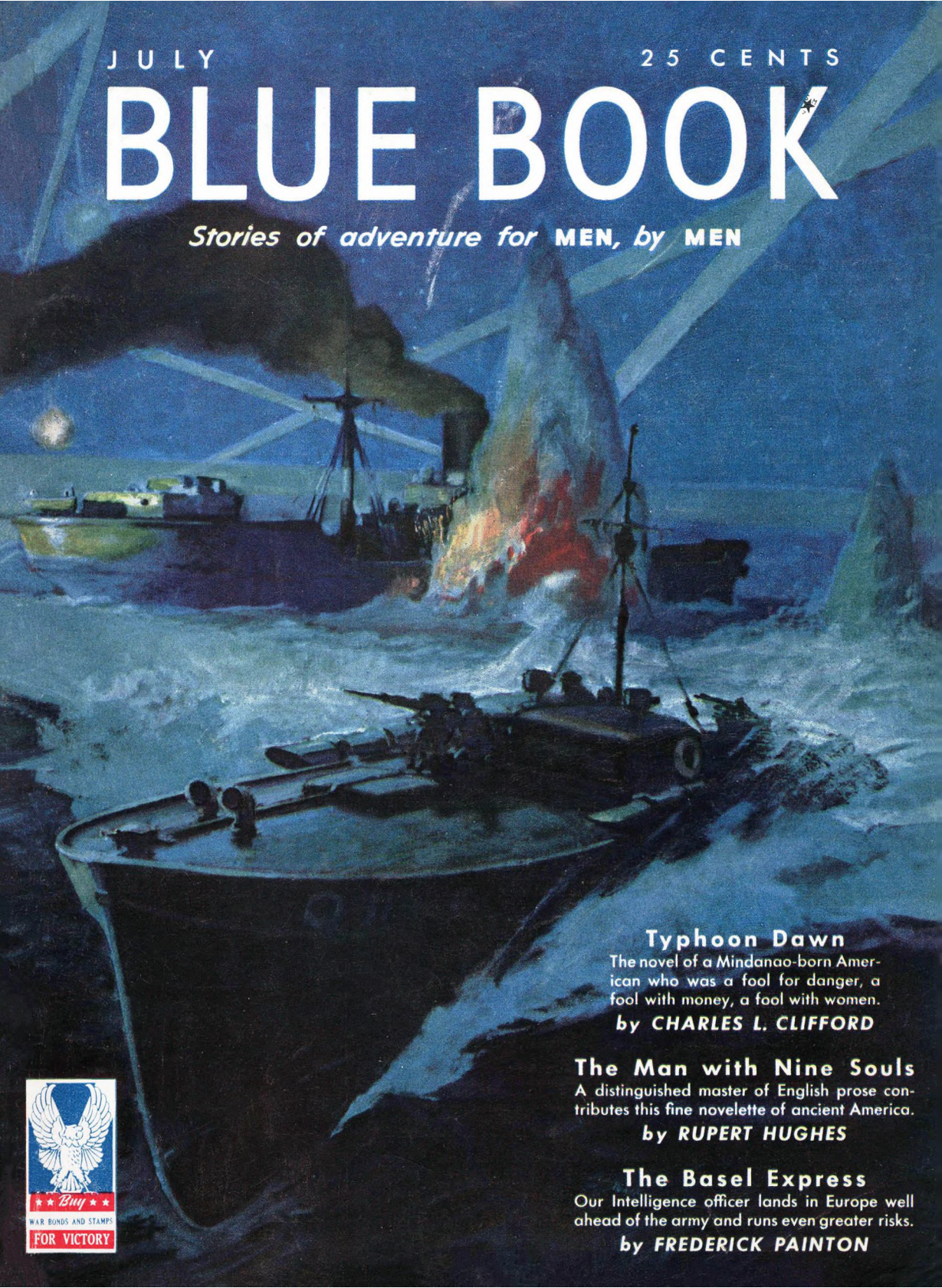
JULY 25 CENTS

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for **MEN,** *by* **MEN**



Typhoon Dawn
The novel of a Mindanao-born American who was a fool for danger, a fool with money, a fool with women.
by **CHARLES L. CLIFFORD**

The Man with Nine Souls
A distinguished master of English prose contributes this fine novelette of ancient America.
by **RUPERT HUGHES**

The Basel Express
Our Intelligence officer lands in Europe well ahead of the army and runs even greater risks.
by **FREDERICK PAINTON**

WHO'S WHO IN THIS ISSUE

Rupert Hughes

Rupert Hughes

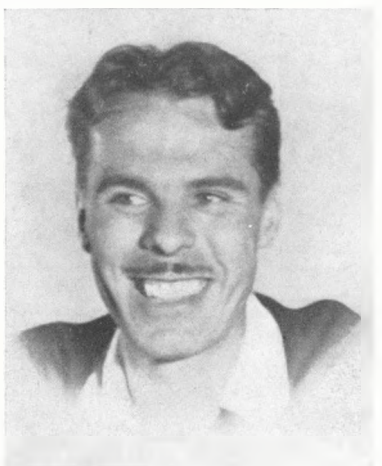
RUPERT HUGHES was born in the village of Lancaster, Mo., on January 31, 1872; he is the son of Jean Amelia (Summerlin) Hughes and Judge Felix Turner Hughes, a brilliant lawyer and for some years president of the K. & W. Railroad. After a primary education in the public schools at Lancaster and at Keokuk, Iowa, he went at the age of fourteen to St. Charles College, then to Western Reserve Academy, entering Western Reserve University at the age of sixteen; he graduated there in 1892, then spent a year as a graduate student in English and philology at Yale University, taking the degree of A. M.

In 1893 he settled in New York, serving as a reporter for six months, after that working on the editorial staffs of various magazines. For a time he acted as assistant editor of *Godey's Magazine* in the mornings and of *Current Literature* in the afternoons, with George W. Cable as his editor-in-chief in the latter office. From 1898 to 1901 he was assistant editor of the *Criterion*, and a prolific contributor of fiction, verse, essays, and criticisms to the leading magazines. He was called to London in May, 1901, to the staff of the Encyclopædia Britannica Co., remaining in London till November, 1902, then returning to New York with the same company as chief assistant editor of the *Historian's History of the World* until May, 1905. After that he did little office work.

In January, 1897, he joined the Seventh Regiment, N. G., N. Y.; during the Spanish War he was acting Captain in the 114th Regiment. February, 1900, he became a First Lieutenant of the Sixty-ninth Regiment, N. G., N. Y., and, in 1909, Captain. He resigned in 1910, but rejoined as Captain in 1916 and served at the Mexican Border with the regiment. A slight impairment of hearing caused his rejection for service in the European War, but he served as assistant to the Adjutant-General of New York during the mobilization, and has been engaged on other work of a military nature since.

Among his well-remembered novels are "What Will People Say?" "Empty Pockets," "Within These Walls" and "The Old Home Town." His remarkable novelette, "The Man With Nine Souls," begins on page 40.

Francis M. Cockrell



Francis M. Cockrell

SINCE 1906, when I celebrated Christmas by being born, at Warrensburg, Missouri, I have gone to school spasmodically, my better known *almæ matres* being Tulane and Columbia University.

Unlike most writers, I wasn't anything else first, so there is little to say about me. While I was in college, I decided that a writer was a fine thing to be—your own boss, your own hours, good pay, and you could live where and how you pleased. Since then I have been one, and have eaten, slept and worked with a lot of writers (my wife, brother, brother-in-law and one sister have all turned out to be writers too) and my thoughts on the subject are—well, more complex. I write slowly, to the accompaniment of considerable groaning and gnashing of teeth.

My sole support is my writing, having had stories in the *Cosmopolitan*, *Collier's*, *Liberty*, *Blue Book* and other magazines.

I am a pretty good photographer, and fritter away a good deal of time at it. I am a fair badminton player and a mediocre golfer, but keep thinking next time will be different. My proudest accomplishment was traveling from Buffalo, New York to New Orleans in three days, on a total expenditure of $3.98.

Herbert Ravenel Sass

Herbert Ravenel Sass

CHARLESTON and the Carolina Low Country have an extraordinary grip on the affections of those who are fortunate enough to be born there. I was among those fortunate ones, and I have never left the place for any appreciable length of time, because there seemed to be no other place to be compared with this one. That may be a prejudiced view, due largely to the fact that my people have lived here since Colonial days, but I can't help believing that there's something in it.

I started out to be a museum man. That is good fun if you care for birds and animals as I did and do; but it can get a bit monotonous. So I became a newspaper man and stuck at that for a good many years, with occasional articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*. Then Charles Livingston Bull, the artist, who had illustrated some of the *Harper's* pieces, persuaded me to take the plunge as a free lance. That has resulted in a great many magazine stories and articles and about ten books.

They have been nearly all of them about the South—usually the Carolina Low Country or the Southern mountains. Some are about birds and beasts, some about the early wilderness days; some are about Indians (long a hobby of mine); some are about the Confederate War. The most recent of the books (1941), "Emperor Brims," is a novel of the early Southern frontier, of just about the same period, although not exactly the same region, as "Desert Blood," in this issue of *Blue Book*.

BLUE BOOK

July, 1942 MAGAZINE Vol. 75, No. 3

Two Short Novels, Complete

Two Serial Novels

Eight Short Stories

Special Features

Prize Stories of Real Experience

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

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READERS' FORUM

NO TIME FOR GLORY

I'm fed up with loose talk about "escape literature." Last night a bird thus blasted the movies, most books and practically all magazines. He said they gushed hero-stuff; that John Citizen, reading, transferred these heroic qualities to himself, and read on—lulled, lazy, cowardly.

Not BLUE BOOK's *hero-tales, says I. These admit that a lot is darned wrong,* but *they hold out hope for righting even the worst,* and *they challenge the reader to help do the job. No "escape" in that! The President, on February 22, praised the tough heroism of Valley Forge. To provide "escape," in past glories, from the stinging set-backs of today? Not much! He meant, go thou and do likewise.*

Now, I'll tell you *a tale. The young policeman who guards my business is a* BLUE BOOK *fan. Last week he enlisted for parachute training. . . . My gift to him and his buddies, wherever he may go, will be money—enough for quite a few* BLUE BOOKS. *I hope they'll provide escape from fatigue, loneliness, homesickness and inevitable fear. All other "escape" be on my head! These lads know the score —know there's* No Time for Glory, *save the glory of flag and nation.*

J. H. Yarborough,
Dallas, Texas.

FROM THE COPY DESK

Along about one-thirty in the morning the boys on the newspaper copy-desk flip off their eyeshades, drop their pencils and relax. Unless a big story breaks, there isn't much to do. They watch each other narrowly. Suddenly there is a concerted dash for the bottom drawer of the State editor's desk. Somebody emerges with a well-thumbed copy of BLUE BOOK *always kept in that drawer.*

We don't know of any better way to ease tired minds than to read BLUE BOOK's *stories while we are waiting for the final edition to roll off the presses. It's nice to get away from the sometimes dull facts we've been reading on the job, and let fancy roam through the pages of sparkling fiction. Then too, we like to hash over the thrilling stories all newspaper men are going to write some day but never do. You know how it is—we haven't time. But we have time for your kind of stuff any hour of the day or night.*

Avery Nelson,
Syracuse, New York.

