early in the morning to reach our destination before nightfall. These were Turkish times, and one never traveled at night, especially if one carried money.

Astride the black mounts we rode across the plain, passing many villages. My father told me the names of these villages, and though years have passed since then, and I have traveled half around the earth, I still remember their names—Orizari, Berantzi, Topoltchani, Ushi. The last place was no village at all, but just an inn, standing like a little fort atop a hump in the plain. The inn itself was a low building shaped like a horseshoe, with a well in the center of the yard in front of it. We dismounted in the yard, tethered our horses to posts near the well and hung bags of oats at their noses. Then we walked over to the terrace and sat at a table. The eave of the inn extended several feet from the wall, forming a kind of awning, beneath which were tables at which travelers could sit in the shade and enjoy a view of the plain.

The innkeeper, whom my father knew well from his previous journeys, came over and greeted my father. Then he asked if the young *comitadji*, meaning me, was his son. A *comitadji* was an armed member of the secret revolutionary bands that were fighting the Turks. They were inspired patriots and were regarded as heroes. So I liked the innkeeper, even if it was in fun that he referred to me as a *comitadji*. Every boy whose father was a *comatadji* was proud, and I often felt ashamed that my father wasn't one.

Besides ourselves there were two other guests at the inn. They were Albanian Mohammedans, of the Gheg tribe. They wore white fezzes without tassels, and extravagantly embroidered white woolen trousers, tight around the calves and

knees, and baggy toward the hips. Their Skanderbeg jackets of wool dyed black were sleeveless and buttonless, with loose yarn of the same color hanging at the back like mops. They were not soldiers; yet they were dressed alike, in their tribal costumes, and were girdled with rows of cartridges.

When my father and I had dismounted, the Ghegs observed us for an instant and continued to be occupied with their meal. And now as we sat at the other end of the veranda from them, they conversed in low tones. My father spoke Albanian, and could have understood what they were saying, but by the time their words reached our table, the sound died away.

The innkeeper brought us food, and a jug of wine for my father. I watched the Ghegs, and once or twice I caught them glancing at our horses. I did not like that, but my father did not seem disquieted. Only once I noticed him look sidewise at the Ghegs, and that reminded me of the way I looked at dogs that did not bark.

Presently the Ghegs knocked on the table for the innkeeper. Paying for what they had eaten, they picked up their rifles, which had been propped up against the wall within reach as they sat, took their beaded skin-bags from the ground, and walked over to where our horses were tethered. Just like that, in the most casual way, they took down our bags and hung theirs on the saddles. They did this without saying a word, calmly, indifferently.

I BROKE out in sweat. Not for the horses, but from fear that the Ghegs might search us. My father and I carried one hundred and twenty gold pounds on our persons. Forty pieces, wrapped in cloth dipped in beeswax and shaped like an amulet, I carried in my bosom next my bare skin. The rest, divided in two piles, were sewn in the lining of my father's coat. Besides, even though I had no definite knowledge of it, I was certain my father was carrying secret correspondence to the revolutionary committee at Prilep.

My father rose from the table, and quite casually, like the Ghegs, walked over to where they were, took down their bags and slung ours back upon the saddles. My heart began to flutter like an agitated bird in a cage. How could anyone do such a thing with Ghegs! They were the most desperate people from Durazzo to Istanbul; they were a terror from the Danube to the Ægean. Descendants of Albanian Christians who years ago had embraced Islam, they were powerful and privileged at the expense of their Christian brothers who had clung to the Faith. Turks, real Turks, had feelings. Touched by supplication or the sight of suffering, Turks sometimes gave way to their human sympathies. But Ghegs were ruthless, were as unaffected by entreaty as stones. No fiercer people could be imagined than a horde of Gheg *bashibazouks*.

The two Ghegs watched my father remove their bags as a two-headed giant might look at a child playing with something which it cannot harm and of which he alone is master. They waited until my father replaced our own bags on the saddles, and then they broke into loud laughter. Not even bothering to take down our own bags, they put theirs back on, untethered the horses, flung themselves into the saddles and galloped toward Monastir.

WE continued toward Prilep on foot. Now and then the road skirted an elevation that rose like a camel's hump athwart the plain, and then again there was another interminable stretch before us. When we had rounded the last one of these mounds, we saw the peaks of Mount Babuna at the farthest end of the plain. Prilep was where the mountain met the plain.

"We cannot reach Prilep by night," said my father. "We'll have to sleep in Allentzi." He explained that Allentzi was a village not very far from where we were on the road, and that he had a friend there, whose name was Strahil, and who was chief of the local revolutionary committee.

Allentzi was not on the road, but a mile away from it, nestling in a hollow between two oblong mounds that extended toward the road and embraced a semicircle of meadows dotted with heaps of recently mown hay. A path issued from the village and ran like a ribbon through the meadows, joining the main road at a point where a fountain spurted water into an old mossy stone trough. Not far from the spring a lone peasant was swinging a scythe against a narrow patch of tall grass. A mare and her colt grazed near by.

"Good evening," said my father as we approached the mower.

"God be good to you," the man replied, and continued to brandish his im-

plement against the grass. Twilight was falling over the plain, and the man was anxious to finish his mowing before going home. We lingered, keeping close to the man and out of the way of his scythe. My father asked some questions, to which the man replied without turning his eyes from the curved line which the scythe followed as it ate away the flowery grass. When my father asked about his friend Strahil, the man stopped and looked at us for the first time.

"Strahil is no longer here," said the man. He was an old man, but powerfully built and well preserved, with mustaches curving like sickles.

"But his brother Tsvetan is here," observed my father. "We can stay with him."

"Tsvetan is not here either. There's no one here of Strahil's. They all moved to another village."

"I wonder then where we shall sleep," put in my father, expecting the man to suggest the hospitality of his own house. At this the peasant pulled a tongue-shaped whetstone from the folds of his leather belt and began to lick the blade with it.

"You can sleep out here in the meadows," he said coldly. Again he bent down to his task; the instrument, sharpened, sang as it cut the crisp grass. Serpent-like, the scythe swung before my eyes, and hissed and whined amidst the grass, which seemed to sigh as it fell in swaths at the mower's feet.

OVER the plain, twilight was deepening. The peaks of Mount Babuna were shrouded in dusk. I felt terribly lonely and homesick. And I began to wish I hadn't begged my father to take me along on his trip to Prilep. I yearned to be back home under the shelter of our own roof. Try as I would, I could not hide the way I felt.

My father did not get angry. He spoke very gently to me. "Don't cry," he said.

"Where will we sleep?" I asked as soon as I was able to speak without choking.

"Don't you be worrying about that," he tried to reassure me. "A father takes care of that."

By this time the man had finished the strip. He tied a sheaf of grass to either side of the pack-saddle, mounted the mare, and placed his scythe across his lap like a rifle. The colt jumped a few times, gave a strident neigh and scampered after its mother.

My father nodded to me to follow. The man knew we were walking right behind him, but did not turn back to look at us. He was riding slowly, not to tire the colt, and we could keep up with him without difficulty.

At last, after we crossed a little brook that sang softly in the dusk, we entered the village. We kept close to the man, not to lose him. He rode into a broad court, in the center of which stood a threshing-post. At the far side of the court a one-story house pressed down upon the earth like a crouched animal. It had one large door, and a row of small windows on either side of the door. It looked like a barrack.

THE man dismounted and handed the halter-cord to a woman who came out from the house. A large dog, wagging his tail, cowered at the feet of his master. It did not bark at us. Some children ran out of the doorway and shouted, happy that their grandfather had returned from the meadows.

My father and I stood by silently. When the old man, with one infant pressed to his bosom, and another clinging to him, hobbled toward the door, we trotted after him. The man entered the house of which he was the master; my father and I, strangers to it, also entered it. No one asked us in, and no one welcomed us. Still, as soon as we crossed the threshold, we said: "Good evening." Again no one acknowledged the good-will which we brought in, except perhaps the fireside, toward which we proceeded instinctively. Uninvited, we sat on one side of the hearth, and the old man sat opposite us. The room was immense, and the family a large one. There were at least a dozen other people in the great interior, men, women, children. Some of the children held to their mothers' aprons, being in the way as the women went about attending to their household work.

The old man never once raised his eyes to look at us. None of us spoke. Meantime the women set the supper table, and youngsters and adults began to line themselves up along the board as at free table in a monastery. The old man rose and took his place at the head of the table. Throughout the evening I felt constrained, but now when all the family had seated themselves at the table, and my father and I, invited by none to share in the meal, still sat by the hearth silently like two punished children, I feared the timbers from the roof would

crash upon me. And not because no one asked us to supper, but because I feared my father would make us sit at the table uninvited.

Fortunately one of the women—she had large black sunken eyes that bespoke much suffering—came over and spread a cheesecloth on the hearthstone before us. She put half a loaf of cornbread on the cloth, brought a large earthen bowl filled with buttermilk, and rested two wooden spoons against its brim.

When supper was over, the women cleared the table and swept the crumbs. Soon after, the youngsters were put to bed. With their stockings and outer garments on, they lay down on the bedding in the very places where they had eaten supper, huddling close to one another like sheep, their heads to the walls and their limbs stretched out toward the middle of the floor. The women brought quilts and threw them over the sprawled company.

The old man returned to his patriarchal place near the fire, still not looking at us or saying a word to us. I had a feeling of guilt for our having inflicted our presence upon the household, but I was so weary and fatigued from the journey that I could hardly keep my eyes open. I was glad when the old man stretched himself out and covered himself with a coarse woolen blanket. The others, too, began to retire in their various places through the spacious interior. The woman who had thought of us at supper fetched us a blanket, and my father and I laid our tired heads on the rough floor, wrapped the blanket about us, and went to sleep.

IT was earlier than I had risen for a long time. My father had probably been pushing at me to rouse me. I rubbed my eyes and woke up to the fact that we were not at home. The experiences of yesterday began to flood my mind, and for a few seconds I was uncertain whether they were real or whether it was something I had dreamed.

The whole household was astir. Men and women fastened pigskin sandals on their feet, took turns at pouring water to wash their faces and were off, yoking oxen, fitting pack-saddles to horses and donkeys, and starting out to field and meadow. No breakfast was necessary for them. In bags and baskets they carried their food for the day with them.

In the place which he had occupied during the evening, and in which he had slept, sat our reluctant host. A little copper pot shaped like an hourglass, and with a long handle, was stuck in the sparkling ashes. The old man was brewing his morning Turkish coffee. When the brew was ready, he poured it out in two small porcelain cups, taking care to distribute evenly the layer of brown cream that had floated at the top of the pot. He offered the first cup to my father and took the second for himself. But again he said not a word.