(Continued on page 61)

Typhoon Dawn

IT was nearing sunset when we came to where at last I knew that at any minute I would have my first sight of the Hacienda Mirage. The trail here was plain, almost a road, beside the narrowing, steeply falling river: I had ridden up ahead of the others.

I had a strange, unsure feeling. It came to me that I was frightened—the same feeling I remembered from years back, when the great guns of Japanese warships tore into us at point-blank range at Shanghai. I was just a boy then, and I remember that I moved closer to my father, and he touched my hand. That was in the great Nineteenth Route Army—China's first proof to the world that peace and trade was not all she understood.

And now I was back in the Philippines; and in a few minutes I would see, talk to, Gabrielle Clough. It wouldn't be pleasant: nothing in my life had been pleasant. My main mission here, in the land where I was born, was unpleasant. The Marshal himself had directed it; and for proper reasons I had been selected as the most useful emissary. But there was a private mission: and that was for my father. For me a distasteful mission, since I had seen that picture in the window of a Manila photographer's. A picture of Gabrielle Clough. Just by accident, walking by, pausing to look into that window on the Escolta. Startled by it, staring—and at last getting up courage and asking who it was. The shock of that knowledge, with the attack on her father already under way!

My pony reached a high point in the trail, and I looked back at my party. There were Lipas, the *capitaz;* the half-dozen Moro *cargadores;* Sergeant Doan and the man riding silently in front of him. The *cargadores* were loaded like pack-beasts, the loads cleverly placed, compact, and each was held by a wide bark band about the forehead of the native carrier. These moved on uncomplainingly enough, though now and then, as if to remind us of him, and of what was coming to him in the end as payment, the *capitaz* hissed Moro words of insult or urging to the ever-silent half-men.

GABRIELLE CLOUGH

I had an urge to call back, to have the man Mitras come forward, ride with me until we came into this place. To ask him in these last precious minutes before I would lose chance to ask him openly, just what he remembered of what he was to do. I didn't trust Mitras.

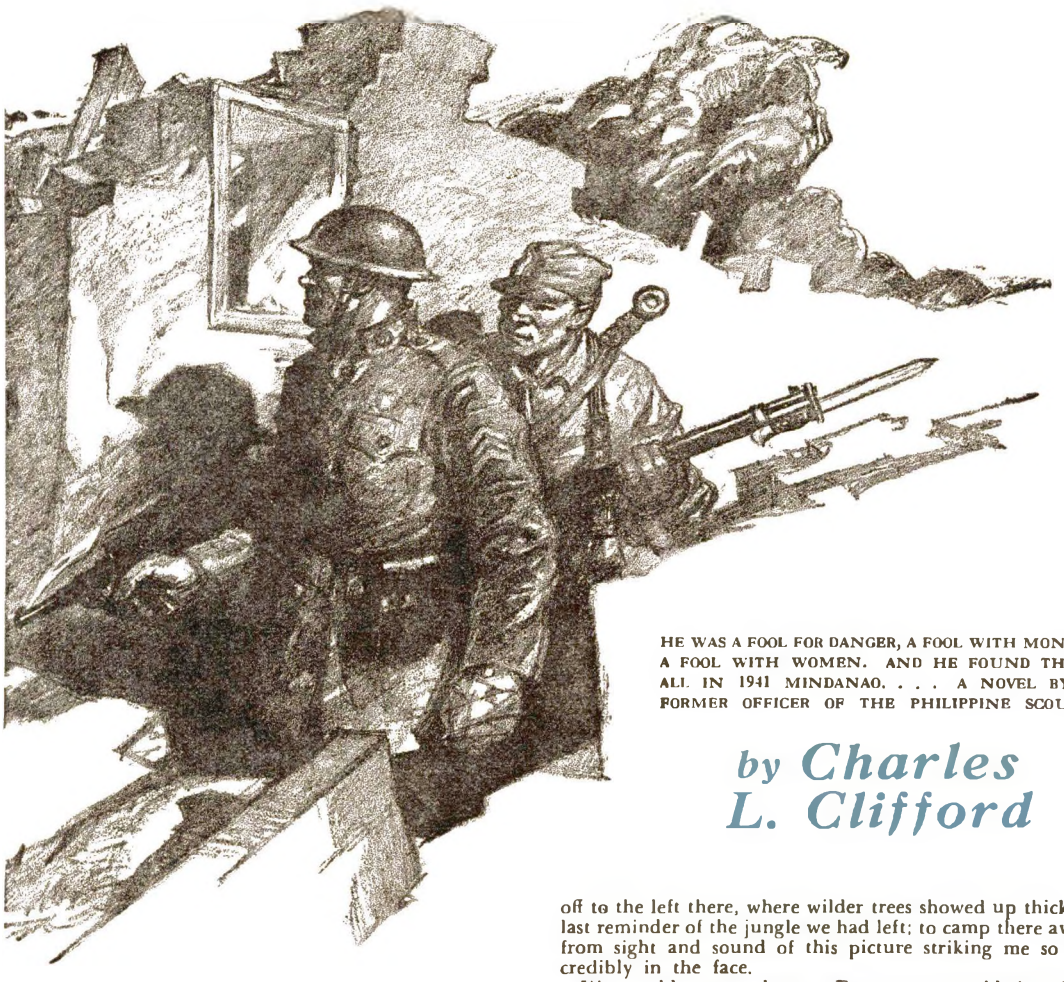
But I knew that wouldn't do. Like the captain of a ship of war, the general in command of an army, I had at last come to that point where responsibility lay alone with me—where the decision that brought exact action and all it entailed was mine alone to make.

I kicked the tough, round-bodied stallion, though his ears were up at last, his own steps hastening. I knew then that we were near. The *palay* awaiting him at the end of the march was already in his nostrils. He took a few stiff trotting steps, went down into a small hollow, and came to the next rise: and there was the Hacienda Mirage.

I stared at it—filling myself with it—with the broad plains, with the clusters of cattle, with the golden crop of cinchona trees. I held my breath unconsciously as I saw the white façade of the house.

It was all beautiful. The house itself was a shock to me. I remembered none of it.

Behind me I heard the *capitaz* shout; I didn't look back to see the weary slave-men lift their aching heads. I



HE WAS A FOOL FOR DANGER, A FOOL WITH MONEY, A FOOL WITH WOMEN. AND HE FOUND THEM ALL. IN 1941 MINDANAO. . . . A NOVEL BY A FORMER OFFICER OF THE PHILIPPINE SCOUTS.

by Charles L. Clifford

looked again and again at these exotic acres, at the sheen of the dropping river through the lush green of the meadow grass, at that white eminence and the hint of pink on it from the western sun. And back of that, high, reaching into the light green of the evening sky, at the wall of distant mountains that reminded me with a quick surge of memory of a child's picture that once had been mine. It was called Story Land. . . . It had a dreamy backdrop like this scene before me, and fabled childhood characters.

I looked back then at this entourage made necessary because of the jungle-ridden path I had followed. Again I was reminded of a later childhood. Of tales of the robber knights, their armed followers at their backs, and they ahead, encased in armor, their great shields emblazoned, their lances restless on their arms. . . . Knights errant.

Hell, I thought, and laughed. A knight in armor! A Sancho Panza on a mangy Filipino pony, and a lousy job ahead!

It hadn't at any time seemed to me that what I had heard would be as near the truth as I now saw it was. I was impressed—impressed to the point of wanting time to get back my sense of virtue, of reality. What I wanted now was time for readjustment: to temporize with time, sneak off to the left there, where wilder trees showed up thick, a last reminder of the jungle we had left; to camp there away from sight and sound of this picture striking me so incredibly in the face.

We could camp there. Tomorrow would be time enough. After all this time, what difference would twelve hours or so make? One more camp, after all that had gone before? Some days, through the jungle we had had to use the *bolo tabaz* almost steadily to cut a trail that would pass us all through. Six, seven, eight or ten miles only in the long day. The twelve-hour day. But this day we had made—well, certainly twenty miles. . . .

Gabrielle Clough—what would she be like? As like the stories told about her as this background of hers which I never had believed? Until this instant, when I saw that there was truth in them, and to spare. And that put fright in me. Because if she proved to be in character, looked as legend would have it, this was going to be more than I had bargained for.

I pulled up my pony beside the trail and waited, watching the walking men pass. Not one of them looked up, and I felt sorry as hell for them. I knew I couldn't change the Moro social system: nobody could. The Spanish couldn't in four hundred years of cruelty, and Americans hadn't in four decades of pacification. These men were serfs; born as such and resigned to serfdom. The *dato* who had provided them for me, sent them along under the petty boss now snapping at them, would get one silver peso a day a head for their steady, back-breaking work. There would

be no complaint from anybody: and for me, the outlander, I was merely the casual, convenient blessing for the *dato* during the time his people were a part of my life.

I wished I could give them something that could remain with them. Some little thing besides the tobacco I had tossed them as they lay in silence during the halts and the night and noon camps. But it was useless. They could not possess. Never in their lives could they own: a woman, a warlike arm, a house, or the meanest vessel of brass. . . .

Doan came toward me, his pony pulling at the dry, cracking bridle. He was watching me, his eyes deeply seeking. I had seen it at last. He was curious to know what I thought. He knew, of course, what I'd say.

"Doan?"

He eyed me, saying nothing. I pulled my pony alongside, not looking at Mitras, and for several steps we went along like that.

"What do you think? Isn't this too abrupt? No one knowing we are coming—just the lot of us suddenly appearing. It might even cause trouble, eh?"

"I know you're not afraid," he said in his strange, low, stubborn voice. "Personally, I mean. I was just going to make a suggestion."