AS soon as my father had finished his coffee, we rose to go. My father shook our silent host's hand, which was grudgingly given. I had been taught by my mother to kiss, rather than to shake, the hands of old people. So I bowed before the old man and kissed his hand. Then just as we started, I turned back and asked the man his name.

"Oh, what do you want my name for?" he grumbled.

"I'd like to have it, Grandfather. Some day we hope to repay you for your goodness." There was no irony in what I said. I really felt guilty that my father had so brazenly inflicted our guesthood on the man, and was grateful for his patience with us.

Not wishing to quench my boyish enthusiasm, or perhaps irritated by my importunity, the man said: "Well, it's Bogdan Golavoda."

When we were out of the house, I wrote in my notebook: *"Bogdan Golavoda, Village Allentzi, District of Prilep."*

We retraced our way over the path through the meadows and joined the main road. The sun now beamed from behind the peaks of Babuna, gilding the whole plain. The dew upon the grass and wheat-stalks glistened like quicksilver. Peasants trudged to their patches of field or meadow, where they would spend the day in labor and sweat.

We walked along upon the dusty road quite oblivious of the extraordinary incidents of our journey. Prilep was before us—a jumble of low houses, graceful minarets, rising toward the peaks of Babuna to reach Allah. The ruined towers where legendary King Marko had held court in the dim past loomed up to the left.

We passed a little whitewashed church and some women holding a service at a grave in the churchyard, crossed a small bridge and were in the city.

At the inn the proprietor was drinking his morning coffee—a corpulent man he

was with a serious and meditative look on his face. He was glad to see my father.

"But why so early?" he inquired. "Where are you coming from? You couldn't be coming from Monastir this early?" Then without waiting for an answer he asked: "What will it be, coffee or brandy?"

"Both," said my father.

The innkeeper, as I later discovered, was a trusted man of the revolutionary organization, and his inn had regularly been used by *comitadji* couriers disguised as muleteers, monks and itinerant sawyers and carpenters.

"We left Monastir yesterday," explained my father, "and planned to reach Prilep last night; but some Ghegs took our horses at Ushi, and we walked the rest of the way. We slept in Allentzi. Night caught us there. But we did not know Strahil is no longer there."

THAT we had been deprived of our horses seemed to make little impression on the man, for our having spent the night in Allentzi eclipsed in his mind this incident of our journey.

"In Allentzi!" the innkeeper exclaimed, startled. "In what house did you stay there?" He looked at my father apprehensively, a cracked note in his voice betraying his excitement.

"Oh, it was not a house," my father said. "It was a dozen houses under one roof."

"I am serious," repeated the man, "tell me in whose house you slept."

I took out my notebook, and finding the page on which I had written the name of our host, I read: "*Bogdan Golavoda.*"

The innkeeper's face blanched. He stared at us, then moved his head slowly from side to side, as does a father when he hears of some perilous exploit on the part of his children. "Did Golavoda know who you were? Did he know anything about you?"

"No," replied my father. "We said little to him, and he said less to us. We only asked about Strahil. It was he told us Strahil and his family had moved to another village. He did not ask us to be his guests. We invited ourselves."

One could see that the innkeeper was disturbed. He shook his head reprovingly at my father, as much as to say: "What a flogging you ought to have for this bit of recklessness!" And taking my father by the arm, he led him into another room where he could talk to him without being overheard. As to what he said, my father would tell me nothing.

We returned to our village with a herd of oxen which we sold to the peasants at a good profit. But most of it went to pay for the two horses, which we never recovered.

SEVERAL years passed, and I was making ready to emigrate to America. While packing my things, I came upon some old school papers and notebooks and I found the page on which I had written: *Bogdan Golavoda*, and the address. Notebook in hand I went out to look for my father. I found him in the yard testing the loops of a wine-barrel.

"Father," I asked excitedly, "do you remember the name of that old man in Allentzi?'

"Yes," he answered. "Bogdan Golavoda."

"How did you remember it? I wrote it down here myself, and I had forgotten it."

Laying down the adze and the chisel, my father said: "You do not know, my son, how near we were to losing our lives that night. Golavoda was a spy. Strahil had not moved to another village, but had been killed by the Turks. And Golavoda was responsible for his death. One night Strahil had left his band of *comitadjis* in a hiding-place and had slipped into the village to see his wife and children. Golavoda's menials, who had spied Strahil entering his house, reported this to him. The old renegade rode to Prilep in the night and returned with a detachment of Turkish cavalry. Strahil's house was surrounded. Rather than fight from within and endanger the lives of his family, Strahil opened the door and bared his breast to the volley of bullets.

"One year after we met him, Golavoda was found stabbed, in the meadow near the spring."

"Who killed him?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"But did you know when we went to his house that he had caused Strahil's death?"

"No—how should I? The innkeeper in Prilep told me. But I suspected something at the time. That's why I did not ask him any more questions, or talk to him much."

"Then why did we go to his house if you suspected something?" I demanded.

"We had to, my son, because—well, we had to sleep somewhere."

Bulldog Mickey

"I do not think I shall ever see his equal again," wrote Damon Runyon of this champion who here tells us his own story

By

MICKEY WALKER

Arm and leg weary, with two black eyes. . . . Jack Britton stood in the center of the ring in the old Madison Square Garden and watched a pug-nosed Irish kid's face break into a delirious grin as Joe Humphries announces, *"Winnah*—and new welterweight champion."

Fifteen hard, tough rounds Jack Britton and Mickey Walker fought, and the older man bore up manfully to the last. "Mickey, you're the best man I ever fought," he said.

AFTER I won the title, Jack and I went on the stage a couple of weeks. We did a funny little bit that there's no use describing here. Our opening was at the old Howard Theater in Boston, an old burlesque house where John L. Sullivan, Jack Dempsey and nearly all the champions between those two appeared.

We stayed at a place, which, come to find out, is Boston's society hotel. So we decided to throw a party.

Some acquaintances were invited, and then we invited some of the girls from the show at the Howard Theater.

The girls didn't take long to start a battle amongst themselves, and these girls might have made good in the prize-ring.

I don't know yet what the fight was about, but it was a rip-snorter and we nearly left the hotel a complete wreck. Ever afterward that hotel barred fighters and managers.

MY father wouldn't give us a minute's rest until we promised him we would fight in his home town, Holyoke, Mass. He wanted to show his old pals what a great son he raised.

Holyoke didn't go in for boxing in a big way, but the fans supported a small club, holding about eight hundred. I was scheduled to fight Wildcat Nelson, but the Wildcat was sick that day and Jack substituted Harlem Eddie Kelly, whom I knocked out some years before.

The day of the fight my old man paraded me all over town. They had to push the buildings back to allow room for his chest to pass. I never knew I had so many relations. I was a cousin to the whole town.

My old man liked to tell relations about when I was a kid in curls and he took me to a bricklayers' outing. It ended in fighting, and the men fighting my father I naturally bit into—I mean, I bit into their legs. So a man picked me up and dropped me, curls and all, into the tub where they iced the beer. I had on a new suit my mother must of paid 49 cents for. Anyway, it shrank, and the belt made a necktie. On the way home I was watching out for my mother. But she came around a corner sudden, and she gave the old man a terrible lacing. "Just *look* at the kid's suit!" she said. . . .

Now I was the welterweight champ, scheduled to fight Eddie Kelly in

Holyoke. Neither Jack nor myself had seen Eddie since I boxed him last, and it was a shock to see him now. He looked like the fat man from the circus, and was in no shape to climb into a ring. He collapsed in the second round without being hit.

In half a minute the ring was filled with chairs the angry mob was throwing at us. Jack and I dashed into the dressing-room, grabbed our clothes, and beat it for the railroad station. My father came running behind.

"Well, boys," he says, "there was some out-of-town people there."

ALL in one year's time:

Philadelphia: kayoed Steve Latzo, three rounds.

Akron: Johnny Griffiths, ten rounds, no decision.

Chicago: kayoed Morris Schaeffer, six rounds.

Philadelphia: Johnny Gill, eight rounds, no decision.

Buffalo: won, Charles Fitzimmons, twelve rounds (Empire State Solons Suspend Mickey for Not Doing Best).

Chicago: Cowboy Padgett, ten rounds, no decision.

Newark: won, Pete Latzo, twelve rounds.

Wilkes Barre: kayoed Johnny Rile, two rounds.

Newark: kayoed Cowboy Padgett.

Newark: kayoed Nate Siegal.

Davenport: kayoed Bobby Green, eight rounds.

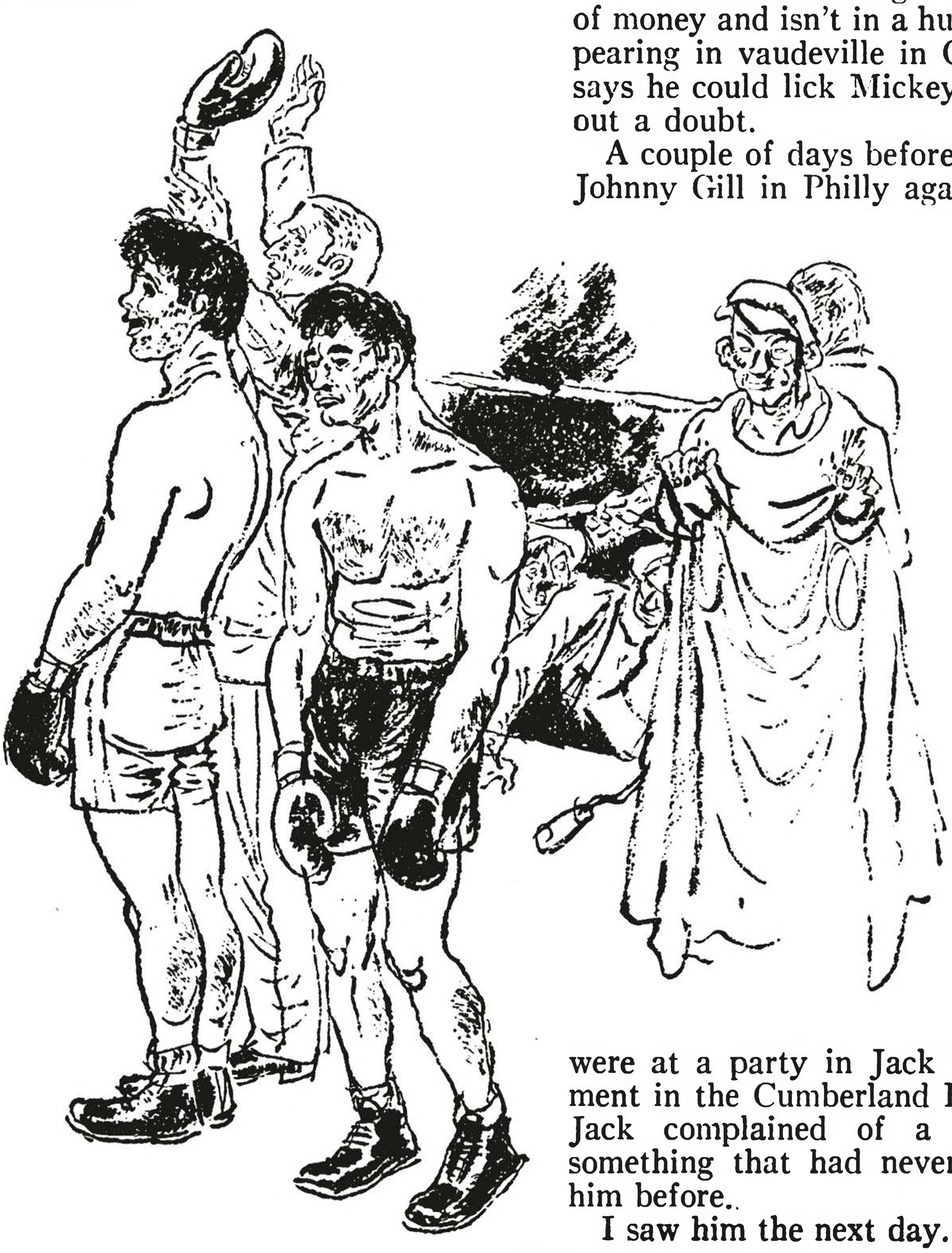
Jersey City: Jimmy Jones, nine rounds: "No contest."