"Well, what is it?" I was annoyed. Waiting for his suggestion made me appear weak, it seemed to me. And I wasn't going to be weak, not even give the appearance. Not unless I pretended for purposes of my own. So I said:

"I'll make the suggestion: All of you halt here. Water the ponies, feed *palay*. And feed the *cargadores*. I'll go on ahead. I'll have talked with him by the time you come in. Say an hour. . . . Is that as good as your suggestion?"

"It is my suggestion, Captain."

"And never mind calling me Captain. I'm not a captain. Unless you're in an army, you're not a captain. Or in command of a ship."

I WAS taking it out on Sergeant Doan, and I was a little ashamed. But I was nervous.

"All right, then," I said. "And you—" I looked at Mitras. All the time we had been talking, he had kept his eyes straight ahead. Acted as though we were speaking a language he didn't understand, on a subject that couldn't be of the slightest interest to him—instead of on a subject that meant life or death for him.

He looked at me, his sallow face was absolutely expressionless. It was as though he had turned it toward me merely because of the strange sound of my voice, but not because of any word I meant for him.

"Now is your last chance to get right into your mind all I've told you. And to believe it, as you would whatever it is you do believe. There must be something."

He turned his head as a sly bird turns it, and gave me an insolent smile. His teeth were very white. I wondered how he kept that small, fixed mustache so neat—as neat as a barber might have kept it.

"There *is* something, *Captain*," he said. "I'll remember what you said."

"If that's meant to be insulting," I said, "I'd better get that out of your system before we go on. I'll guarantee it can be done."

His thin lips moved as though suppressing a smile—a smile for a child. He looked sidewise at me again. "That won't be necessary. You must remember," he added almost pleasantly, "that we're in the Philippines now. Not China, where a thing like that would make you lots of face. Pug-dog Doan, here, knows what you can do with your fists. I know." He shrugged at the Moros now gone past us: "Unless you merely want to show off before those animals. And they'd just think you were simple-minded to use a hand, when you've a big gun at your hip."

The insult to Doan brought a deeper color to his saddle-colored face. His hard blue eyes, deep in his head, gleamed.

"You lousy gigolo!" he said. He didn't pronounce the insult properly, and that usually would have amused me. But not now. And I wasn't going to waste any more time, now that I was keyed up to my next move.

"All right," I said. "This will all keep."

I hit the pony with my heels and drove him away from the others. Once by the bearers, he went willingly enough. He even broke into a gallop at last.

A lawn sloped sharply down before the house. There were several great mango trees on it: their spreading tops looked impenetrable: the late sun glistened on their leaves. A semi-circular drive had been cut in the lawn, and it swept evenly up under a long balcony that stretched across the entire front of the house.

The house was built as large Spanish houses are. I could see through an arched doorway a patio, the color of high flowers. And on the ground-level, an arcade-like structure passed along the building. The place was on a dome-shaped hill, the first before the real foothills started from the plain and ended miles back in the shadowy backdrop mountains.

A woman was sitting in a deep cane chair when I rode up. She was close to where the drive came into the open beyond a concealing hedge. She was dressed in white, and I could see that her hair was cut squarely across the lower forehead, rolled out like a scroll on the side of her neck. It was heavy, and it shone with a gloss like polished *camagon*.

As I came closer she got up, stood staring at me. Now I could see that her face was powder-white, her lips wide and very red, and there was a faint slant to her black eyes.

I dismounted, dropped the reins over the pony's neck. I wondered how I looked to this woman—and if I looked tough enough, as badly worn as I meant to look when I first confronted Garson Clough.

I was wearing a service O.D. shirt, the two upper buttons missing; khaki breeches and a pair of English boots. The boots were old and soft, and they fitted perfectly. They'd set me back a hundred Hongkong dollars. The hat in my hand was a good one. It was almost new: I'd got it in Manila only a few weeks ago.

"Miss Clough?" I knew she wasn't—but somehow I said it.

She looked at me coolly. "I am not Miss Clough."

I saw then, looking closer at her, that there was more here than mere doll.

"I'd like to see Mr. Clough," I said. "I've got a party with me down by the river. I came on ahead to pay my respects. We've been some days in the jungle. Came through from the Cotobato."

She lowered her heavy eyelids.

"You're on an expedition? Are you an officer?"

"I have some Moros with me. *Cargadores*. And two companions. We've been prospecting. Really came out of our way to pay my respects to Mr. Clough. He was a great friend of my father's."

She was not friendly. Now she had brought both hands up flat on her chest. To show, I suppose, the flashing bracelet, the rings on her long, tapering fingers. I couldn't help but notice the deep opening of the silk blouse she wore, because her hands fluttered up as though clutching for support at the loose sides. Below that, she wore a wide cummerbund of crimson silk with two long blue tassels, which made you look at her rounded hips. I noticed also as she rescated herself, that what I had taken for a skirt fell straight like a skirt, but it actually was pajamas of heavy silk. . . . Quite a sight.

"How interesting!" she said softly.

It was then that I saw Gabrielle Clough. She was barefooted, and when she came through from the patio, her feet made no sound on the heavy flagging of the arcade. I saw a flash of brown and white, the white dazzling with the gleam of water on it. Then she saw me. She whirled the light-blue bathrobe about her upper body. But I could still see the satin trunks she wore: new-ivory colored, and below them her straight long rounded legs.

I stared at her. She stopped where she was and stared back at me. I'd been thinking just before, regarding the girl who had so coolly received me, what a sight *she* was, with her thick black bang, her red mouth and her provocative dress. . . . But not after I saw Gabrielle Clough.

She stared at me, and I stared back. I could afford to, for these seconds, I decided. She had one of those faces with wide cheekbones, that made her look sleekly superior rather than coarse. Her eyebrows were the reason, I suppose, why most women trim theirs. Take what they have off the record, because they have no beauty. This one's had. I got the impression of not a hair touched, not a hair spoiled. The arch of them was natural, and it flared wide, out to the high wide cheekbones. The whites of her eyes were startling and showed clearly, almost arrogantly under the pupils. The color I couldn't tell. She was back in the shadows, and the sun was behind the house now. But the life in them, even now while she kept them still, unwavering, was the most notable thing about her. That and her hair. It was a color I couldn't name. And as I first saw her, one great wave of it fell across her face, covering an entire shoulder; while she watched me, she slowly raised a hand and moved it back away, so as to see me better—see me more rudely, I thought; and the thought angered me. I didn't want it to happen this way: hostility between us before it was necessary. I knew in the end that would have to be. But for my book, it was bad to start with it.

So I smiled. "I'm Stephen Curtis," I said.

"Yes?" She said it as though I was announcing myself at the door of a city house; not in any way as though I'd said it in the wilds of Mindanao, hundreds of miles from Manila.

Again I started to explain; but the dark one broke in: "Why didn't you come straight through from Pang Pang? The *Basilan* touches there twice a month. You could have motored up."

I looked at the dark one. Who was she, and why was she butting in here? Why didn't she beat it and let me talk alone to Gabrielle Clough? I had a feeling that, left alone with Clough's daughter, I'd do a lot better than with this suspicious-eyed mestiza.

"I had business in Cotobato, then in the mountains. This was close to my route."

THE Clough girl was watching me, with the open curiosity you see in children, and it occurred to me that it might not be rudeness: that stuck away here, far from normal people, she might indeed have the tricks, maybe the mentality of a child.

I turned to her. "I have a message from my father, Miss Clough. He and your father were once in business together. Worked for the same company. They came over here in the army together in the Spanish war."

"Oh," she said. She gave the other woman a side glance—almost as if asking permission to go on. But she got nothing in the way of encouragement. The dark, haughty eyes turned almost at once on me:

"I am to be the Rani Clough," she said coolly. "I'll be very glad to take your message to the Raja. I'm afraid it's impossible for you to see him."

I stared at her. The blankness in my face never fazed her. She went on evenly: "The Puasa has just ended, and the Raja is resting. Tonight is the Halilaya reception. You must understand it is not for outsiders—unbelievers."

She looked me over then coolly, as though nothing more was to be said, and I must admit that there was nothing I could think of to say. Puasa—Halilaya—Raja and Rani! Standing there, face to face with this cool, unfriendly-eyed woman, my mind floundered back to the days when I was a child in this strange country. The words I had heard . . . their sound was familiar but their import unremembered.

Gabrielle Clough was watching me. Her eyes lifted a little as I turned from the seated woman to her. I thought

"Miss Clough?" I knew she wasn't—but I said it. She looked at me coolly. "I am not Miss Clough."

there was a flicker of pity in them, and understanding. She said, speaking softly, a little unsurely: "The Puasa is a period of fasting and prayer during Ramadan: a very sacred and severe rite for Mohammedans."

Her voice trailed away as though suddenly she realized the futility of further explanation.

"I remember now," I said. "You see, I was born at Pang Pang. I lived among Moros as a boy. And you, Miss Clough, were born at Pang Pang. Though you don't remember me—I was about seven when you were born—I do remember you."

A quick light came into her eyes. I saw now that they were a very deep blue—the color you see sometimes in the Philippine sky at night over the water. She moved toward me, and color had come into her face, deepening the color of her amazing eyes.

But before she could speak, the other woman lifted a hand, and the late sun hit the jewels on it and flashed back with quick, radiant lights.

"Gabrielle!"

The girl had backed away, was still moving. It was a command. But I paid no heed to it. I was staring at that white, ivory-white arm. At something on that arm, that wrist. I had never seen it, but I knew it without more than what I had been told. The sun hit it; and as the arm moved, the light flattened. The jade gleamed dull, and the red stones, the priceless red of the rubies in that bracelet, glowed with a deep, bloodlike quality.

"I forbid it, Gabrielle!" the woman said, and the arm moved again, and the sun hit those red rubies, and the glow of them grew into fire.

Ah, I thought, and my hand went without my directing the action to the wallet deep in my hip pocket. My hand touched the outer cloth, and I thought of the thin rice paper in that wallet, and the list of precious things neatly written in Chinese characters. . . .

I looked then at Gabrielle Clough. I was amazed at the defiance in her eyes. Like the start of a typhoon coming, clouding the deep blue of the sky over the water. She said nothing back—just moved away, turned and walked from us toward the house. I watched her walk. Something deep stirred in me as I watched that long, defiant stride of hers. Her legs moved strongly; her hips moved with a stirring grace; her shoulders were back—wide, lovely shoulders. And as she moved away, the wind came toward her and flung the thick, curved hair away from her face—back toward us.

"Go! And quickly, please!"

I took one more quick look at the imperial bracelet. I thought: "Once that was on more than a Rani's arm . . . a prospective Rani! Once that perfect thing was on the arm of a Chinese princess who might have looked into the kind old eyes of Confucius. . . . No, I will not go." I might have gone—at least more easily—had I not seen that.