Toronto: kayoed Max Herscovitch, six rounds.

So you see Jack and I were getting around. . . .

Dave Shade was coming up just then, but Jack's ambition was a fight with Benny Leonard, the lightweight champion. According to all fight dope, this fight would draw a million-dollar gate, and Tex Rickard is interested. But it took a lot of dickering. Benny has lots of money and isn't in a hurry. He is appearing in vaudeville in Cleveland. He says he could lick Mickey Walker without a doubt.

A couple of days before I was to fight Johnny Gill in Philly again, Jack and I



were at a party in Jack Wood's apartment in the Cumberland Hotel in N. Y. Jack complained of a stomach-ache, something that had never happened to him before.

I saw him the next day.

"You get down to Philly," Jack said. "I don't feel just right. But I'll see you the day of the fight."

On the afternoon of the fight we got a phone-call that Jack was in the hospital near death; his appendix had bursted.

I hopped a train, never even thinking to call off the fight. At St. Michaels Hospital in Newark I learned that Jack needed a blood-transfusion. My blood wouldn't match, but his brother's come out okay. But Jack died the next day.

Maybe a few times in a lifetime you can have someone near you die and leave a great big empty place. If it happened often, we couldn't go on living.

AFTER Jack's death I was a champion on the loose. I might have been a pretty fair prize for a good manager, but I had ideas of my own. I appointed Joe Diegnan my "front" man. Jack and I had made a lot of money together, but when he died we were both broke and it was up to me to get a new stake. I kept right on where he left off—the Leonard match.

After wasting a lot of time and putting myself in the red for a lot of money, the match was made for Boyle's Thirty Acres in Jersey City. Seeing what a great money match it was, the New York Boxing Commission had it moved to New York.

The New York Commission and I never did get along, even in my last days of boxing. Bill Muldoon was head of the Commission then, a perfect gentleman and the squarest shooter on two feet. We had a disagreement at the time of the Leonard match. But years later when I fought Jack Sharkey in Brooklyn, Muldoon stood up right in front of the audience and said I was robbed. From that day until his death we were great friends. . . .

To get back to the Leonard fight: After all the ballyhoo, it landed at the Polo Grounds. Tex Rickard was the promoter.

I went into training and hired Johnny Collins' place in Summit, N. J., making a private training-camp out of it. Altogether the training expenses were ten grand, but I was forty more in the hole. Jack Bulger wouldn't have let me get in this deep, but without him I was kind of reckless.

The Leonard fight would fix me up. Besides, I didn't like these statements he was handing out about what a easy mark I would be in the ring. Even when it's only newspaper talk, it gets under your skin.

But the bubble busted. The castles came tumbling down. The plans of mice and men! Benny Leonard took a warm-up fight with Pal Moran somewhere out West, and came out of it with a busted hand. He postponed the fight. Later on Benny called off the fight altogether, leaving me holding the bag.

I was in a tough spot. I had debts to pay and nothing to use for money. I had to grab a fight and grab it quick.

The purse was "short" in Philly when I fought Lew Tendler; but without letting them know, I grabbed half of the guarantee like a drowning man. This was a ten-round struggle that got swell write-ups, but I was getting used to my name in the paper.