I looked up at the hostile dark eyes. "Are you a Mohammedan? I know you're not a Moro."

She looked as though she were biting her generous lips—without biting them. "You are insulting."

"I simply asked, because a good Mohammedan is the very soul of hospitality. A believer in Allah does not drive a visitor from the door—even a declared enemy."

She studied me for a long time. Her face was as still as stone.

"A good Mohammedan tries to avert unfortunate probabilities. That might be far more serious than lack of hospitality. I know why you came here."

"I told you why. Of course you know."

"I don't mean your lie."

I thought fast as I watched her steady, unfriendly look. We had been in Manila a week—Doan, Mitras and I. And Pang Pang was not the sleepy little town it once had been. From what I had heard, Garson Clough had made a big thing of it. Cable and radio connected it with Manila. Big ships stopped there to load the newly developed riches of Mindanao. A motor road led from the Hacienda Mirage to this thriving little city.

Mitras could have tipped my hand: he was crooked right through. I had never let him out of my sight unless Doan was right on his neck. The secret he had was the weapon that would shake Garson Clough out of this stolen heaven. . . . Mitras could have sold me out.

"What do you mean?"

She lowered her faintly blue lids. The dark eyes under them gleamed. "*Adventurer* is written all over you," she said. "I mean in the professional sense."

"So?"

"You can be bought. I'll buy you."

"In what kind of coin?"

HER eyes hardened at my mocking tone, at the implication. "You know why she"—she jerked a shoulder toward the house—"left, and what she's now saying to her father. I could have forestalled her. That's not my way. My way is to speak last. Laugh last."

"I see."

"And act fast. What do you want?"

"You said you knew."

"I know you have a party camped down by the lower falls. At least two white men and some *cargadores*. A mere message from your father would not necessitate that. You could have come by boat to Pang Pang, hired a car and been here in half an hour."

"I told you I was on a prospecting trip."

She eyed me carefully. "For what?"

"Gold, preferably. The mountain provinces in Luzon are full of it. Why not Mindanao?"

"Yes," she said, and she nodded her dark head impatiently. "That may be. But you're not the type—patient. Impatience sticks out all over you. You are an opportunist. Even your English sounds strange. I speak it better than you do, yet you are definitely an American. That means for years you have been living in an un-American background—speaking a foreign language."

I couldn't help the flash of respect I had for her on that one.

"Among Filipinos, living among them, that could happen."

She spoke swiftly then in a dialect. I stared at her, startled. She repeated what she had said. Then she laughed, a quick, nasty laugh.

"Why don't you answer me?"

I said nothing.

She spoke again and again; the tones, the words changing. Then she said, mockingly:

"Tagalog, Visayan, Magindanaw—a little Spanish. So you see?"

What would she say, I wondered, if I told her that for years I had been talking Chinese? English only with my father and Doan, and lately very little of that. I didn't tell her. This was a bad one to tell anything to. . . .

"What's your price?" she said swiftly. "Time is short here."

I looked at that jade bracelet with the deeply glowing rubies. The light was fading, but the glow was still there. It had been there for a thousand years.

"I'm a mercenary, you said?"

"Markedly so. A true adventurer."

"You may be right. My own father told me that. Also that I was brutal."

"And that's true too. I can understand that. There's plenty of it in me. We should understand each other."

"Tell me, then, why you don't want me to see Clough. That's part of the price."

"What's the other part?"

"I'll tell you then."

She raised her dark thin brows. "Quickly? So that this can be settled here and now?"

"Yes."

She watched me for a brief, searching moment; then she said swiftly:

"It's Gabrielle."

"Gabrielle?"

"Don't play the fool. If you were an utter stranger out of the blue, you'd be welcomed. But you're not. You've already said enough to her to make things difficult. You've reminded her that once she was an American girl, her father a mere business man, and that you and she are contemporaries."

"Well?"

"That has been driven out of her long ago—if she ever remembered it. I think not. She is the daughter of a Raja—a Hadji who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. The biggest man in Mindanao—the Leader."

I stared at her, wanting to laugh out loud, but somehow unable to do it.

"What is your price to get out of here now, before she comes back? You can pay off your men here. I'll see that you have a car. There's a boat due in Pang Pang tomorrow."

She spoke almost breathlessly, and I realized with wonder that she was making a desperate play.

"What have I to do with Gabrielle? I don't understand your concern."

"You understand it. I know her very well. And I know your type very well. You never have seen and never will see another girl as beautiful as she is. I doubt if any man has. Do you think I'm fool enough to leave you together even for a day?"

"You're flattering me."

"Possibly. But you've got that bold, reckless look that gets women. A girl like that—" She shrugged and waved a hand. The dull glow of the rubies made a moving light in the growing dusk. I stared, fascinated at the gems. "She's lived here all her life. A princess with a future laid out for her. You have no place in that future."

"You must be crazy. I've only seen the girl for a minute. I admit she's beautiful." I grinned; "and that I'm a devil of a fellow, if that will please you. But I'm here to see Clough. And then I'm on my way."

"You're on your way now. What's your price?"

I pointed at the bracelet on her arm. "That," I said, "I can do my business with Clough by mail. I only came in person—" I shut up then. Why had I come in person? I had all the evidence I wanted in Manila to start legal action against Garson Clough. I need never have seen him. But I had wanted to see Gabrielle Clough. That was the whole thing. Because of that picture I had seen in a photographer's window, I had eased my hate against Clough. I had come here hoping to temper the shock: to play it man to man, and not leave a trail of disgrace for him—because of the beauty of that face behind a dusty window.

I was aware that the face before me had paled, that the big dark eyes were wider. They came up from the bracelet with shocking impact. But the voice, not sharp as before, came now almost hoarsely.

"What are you talking about?"

"That trinket on your arm. It attracts me, for some reason. I've always liked spectacular jewelry. Is my going at once worth that to you?"

"You're extremely insulting," she said in a low voice, and she drew the arm from my glance, dropping her hand beside her in the depth of the chair.

"Just running true to form. As you yourself described me. Jewels happen to be my weakness."

SHE had hold of herself now. I saw her send a quick glance toward the patio. She said, steadily:

"That is an heirloom. Priceless to me. Of tremendous family significance. You see, I, Consuela Pilar, am a descendant of one of the early Spanish governors of the Philippines. An old and noble family—the Pilars. But I am prouder still of the other side of my family. That is royal."

"Yes?" I said, and I looked properly impressed.

"On that side I am descended from one of the greatest rulers of Mindanao and Sulu. The famous Sultan Suliman."

I nodded, still impressed.

"This,"—she lifted the hand and the bracelet glowed again—"came down from Suliman. Aside from its great intrinsic value, it is the mark of royalty. Each senior female descendant inherited it."

She was watching me for signs of lightness, unbelief. But I gave none. I said gravely: "I'm sorry." But I thought: "Here is one of them. The most important and valuable on my list."

I bent closer and stared at the bracelet. "It looks sort of Chinese," I said. "That jade."

Her eyes flickered, but I gave no sign of the import of this remark.

She nodded then. "They raided as far as China in those days," she said. "Our people came from India, many of them. The nobles, mostly. This"—she shook it, and her eyes glowed like the rubies—"was a temple piece."

I wasn't getting anywhere with her. It was a temple piece, all right. From a Chinese temple. I had the complete description and history of it in my pocket. And I knew that the longest it could have decorated that smooth ivory wrist could have been merely a matter of months.

"I'm sorry I had to suggest the only price you can't pay," I said, smiling.

She got up from the chair. It was quite dark now—dark in the way it gets in the Philippines, where the darkness seems almost bright; where you can look up and see that the sky is actually blue—deep and full of real color; where you can see the face of another, the brightness of eyes, the whiteness of teeth, but not the fine outline of things.

"Are you going?"

"You must give me a stronger, more real reason. Or—the bracelet."

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

She said in a low voice: "Maybe what I've done is very wrong."

I could see the flash in those eyes—like a flash of heat lightning. She reached out suddenly and took my arm. She drew me with her; she walked close to me, and I felt her hip, smooth and rounded through the wide silk Moro trousers she wore. We went through an archway, and in the dimness I saw that we were in the patio, the inner sanctuary of the Spanish house.

The patio was large: full of flowers and shaded with trim nipa palms. In the center was a large pool: the stars thick above us now shone down on it, gleaming on the still water. The water was deep, a lovely gray-blue in the strange light. The tiling was white and a pale blue. The water looked clear and cold.

She led me across the open, into the deeper shade by the far wall. She still held onto me, and now she lifted her face, blurred white in the gloom. The faint odor of her hair came to me, her eyes were wide, luminously bright as she lifted them up and pleaded with me. Her voice now was soft, denying the hardness and the impersonality of its earlier manner.

"I have some of the recklessness and adventurousness of you in me too," she said in a quick, low voice. "I understand you. I am like you. And it is because of that likeness that—I owe you a warning. Go. You cannot succeed here. It is far too late. What you are against is too strong."

"Against?"

She looked up at me with sharp impatience. "Playing dumb is wasted with me. Do you think we are cut off from the world here, simply"—she waved a bare arm—"because of those surrounding hills? You have heard of radio? Of the cable? Of the airplane?"

I stared at her as though I never had, and she gave me back a hard look of annoyance.

"And you've heard of friends? We have many—many in Manila as well as in Mindanao. And your activities in Manila could hardly be called subtle. No more so than your clumsy tale of this innocent trip, this casual call!"

"Regardless of that, I'm hardly accountable to you."

She gave me another of those looks. "No. Nor am I accountable for your safety. But—you have a way with

you. A boyish clumsiness, but clumsiness nevertheless. I have always hated to see clumsy people hurt."

"I can take care of myself. And believe me, it's better if I see Clough—better for you."

"Yet you were willing to leave for a mere bracelet! Without seeing him."

"Not a 'mere' bracelet," I said, and I watched her closely. But she met my look steadily enough.

"Why?"

Why, indeed? Well, I'd then have had something concrete with which to confront Wang when he returned to Manila. And I could always strike at Clough impersonally—from Manila too. Though I preferred to get the supreme satisfaction of telling him face to face.

There was no reason for me to tell this woman all that.

"Just another bit of my clumsiness."

Fear appeared suddenly in her dark eyes. Her fingers closed on my arm. She was very close to me, as though almost coming into my arms with her urgency. I was about to laugh, to shake her off.

Something stopped me. Possibly, subconsciously, I had heard something, and my action warned her, catlike. She stiffened, but hardly drew away. It was more a brief respite of caution, an instant and complete change from passion to cold wariness, poised ready to resume instantly, fully. Her dark eyes were bright, hard-pointed in the shadowed light. Her black hair gleamed like lacquer. I had seen the hair of Chinese women gleam like that, but never Chinese hair as fine as this of Consuela Pilar.

"What is it?"

The words were surprisingly soft. I found myself wondering: a mestiza of the Philippines, or Eurasian? Half-caste of these tropic islands or of Maçao, Kowloon—the Chinese coast to the north? No other women in the world had the sensual beauty those had. And none were more dangerous.

It suddenly seemed much brighter. At first I thought a light had been turned on somewhere over the wall. Consuela Pilar's eyes were not on me now. Her hand had dropped away from me, and she was staring coolly toward the house. I turned, and I realized that the new, glowing light was the coming of the white Philippine moon over the hills to the north.

I saw Gabrielle Clough. I couldn't see her face clearly, but already I seemed to know the lines that encompassed her. She moved a few steps toward us. She looked from one to the other of us with complete calmness.

"Gabrielle."

Swiftly Consuela Pilar left me, paused, half turned and said, honeylike:

"Please sit down, Mr. Stephen Curtis. I'll send a boy out. I sha'n't be long."

Gabrielle Clough said nothing. I felt a little sick. I wondered how long she had stood there in the shadow of those rubber plants.

They walked off together, and I could hear Consuela Pilar talking in a low, quick voice. A light came on then, flooding the patio with a misty, pleasant glow. I sat down in a wide cane chair and watched the light on the fountain in the middle of the pool. A Moro boy came quietly with a tray. He wore clothes that looked startlingly white in that indirect light and a clean orange *tubo* set neatly on his shaven head.

He said never a word but set the tray with the whisky, soda and ice before me, and departed swiftly. I wondered. Mohammedans, I knew, must eschew alcohol. And yet among the highest classes I'd heard the rule was honored more in the breach than in the observance.

I made myself a drink and sat back. The moon was coming fast now, and marking the high palms with silver. I drank, and thought of Gabrielle Clough. Already I had forgotten the other one; and I was amazed, realizing it. I thought with a sudden passion that here was a woman such as I had never seen before. With all my wanderings, adventures, I had never had an adventure as stirring as just sitting here in this quiet patio. I'd been around, and I'd shot the works, but I'd had to come back here not twenty miles from where I was born, to find excitement as intense as this: a woman as stirring as Gabrielle Clough. A girl who was born in the same tiny outpost of civilization, in the same sketchy hospital. Actually, quite likely, in the same room.

Well, she was gone, and the moon was coming up over the far, high mountains. Maybe I would never see her again. Maybe, with all Consuela Pilar's tender talk, it would be all just a double-cross. Just the bum's rush for me, a humdrum return trip to Manila, and a drab, unpleasant legal action which could have been done in the first place, and no memories to live down. None except the face in that picture; and such things, I knew, didn't last long in the sort of world I lived in.

The first of the evening breeze came over the wall and stirred the high tops of the palms. The surface of the pool rippled faintly. In the distance I heard the faint musical tinkle of an *agong*—a Moro gong.

I sat back in my chair and closing my eyes, tried to see the face of Gabrielle Clough. But I couldn't see it. It eluded me completely. But I saw dust—weird, reddish dust in the China dawn. I heard the moaning and the cries of dying men, and of women—of children. The foulness of death, the death of war, came to me as I breathed. And for a time, how long I never knew, I was back there.

Chapter Two

Sergeant Doan brought me word just as day was breaking. It was like an eclipse: the strange greenish-yellow light filtering through the lethal dust of the shattered village. The Japanese bombers had passed on, the local ground fighting stilled for the time being. But that sickening dust lingered, and the dead lingered, flung about in queer attitudes on the sun-hardened streets of the village.

The moaning of a woman rose steady, monotonous, above the stifled pleading cries of the wounded buried in the debris of the mud hovels.

I mounted the griffin—the Mongol pony that Doan had brought—and rode beside him, hard, neither of us talking. The sun was almost up, the air clearer as we passed the shattered railroad station with its barricade of rusted wires and ripped sandbags. Tired, dust-grimed soldiers stared at us, moving away from their brown machine-guns, using the occasion to stretch their night-stiffened limbs.

When we came to the place, I was frightened: not for the first time since I had been in China, but with a different sort of fright. A fright that it was not in me to combat with action, or with pride, as the others had been.

Sergeant Doan moved a hand toward a field of high *kao-liang*, and the trivial thought pierced my fear: how tall and virile and clean it looked. Through war and misery and the turgid rush of fighting men, it had been planted, had matured, and was ready for the harvest.

I could see where the *kao-liang* had been trampled enough for the passage of men. Doan dismounted and spoke in Chinese to a soldier kneeling, rifle in hand, close by. The man took the horses, and I heard him call ahead as we moved through the tunnel of green stalks.

They had cleared a place in there, and I saw my father at once. A dirty quilted soldier's cloak was spread under him, and they had propped his head so that he saw me at once.

The same old smile. "Hello, Steve."

I grinned bravely enough. Two Chinese who had been squatting near him got up, moved a little way off. One was a big, peasant-faced man, and tears had grained down beside his flat nose, leaving crooked channels of brown skin. The other was an officer, and he spoke a brief word of greeting to me and saluted. He was a staff colonel.

"How does it go?" I said, and knelt down beside him. His hand lay over his knee, and I took it. It was cold.

"Just one of those things, Steve. Too much luck too long. How was it back there?"

"They've withdrawn across the river. They dropped a few on the town, though, awhile back."

"Yes, I heard it."

"Has anybody done anything about a doctor?" I said. "No chance back there—just some sanitary men, and they were cleaning up the village. Here, let's see—"

He shrank away from me, from the feel of my hand. "Feng will come if he can. But I told them not to. . . . Except I'd like to see him. Remember back in Suiyuan?" He smiled feebly. "Well, Feng's the last of our lot."

HE was talking about the old days. Years ago, it seemed to me, but really it was only about five. It was the Chinese Communists then, and we'd been fighting with the canny Yang. But all were for China now, and men you fought then often turned up right at your elbow with a hot gun pointing the other way.

"Let's see," I said. They'd bandaged him a lot. His tunic with the general's insignia had been stripped away, and his thin body was bare to the waist except where the blood-soaked cloth was drawn taut about his lower chest.

"Nothing you can do. The bleeding's stopped, Steve. But I'm getting weak as hell. I've lost too much. It was dark, and I'd gone out there alone like a damned fool. Wanted a private look. It was just a stray shell, and it got me. Marked for me on the dot. Doan found me. I never could shake old Doan. . . . Doan!"

"Yes, Major."

My father smiled as the old sergeant came up and looked anxiously at him. "You see what I mean. I've been a general for six years. But he calls me Major. If they made me a field marshal, he'd call me Major."

Sergeant Doan was bitter with what had happened. But he was a professional soldier—a soldier grown up in the school of my father's time. He was of the "old army," and that meant the army that ended in 1917. He looked awful, his face thick with caked dust, his lips broken from the sun, and the clothes he wore were stiff with dried sweat. But his eyes softened now, and he said in a strange, cracked voice: "You know about that—how it is, Captain? I can call *you* that. You never was any rank in our own army. Just a boy, and then suddenly a lieutenant and a captain. In the Chinese army."

"Like a Swiss admiral is what he means," my father said. "Doan, come near me. I want you to hear this. You were there when it happened. It'll make it clearer to Steve here. Maybe—I won't get to finish it. You can put the bits together then. I'm weak as hell, damn it."

I was thinking how Sergeant Doan could have been a lieutenant and a captain, too, in the army of Chiang Kai-shek; but not for him. He'd fight gladly in that army, as he had done ever since the invasion, but he fought as a sergeant. Or at least in the uniform of a sergeant, and an American uniform at that. "I paid for it," was the way he put it to me once. "And I wore it honorable, or one like it, in the Islands, and with Pershing in Mexico and in France. And even in Siberia, when France was over."

"He couldn't get enough," my father once explained. "Wouldn't admit the war was over, so he takes his discharge, pays his way to Mukden, and how he got to Vladivostok is something we'll never know. But he did it in time to reënlist without losing his longevity, and catch what looked like the last bit of war of his time."

I knew the rest, of course. There still was a bit of war not so far away when the S.E.F. sailed forever out of Vladivostok, leaving Sergeant Doan to seek it. It was to the south, in the land of perpetual unrest. To the wandering soldier, it was a fighting sanctuary. And when by chance he again encountered my father, he slipped into the groove for which he was made. . . .

The Chinese had drawn away, and we were alone. I wet the rag they had been using, a piece of sacking, and I laid it, wadded, on my father's head. He began to talk at once. His voice was weak, but it went on without any bad stop. It faltered at times, and once tears seemed near his eyes. But often his voice grew stronger, and the thin mouth would harden.

Sometimes he spoke straight to Doan, who agreed—agreeing and growing more bitter as the tale went on.

"If I'd known any of that," once Doan said, "I think I'd have shot him. I never liked him. He was the kind of man no soldier likes. And thank God, I never had to serve directly under him."

"But this is for Steve," my father said steadily. "Not for you, Doan. Your life is about made—what you were cut out for. Steve owes nothing here. Maybe I did. And maybe—I think so—this pays it out. And Steve can go. I want him to go. I want you to go, Steve. If it would work, I'd like to be buried there. That's the China in me. But that can't be. But it may be that you can put this over. I think you can. You're harder than I ever was, Steve. Because of the life I took you through! Brutal—too brutal for a youngster. I made a soldier of fortune out of a boy who should have lived like a boy. I even had the money more than once to send you back to the States and put you through decent schools. Once—well, I was going to make you change your name. I could have got you an appointment to West Point. There was a way. But I was afraid it would come out. It always does, in an army as small as ours, and as intimate. Why, you even look like me. So much! Though I was always sorry as hell you didn't look like your mother. Your beautiful mother—"

He was quiet then for a long time, and alarmed, I touched his wrist. But the pulse was there: thready but still there. He opened his eyes then, and smiled at me, "She's buried there, Steve. At the little cemetery at Pang Pang. Even though they've taken the troops from there, it's all right. The Moros are respectful, understanding of the ones who go to Allah. So she'll be there near you. It will be nice if I can join her. That's something I've soaked up, I suppose, from the Chinese. They go back, when they die, to the land of their ancestors—the land they love."

FENG came then. He hurried in among us almost noiselessly, pushing the *kao-liang* stalks aside from his narrow shoulders. I always looked at this man with a sense of respect, wonder almost, that I never had for any other of these alien but understandable people.