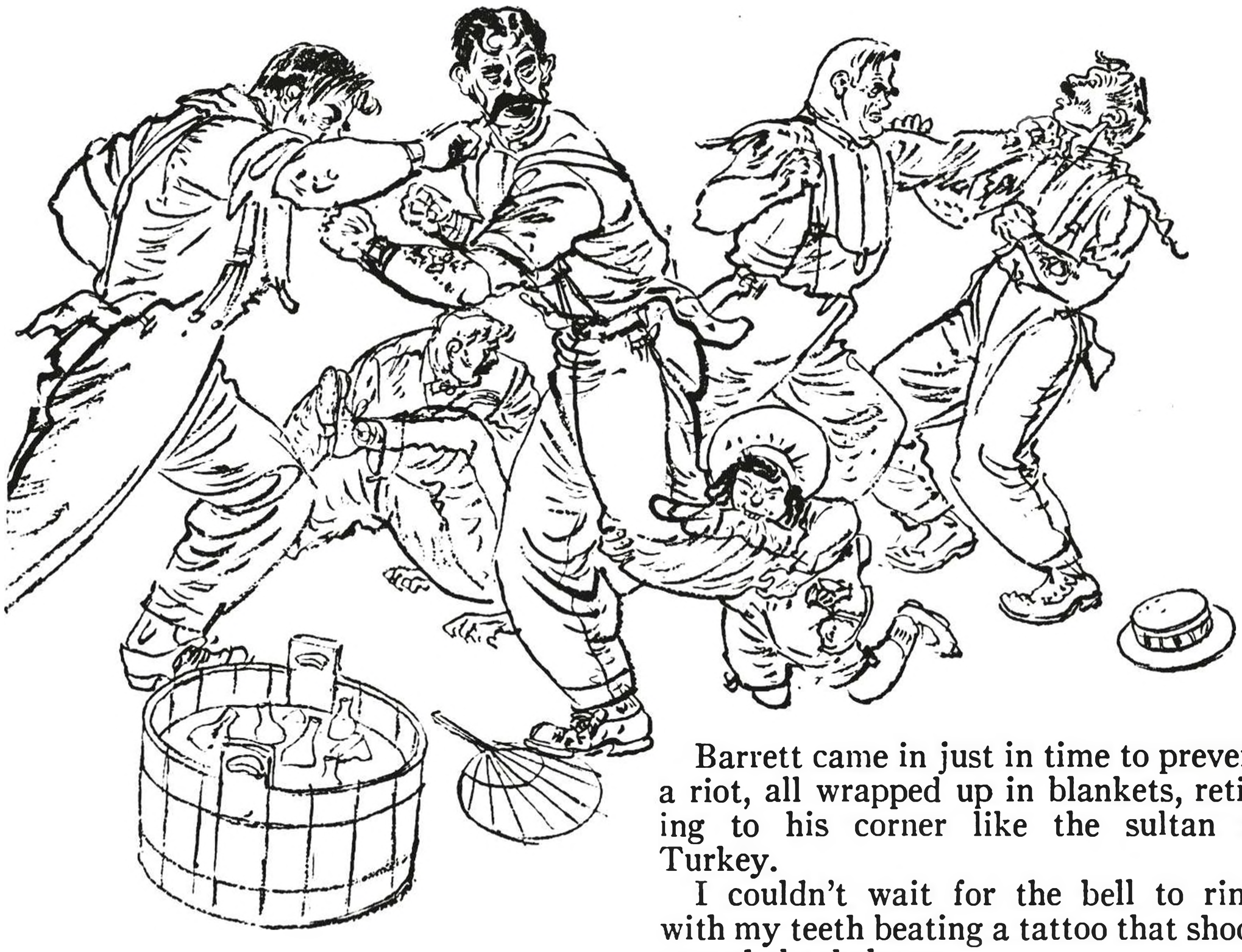
Then I thought I was getting as good as Jack in games of chance—anyway, a little game after the fight; and I was once again clean as a whistle.

To put it mildly, my debtors were pressing. . . . This bookkeeping is an awful bother.

Well, just then comes a offer from Herman Taylor and Bobby Gunnis in Philly, to defend my title against Bobby Barrett —$23,500. Come one, come all!

Bobby Barrett was a murderous puncher. The title was at stake.

The fight was held in the ball-park and the night of the fight turned cold. In my dressing-room I was told the attendance didn't come up to expectations. I didn't have to fight, but all they could give was $17,500. Finally I says okay —shoot.



A couple of minutes before I left my dressing-room for the ring, Taylor come in. "You better scram, Mick," Taylor says. "We can't even make seventeen and a half grand."

I'd boxed for Taylor and Gunnis before—they handed me twenty-five grand without blinking an eye, for boxing Lew Tendler. Tonight I had to fight.

"What can you make?" I says.

"Ten grand would do it," Taylor says.

He didn't know I would have taken ten cents.

"All right," I says, "let's stop yapping about it and call it ten grand."

So I went out to defend the title. . . .

I will never forget that night.

First of all, when I reached the ball-park I was given a dressing-room that a preliminary fighter wouldn't take. It was so cold that when I was getting into my tights one of the guys there was shivering in a coonskin coat. Then this room was a regular hallway—everybody had to pass through it, going or coming, from the other rooms.

Then I was called to get into the ring.

All I used to wear going in was my tights, shoes and a lightweight purple sweater knitted by my mother for my first fight. I was kept waiting in the ring in all that cold in the ball-park. The mob kept yelling for Barrett, yelling and stamping their feet. The yelling grew into a roar. I felt like roaring myself.

Barrett came in just in time to prevent a riot, all wrapped up in blankets, retiring to his corner like the sultan of Turkey.

I couldn't wait for the bell to ring, with my teeth beating a tattoo that shook my whole skeleton.

The time always comes. The bell rang! It was the signal to fight.

I tore across the ring like a shot.

Before he could get out of his corner with his hands in position, Barrett was on the floor. I was like a wild man. The weather wasn't cold for me any more.

Barrett came up again, but he bounced right back to the canvas. He came back again and again, only to hit horizontal again with a thud that shook the ball-park.

The mob was on its feet, making noises in the throat.

I connected with my worst left hook, and Barrett was stretched out flat, looking up at the stars. But the bell saved him for the next round. The bell rang at the count of eight.

BOB CULLEN was in my corner that night, and started to rub me down with a sponge.

"Never mind, Bob," I said, wrapping my mother's old sweater around me. "He'll never come out of that one."

"Okay, Mickey," Bob said, standing there with his sponge dripping.

The bell rang, and I still sat in my corner. I never expected Barrett to get on his feet. To my surprise, he come charging like a wild bull.

Like the feller said, I jumped out of my ring in the nick of time.

I started to box, but Barrett clipped me on the side of the head with a long

right-hand swing that nearly knocked my head off. A bump as big as a grapefruit started to raise on my head.

I walked into a clinch to think.

The worst thing a fighter can do is to lose his head.... I mustn't get too mad! And I made up my mind that the next time I put Bobby Barrett down, I would put him down to stay.

It took me four dangerous rounds to do it, and I boxed as I never boxed for a title before or since. Because I knew if I got one of those Barrett punches square, it would be curtains for Mickey Walker.

From the second round on, I kept nailing him in the belly. I knew I was hurting him, because he nearly went down several times, but every time I nailed him and see him going toward the floor, I would rush in and lock his arm in mine. I didn't want him on the floor until I had the convincer ready.

The opening of the sixth round showed me he was ripe.

I gave it, and he took it.

Barrett went to the floor, and out like a light.

I BOXED Jock Malone in Newark at the time Dempsey was making a personal appearance at the Loew's Theater there. The Manassa Mauler said he would be at the fight.

Jack Dempsey was my favorite fighter. When I won Jack Britton's title and was a champ myself, one day I drove up to Saratoga to watch Dempsey train. I will never forget the thrill of that moment, the first time we ever met, and the grin he gave me....

The last time I had fought Malone was in Boston. Malone had trimmed me okay in Boston. But now Dempsey's presence must have put new fight in me.

I pummeled poor old Jock with all the strategy I had ever learned, to show Dempsey what a great boxer I really was; and then as if I did it on purpose, I clouted Malone right over the ropes into the lap of Jack Dempsey. Dempsey did not exactly receive Malone with open arms, but after a while he grinned the same grin he had at Saratoga.

Malone and I boxed three or four times after that. The last time was in Malone's home town, St. Paul, which is why he got the name of the St. Paul Phantom. It is a good thing they like Jock in St. Paul, or we would have both been thrown in jail for impersonating fighters.

I had run into Jock in Willie Webb's place in Chicago, where Jock was a bartender.

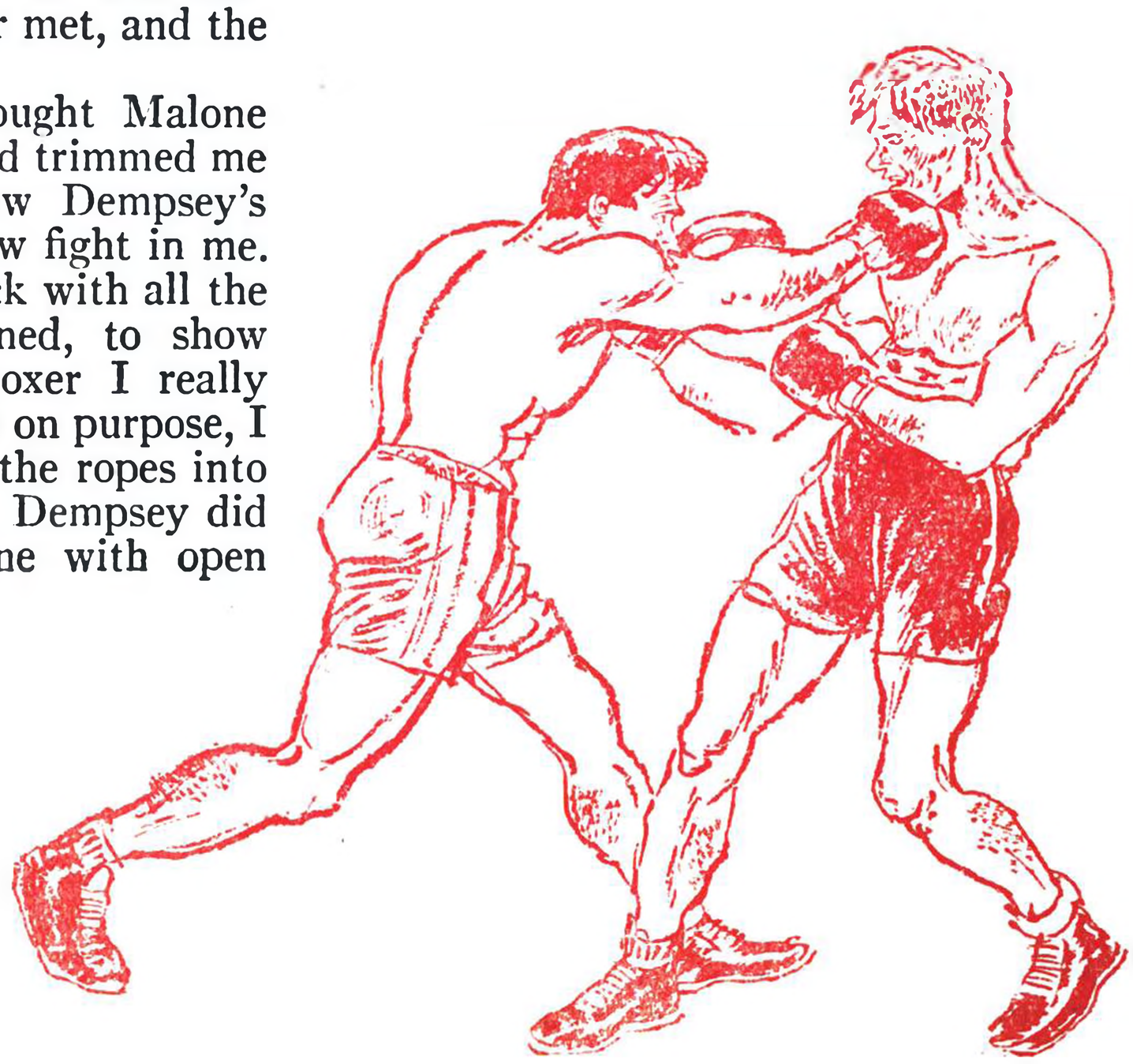
"Being a little short of money, Mick," says Jock, "couldn't you and me box some place?"