And this time, bad as it was, I looked at him and thought of the manliness and strength and feeling in that slight body. Not so long ago Feng had been one of the great at Johns Hopkins. He was an American Chinese, born in San Francisco, but he had given all that up without a shrug. I could be sure of that, knowing the man. And here, in a land he had never seen before, had seen less of than I, as far as that went, he too had found his groove. And that groove wasn't on the Marshal's staff, though that was where he'd started. For some years now he had been with the troops in the field. . . . More, he had been with the "lost lot," as my father called them—the guerrillas who banded with desperate unity and disbanded as swiftly after their bitter job was done. My father's men: he and his *cadre* of such as Doan and Feng, who combined the rarity of mobility, expertness in war, and leadership for these desperate peasant fighters.

Feng didn't even glance at me or at Doan. He bent swiftly, his lean ivory-colored fingers moving toward that pulse as though drawn by expert puppet-strings. My father smiled up at him and began to talk. Feng hushed him with a quick gesture of his slim hand. His back was to me, and I didn't move; I didn't want to see him lay back the rough bandages. He reached back, not turning, his fingers opening the canvas-covered case he had laid on the

"Cheng, how long since you have been in the country where you were born?"

trampled blood-soaked ground beside him. I could just hear the murmur of his voice, and knew that he was asking searchingly, in calm, encouraging words, what it was he wanted to know. I saw a syringe appear, several small vials. I turned away then, and found Doan watching me.

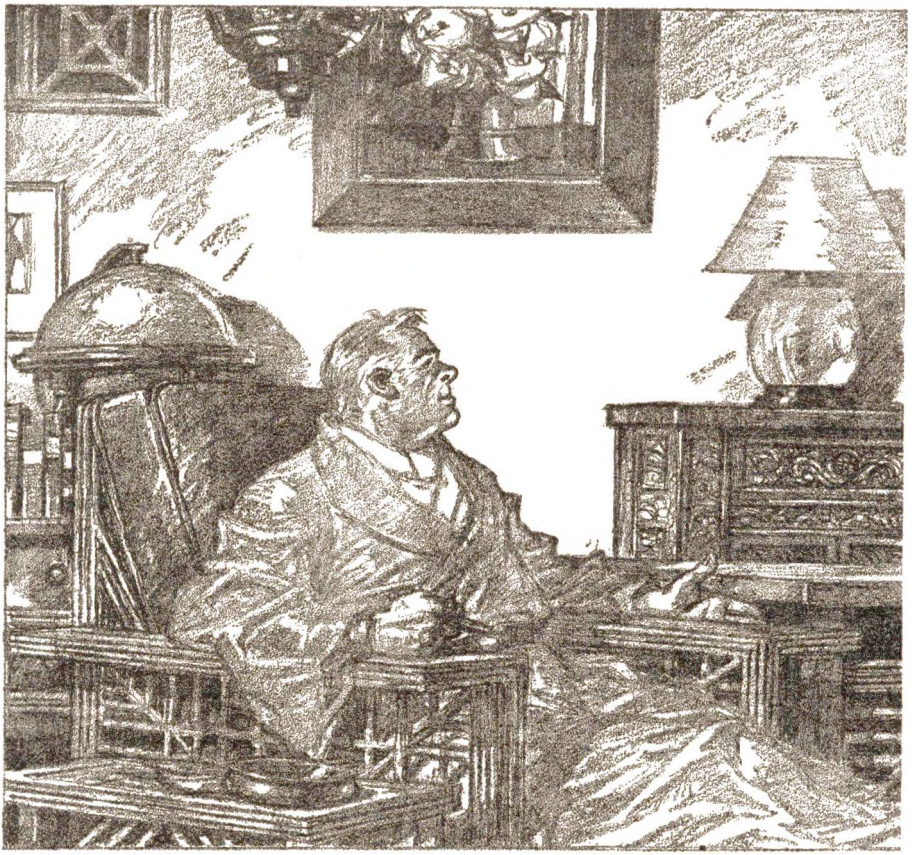
"I seen as bad as that in France," he said, his cracked lips barely moving. "They saved them. And that was over twenty years ago. And no guys around like Doctor Feng. I seen what he done at Nanking on that river boat. And the guy just a coolie."

"He's lost too much blood," I said, but sudden excitement stirred me. Doan was, of all I'd seen, the worst where hope or expectation stirred. Pessimism was in his blood, as surely as that queer streak that drove him toward the sound of hot guns.

Feng turned toward me, nodded. "Steve, there'll be a plane in from Kling Po—with medical supplies. Don't let it get away. Beat it now!"

I rode like hell. Back at the bare brown field behind the kilns and close to the first hills beyond the town, I found the transport plane. It was a good place for an emergency field, and supplies of sorts had been flown in to us.

The only reason my father went at all was on account of me. I knew he thought it was no use, in spite of what



"I was sorry things had to turn out the way they did. I was very fond of Steve."

Feng had told him. Just before they loaded him into the plane, Feng said:

"You owe something to your own: Steve does also. Please believe that I'm speaking for Chu Teh now. Even for the Marshal—"

Chu Teh was the Number One Chinese general as far as we were concerned. And by the Marshal, he meant Chiang Kai-shek.

"All right, Steve." He pointed toward the open door of the plane, and he smiled. "Tough to have to leave all your belongings."

They were on my back or in my pockets.

"I've got a command to look out for."

"You and Sergeant Doan both," Feng said inflexibly. He smiled with a rare broadness. "We Chinese would like to give him back all that blood—more than all. But—" He shrugged. "Yours and Doan's just happens to be the best chance for him. One or both of you. He's *got* a chance, Steve—unless you want to stand here and argue for a while, and lose it for him."

I didn't want to lose it for him, nor did Doan. We both gave plenty before it was over; and when we left China, he wasn't going to die, anyway. . . . Unless a Japanese bomb hit that hospital.

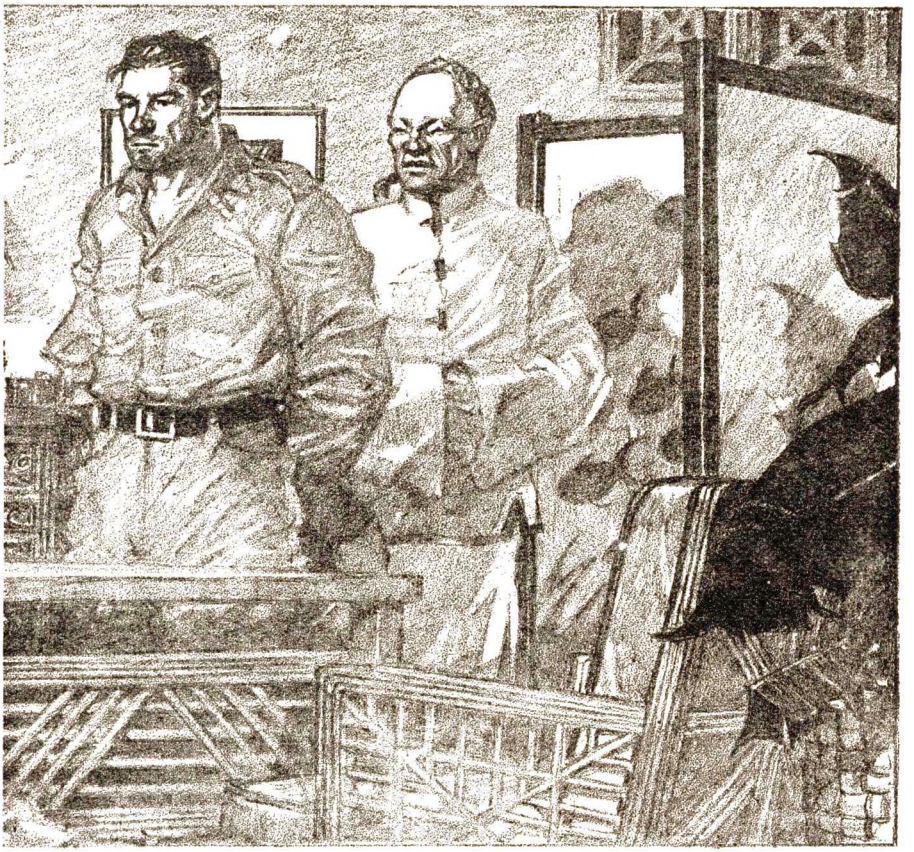
But we didn't go alone. Mitras went with us. That is what he called himself now. It had been something else in the Philippines, far back, my father said. Mitras was an unnoticeable clerk then. He had worked with my father and with Garson Clough. When the insurrection was over, my father had resigned from the army: and Garson Clough, a volunteer captain in the same brigade, had left the army with him. Big business chances in the new country, Garson Clough had said. He knew business: he had left a flourishing one to join up. Even then, as a young man, he was an opportunist. Which was the reason—not patriotism—that had made him do the showy, exciting thing. Join the army to fight in the exotic Philippines! But he had the beginnings of the shrewdness, the craftiness of his later life. He saw the despoiled, disorganized Philippines. He saw a chance to further despoil a troubled, unhappy land.

The Inter-Island Products Company was merely a stepping-stone for Garson Clough. To my father, it was a chance to prosper in a country he had grown to love. A chance to escape the humdrum garrison life, the return to his normal rank of lieutenant in some drab Western cavalry post. A chance to grow up with a new country in a big, growing concern, to live with his family, not moving on sudden orders from year to year. At last, probably, to reach a measure of independence—to own his own plantation, his grown family about him.

That, at least, is what I gathered from what my father said in those long talks at the hospital after he had passed the danger-point.

And he had said more. He cleared up the Mitras thing for me. Mitras made a confession—a confession that shocked my father into new life, that sent a blaze of hope into him: not hope for himself, because his path was set, he had figured. But hope for me. . . .

He spared Mitras' life. He insisted when we went back in that plane that Mitras, like some precious package, go back with us, under the guardian eye of Sergeant Doan.



"That's the rotten part of it. For a man who had served with my father—" I stopped.

And when the Marshal came to see him in the hospital, to say his piece of gratitude for the new China, my father asked the first favor he had ever asked of China.

It was granted at once. By the Marshal himself! It just happened one of his staff was with him, and it would be unfair to blame him for not wanting to kill two birds with one stone; or for him to consider that his bird was the more important. It was a practical bird, whereas my father's might have seemed the mere satisfaction of an emotion: impractical, certainly, when you consider the distance to Manila and the lapse of years, the obvious unreliability of Mitras.