"How about St. Paul?" says Doc Kearns, with an eye to business.

But when we come into the ring, we looked like two Paul Whitemans before Paul reduced. Our fight must of looked like two flappers practicing the Snake's Hip. I won the newspaper decision, but we both stayed the full twelve rounds, fighting our way into shape and a fine battle.

About this time I fought Mike McTigue in Newark for the light heavyweight championship, the newspapers to give the decision (New Jersey's law forbidding ring judgments).

I got a gold cup presented by Al Raynor, proclaiming me the new champ of the world. This championship did not mean much in those days. I didn't give the gold cup much attention. But Mike was a generous loser, and it was a good fight. It cleaned up most of my debts.



Next month Mickey Walker tells of other fights and of presenting a pair of golden gloves to President Coolidge—who promised to use them on Congress.

Flash! PEARL S. BUCK'S GREAT NEW NOVEL BEGINS IN FEBRUARY REDBOOK!

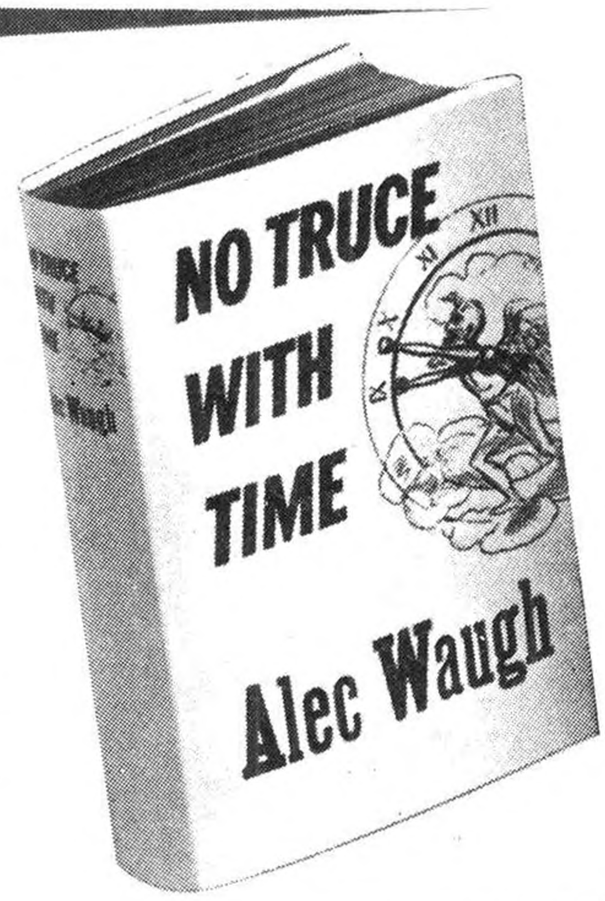
Case of the muted VIOLIN

There was nothing very strange about the death of the hermit. Anybody would have said "...from natural causes." But Dr. Colin Starr wasn't satisfied to let it go at that. He found the truth—and the ghostly playing of a violin helped to discover the murderer. How? Read "Case of the Muted Violin" in February Redbook.

A RUFUS KING MYSTERY

What happens when a "nice" woman wants to kill her husband - - - AND DOES!

Imagine a young woman tied to an oldish man who was just well enough to keep on living—and imagine that woman deeply in love with a young man. Yes, she does the expected thing—but the unexpected thing about Redbook's complete novel for February is what happens *after*. For a great experience read "No Truce With Time," by Alec Waugh.



MORE FEATURES!

"YOU CAN'T BEAT BEAUTY"
by **Philip Wylie**

"BEFORE WE GET AFRAID"
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In the all-star March issue of The Blue Book Magazine

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