Chapter Three

I DIDN'T hear her feet on the tiles. Maybe she had walked naturally, and no sound she might have made would have aroused me from my thoughts. I heard her voice, first; it was low and quiet. She stood between me and the pool and looked down at me. I got to my feet, clumsily, embarrassed. I must have looked very stupid, standing there staring at her.

She had changed into a silk blouse that molded softly over her wide shoulders and her deep, lovely bosom. She wore the loose wide-buttoned trousers of the Moro women.

She saw me looking her over, rudely almost, but she made no concession to it. She said coolly:

"My father will receive you. Will you come?"

I couldn't think of anything to say. I nodded, and walked in silence with her toward the house. We came to a side door. It was quiet and cool there in the shadowed angle of the wall. A gecko lizard started his deep, throaty call from a near-by papaya tree. It brought me back, suddenly, more than any other sound, to memories of the old days—when I had lived in this very place, and as a child had heard the gecko outside my window at night. Maybe this very lizard—how old did they live to be?

She had stopped and was watching me.

"Would you like to tell me why you came here?"

Her eyes were troubled. Here in the quiet dimness she seemed for the moment to have thrown off the poise of the last few minutes. There was even a faint tremor in that low, rich voice. But I couldn't help that. Go soft now! She'd been talking with the other one. And with her father. I couldn't tip my hand just because this girl was beautiful.

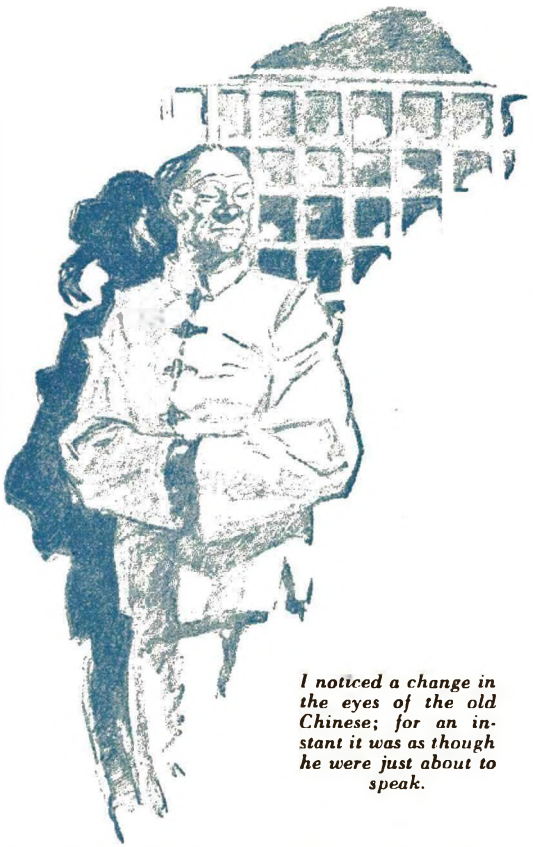
"I did tell you. Just a word for your father—from mine."

I could see her stiffen. She said, in a cold voice: "You talked with Consuela, while I was there. She acted very strangely. And later—" Her lips came together, and she looked away from me. . . . So she had seen us under that shaded wall.

"And you've talked with your father," I said. "He's the Raja, I understand."

I suppose the facetious stress I put on that exotic word hurt her. She looked back at me, and her eyes were unsure. I felt a wave of sympathy for her. For this young, lovely girl messed up in this madness of unreality—to give it its mildest term.

"And I," she said, and her shoulders came up, there was a quick light in her lovely eyes, "am the Raja's daughter.



I noticed a change in the eyes of the old Chinese; for an instant it was as though he were just about to speak.

It is because of that, I ask. If there's something wrong, I should like to know."

Looking down into those eyes, it seemed impossible to deny her anything. I said impulsively, without thinking:

"I couldn't answer you truthfully without hurting you. And I couldn't hurt you."

I was stirred by the feeling that came to me as I said that. For an instant I really felt like the knight I had been thinking of whimsically as I rode over the ridge that first showed me the Hacienda Mirage.

And looking at her now, after these words, it seemed to me that those steady eyes warmed suddenly with unguarded response. But only for a moment. Again she was cool, stubbornly demanding, and I felt somewhat of a fool—a very melodramatic fool.

I made a move toward the doorway and nodded. It was then that I saw the Chinese. He was an old fellow, carefully dressed in servant white. He stood in the dim hallway, his arms folded as only Chinese can fold their arms, and the sight of him seemed the first real thing that had come my way in this place.

She followed my glance; and the Chino, meeting her eyes, smiled at her.

"This is the gentleman, Cheng," she said, and he nodded gravely. She turned to me then. She looked at me for so long that I was embarrassed. She said at last in a low voice, so low that the old Chinese could not have heard:

"I'll be franker than you've been, Stephen Curtis. And maybe what I've done is very wrong."

"What have you done?"

She turned away again, as though she had said too much—intended to say no more. It angered me: this girl so incongruously here, this lovely girl who had stirred me at first sight more than any woman I had ever met, being thrust, buffer-like, between me and a man I could have nothing but contempt for. It made me feel impotent, drained of fight before the fight began. If it had just been the other one, Consuela Pilar—

"Well?"

She swung on me then, and said what she had to say swiftly.

"My father refused to see you. Such a thing has never happened before. Now do you see?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then," she said. "Go now. With Cheng. Before something happens."

What she had done I now saw was an amazing thing, a defiance of all she knew. And I saw that she was frightened, would be more so when I left. Before I went by her, walked into the dark interior of the house, I reached down and took her hand. It was cold, but it was soft, and it seemed to me that for an instant I felt a movement of the fingers—a faint tightening.

Then she turned and was gone.

I followed the silent, shuffling Chinese.

Chapter Four

WHEN I left Gabrielle Clough and entered that strange house, the Hacienda Mirage, I had the feeling of a person abandoned, lost in some dangerous place of secret caverns. Alone, cut off from all normal men and means of movement hence! There were no lights, and the gloom of night had come into the house, I thought, before it was due. The old Chinese shuffling before me was a dim, bending shape of shadowy white. His *chinelas*, sliding over the tiled floor, sounded like the coarse wings of some predatory creature of the dark. My hand moved instinctively to the pistol-butt against my hip.

I had to speak. And to my mind came the natural, and I realized with relief, the soothing thought that I could speak the language that during the last many years had seemed almost my own.

"Cheng, how long since you have been in the country where you were born?"

The old Chinese seemed to shudder. His thin head came up, and the slippers on the tiles slowed, their scraping died to silence. I could see in the dimness of the big hall how his head came around, see the blurred difference of color of his old face. His small, wrinkled, blurred eyes searched my face, and there was a quaver in his thin voice as he spoke.

"Since the years of childhood." He was about to say more. I could see his old hands shaking with the miracle of this, about to accent his feeling with his words, when a roaring voice tore into the stillness about us. He swung about then, jerked a gnarled finger indicating the upper reaches of the wide stairway we had come to.

"Raja calling," he whispered.

I went behind him up the broad *camagon* stairs. The steps were great solid pieces of the ebony wood, and they were polished like metal. Twice again the voice from above reached down to us, shouting. And at last, near the top, Cheng answered that he was coming.

Wide windows letting onto the upper balcony shed light here. Their shell-paned frames were pushed back, and I caught a glint of the moon on distant mountains. And closer the soft, blurred glow of fireflies. The cooling air of the night came through the windows, and I drew in deeply of it before I came face to face with Garson Clough.

I passed over the shining floor, and my boots made a harsh, metallic sound. I wondered if he heard them—heard them and sat up, listening, wondering what could make such sounds. As we came into the wide upper hall, I knew where he was. One whole end of this great house

was his. The door was flung wide, and already I could see enough of the apartment to be certain that it was the command post of this fabulous estate.

I was close behind Cheng when he entered the room, bobbing his head and awaiting his master's pleasure. I followed him closely because I knew that then nothing could be done. No door slammed in my face, no pistol shot—and that might be a possibility—blasted at me.

I even had time to sweep the place with a hasty glance before Cheng's form before me failed at last to hide me.

It was a big room, and it occupied the entire end of the house. Except for one side, that from which we had entered, it could be turned into—was, in fact, at the moment—an outdoor pavilion. Through the sliding windows I could see the tops of palms and mango trees, see a flight of homing birds, and again, on several sides the rise and the lighted tops of mountains. I could see the dim flash of the river, and beyond, rising in a dark green wave, the massed tops of the cinchona trees. Sea upon sea of them.

But I must look at Garson Clough.

He was dressed in a crêpe kimono of pale beige. It was worked with dark blue silken butterflies—a handsome gown. His feet were thrust out, encased in beautifully woven *chinelas*. They showed brown and strong through the toe-grips. The bare legs above them were powerful, hairy. The thick body was powerful. And to my surprise, the muscular corded neck rose into a head that shocked me. This man must be as old as my father—possibly a year or two, one way or the other. And my father—even before his ghastly wound—had looked like an old man. Sixty, certainly. But this man looked ten years younger.

It wasn't this that startled me. That could be in the natural course of events. But the clean-cut handsome face, the virile flash in the bold blue eyes, the chin of a man of action, the look of bold honesty about him—all that startled me. Because false men don't look that way. Up until now you couldn't have made me believe it. But now, in spite of myself, I had to believe it. After what I had heard of Garson Clough, I had no choice.

I stood there staring at him. The Chinese had drawn off to one side. His arms were folded again in that complacency of his people that nothing can shake, that posture the Chinese assume that epitomizes the patience and sense of fatality of their race.

Garson Clough stared at me. There was no evidence in his look that I had forced myself into his most private place, and this in defiance of his wishes. It was rather as though I had been directed to appear before him, and had come tardily.

His gaze moved over me. He studied me from boot-sole to the top of my hair. He knew his stuff, all right, and gone forever from me was the idea that I had before me a cheap crook, a weakling to cringe at quick accusation.

He was softening me up. That was all right with me. But not too much of it.

"I'm Stephen Curtis' son," I said.

"I know who you are," he said. His voice was almost conversational, utterly without accent.

"I'd rather not have come in here just this way. But I was informed that you would not see me. I was asked to leave without seeing you. Summarily."

He nodded, as though with calm satisfaction at the information. He said, almost soothingly: "Who asked you to leave? Summarily?"

It was as though he had made a play of the last word as sententious, slightly adolescent. I wasn't sure that it wasn't. It angered me. But I caught myself. I had no intention of betraying his daughter; of telling him that she had suggested this against obstruction.

"Your daughter, for one."

His heavy eyebrows lifted slightly. "Oh! And who else?"

"Miss Pilar."

I was surprised to see the smile come slowly into his face. He said his eyes still bright with it: "You're a fine-looking boy. The resemblance to your father is amazing. You look just as he did as a lieutenant."

"That's very interesting. You should have seen him just before he died. An old, broken man. What is called in romantic tales, a soldier of fortune."

He didn't move an inch away from my passionate attack. He just watched me, gravely, sympathetically, even.

"I was sorry to learn of that. Sorry things had to turn out the way they did. I was very fond of Steve. We were very close, you know."

"That's the rotten part of it. For a man who had served with my father in the most honorable of all professions—" I stopped, stifled with my sense of outrage.

He was gazing at me as though I were a child berating a plaything. Something inanimate and ridiculous. And now he even smiled at me.

"Here, now—let's cool down. You know if you hadn't looked as you do, I'd probably have had you thrown out of here some minutes ago. But damn! You're the spitting image of your father in one of those moods of his. Fizzle up like a firecracker, bust all over the place. If I didn't know your name, I'd know you instantly after that outburst. Cheng, get us a couple of whisky *tan sans*. *Sigue!*"

The Chino drifted swiftly out of the room, and Garson Clough nodded at a deep cushioned Bilibid chair.

"Sit down and bawl me out. You probably won't be any more comfortable, but I will. I hate like hell to be attacked by a man on a horse when I'm afoot."

I sat down in the chair. I thought as he said that, of Gabrielle Clough. Maybe it was something about his gesture, the look in his eye, or perhaps a tone of his voice—but it reminded me of her. And she it was who had helped me here, wanted me to see her father, for some purpose of her own. Why should I queer it now? Before I'd accomplished even the first step in what I was determined to do? I *was* like my father. More brutal, he had said. But I could remember many of his fierce outbursts, crusader attacks on things I had often thought of as trifles, or pure theory. But I had some of his temper, though I knew it was more practical in my case. Mine must be aroused by the blatant, immediate wrong; my counter-attack more cold-blooded.

Garson Clough was busy clipping, lighting an Excellente cigar. He looked over it, through the smoke at me. His eyes almost twinkled as he said: "Now—do you want to go through it all, or would you rather hear my side of it? I assure you there has never been any question in my mind. And there'll never, *never* be a change in it."

As he said this last, his jaw suddenly tightened, and I was startled at the look that came into his eyes. It was as though a gun had been placed against his head with a warning to talk or die. As though he had screamed a formula of denial, and meant never to change its content. And as though he might at any moment forget what he insisted must be said, he started to talk swiftly, almost eagerly.

"You've heard all your father had to say? Suspicions, let's say, about me?"

"Yes. But not until a few weeks ago. Until he was certain that he was dying. I'd never heard before. I was too young when it all happened."

"You were—five. Yes, just about five."

I was startled at the exactness, the swift placing of the fact.

"Just about."

His eyes were fixed on me as though to hold me with physical restraint against any movement, mental or physical, away from his attack. He said:

"The facts of the Pang Pang affair were these: A certain contingent fund was in your father's keeping. He was the accountable official. As district manager, I was, of course, the responsible official. Are you aware of the distinction?"

"I am."

"Then you know that in case of loss, the accountable official must make good the loss. In dollars and cents."

"I understand."

"But any lack of care, such as improper exposure, inadequate guards, and so forth, may be in addition a proper charge, exactly as in military administration, possible against the responsible official."

"Yes," I said, angry. "I understand all that."

He looked at me with mild curiosity. "Indeed?" He said that as though an annoying misunderstanding, to his mind, stood between us and must be cleaned up before more interesting and important matters could be discussed. "Your father could not show that fund when the company auditor suddenly dropped in at the plantation. It just wasn't there. Unfortunately, the auditor was an extremely strict type. Possibly not a good judge of men, or just naturally suspicious. I didn't know him at all; but in court he was a very bitter witness against your father. And his report was so worded that a criminal action was instituted. In a way, it was just a bad break. If he had been a more easy-going type, or knew and liked your father—which I must say was the same thing—it might have turned out otherwise. Possibly there'd just have been disciplinary action taken, and the money deducted from your father's pay. Or even, instead of legal action, it might just have been the loss of company rank. Are you following me?"

"I am. But you had the combination of that safe as well as my father. You were the only two who did have it. When it was found empty, why wasn't that—"

He waved an impatient hand. "I explained that. And also there was no proof, for that matter, that your father had actually taken the money. It simply wasn't there when called for, and your father had no adequate explanation for its disappearance."

"Naturally. He was as startled as the auditor upon opening that safe. It was rarely opened. Hadn't been by him for some days. It could have been cleaned out at any time during that period."

"Ah, yes!" he said, as though I'd made a pretty point for him. "Quite right. But does that mean that *I* did it? The evidence showed that, as manager, I had done my duty. I had seen that proper guards were placed over the building where the safe was. And I had myself made periodic inspections of funds, including that one. Naturally, I was never involved."

"My father *knew* he didn't take the money."

"Yes, of course," he agreed impatiently.

"And the safe wasn't broken open."

"So they thought, yes."

"It couldn't have been, and not shown. My father said when he opened it that day it was in perfect order. Not a mark on it. Nothing disturbed. Simply all that money gone."

"Well?"

"It was taken by someone who knew the combination. That's elementary."

He smiled at me as though I was being childishly naïve. "And that someone was I? Had to be, in your arithmetic?"

"Yes."

He sat there looking at me for a while. He was entirely relaxed. And when the Chino came shuffling in with his brass tray and the whisky and *tan-san* bottles, he looked up like a boy might at the presentation of an air-rifle.

"Ah. Looks good, eh? You see, for a long time I've taken nothing. Puasa. Explain that later. Feel a thousand times better for it. Never touch it until sundown, anyway. Never over three highballs in a day. How about you?"

"I've never thought of it, one way or the other. I've drunk over three and gone without three, many times. I haven't been living like this, Mr. Clough." I waved a hand to include the solid grandeur of the room.

He took it as a compliment. "I've done some great things with this house. Everything of the best. Manila architect, best builder in the Islands, and the pick of the trades worked on the Hacienda Mirage. When your father had it, you know, there was just a—well, pretty place, but really just a *bahai* here. Swali, bamboo and nipa."

"He hadn't got the fruits of his labor yet. You got all that, Mr. Clough. And that's what brought me to Hacienda Mirage from—from Egypt."

I tried to control the passion in my voice. I needn't have. He said amazingly, raising his eyebrows in mild surprise: "Egypt, eh? You don't mean you were in the war?"

"Yes," I said. "My father and I were with Wavell's army. My father was killed at Crete. He told me then. Only then. So I came back."

IT was then I noticed a change in the eyes of the old Chinese; he'd been listening, and for an instant as he met my eyes, it was as though he were just about to speak. But he turned quickly, bobbed his head and left the room.

Garson Clough looked after him. "There's a great Chino," he said, nodding. "Sometimes I think—hell, I *know*, he'd do more for me than anyone of the lot. I picked him up while prospecting years ago across the Island. Near Davao. Moros were raising hell over there, and they'd jumped a constabulary post, massacred the detail to a man and tore the shops and dwellings to bits. Sort of a Foreign Devil business, like the Boxers in China back in 1901. 'Clean out the foreigners!' Killed all the Japs and Chinese and the few whites there. Somehow Cheng had got away and made his way up the coast. I found him, half-starved, hiding in the mangroves, and have had him ever since."

His voice trailed off as though his memory of the affair had suddenly faded from his mind. He looked at me suddenly, alert, and he said with startling directness: "What did you think of Gabrielle? Of my daughter?"

For a moment I was shocked. And then something about his manner, added to his throwing the question at me in that abrupt fashion, made me say what I never would have normally said. But what I had been thinking.

"I think she's the most beautiful girl I ever saw," I said.

His eyes lighted with pride. "Really? That's very pleasant to hear. Especially so, as it was said so spontaneously. And," he added with a mocking light in his eyes, "by a young man who has been taught to feel that I am—not quite honest."

"You'd have me believe that my father lied?"

He shook his head patiently, as at a stupid remark. "Let's finish all that, shall we? Then our next drink we can have with complete pleasure. Only way to drink. Now, look here: About the place—Hacienda Mirage. Everything about the deal was legal, above-board. Your father went in with this Dutchman—forget his name, offhand. The Dutchman dies. Leaves the place to your father. It's already planted in cinchona—from prime cuttings the Dutchman somehow smuggled out of the Dutch East Indies. First time such a steal was ever put over."

"He didn't steal them."

He shrugged impatiently. "You have a passion for moral detail. Another trait of your father's. All right, he was *given* them. And by luck, or persistent trial and error, he settles on this exact spot of land. Plants his stuff. It thrives. In the end turns out better bark than the best Dutch stuff. Threatens the Dutch monopoly. But to plant and put over the first crop, your father has to borrow money from the bank. I happen to buy that mortgage."

"*Happen* to!" I burst out.

He nodded calmly. "I was a speculator. Always was. It wasn't the first mortgage I'd ever bought. Nor the last. That mortgage gave me a half-interest in the place. Anything wrong about that?"

"Legally, no."

"Or any other way."

He met my stare with an easy smile.

"How about the other half? That's what I came to see you about."

I saw my men. . . . Sergeant Doan, his face expressionless, and beside him Mitras, swaying with exaggerated grace.

He chuckled after a frowning pause. "I see what you mean. That, in fact, was even less questionable. It came into the company office as a legal tender of half this estate. Typical of your father. And naturally considered by the company as a mere token. Quixotic! The letter with the deed insisted that it was an earnest of his intention to pay back every company penny lost in that theft from the safe. Well, all he had was a place in the hills—according to him, planted in cinchona. Who would take that seriously? It's been planted all over the world: India, its native South America, Africa; they even tried it in the Igorrote mountains in Luzon. But the Dutch in Java were the only ones who had the secret of the good bark—who ever made it pay. And they had a monopoly—ninety per cent of the world's supply.

"In every new country," he went on, "misguided people, nuts and plain dumbbells, try out things like that. There's been lots of it in the Philippines: rubber, coffee, cotton, what-not. How was anyone to know that he'd inherited from this Dutchman the hitherto unobtainable from Java: *ledgeriana Moens*, the most valued of all the cinchonas? Or that he had the most perfect setting for its growth: a place where the climate was ideal, no cross-pollination possible, just the right elevation, humidity, and natural water? Hell, man, since the success of this place, they've tried to duplicate it all over the Islands. No luck. You can go ten miles from this house in any direction, and all you'll get is inferior bark. If any. Wouldn't yield four per cent of poor stuff. *If*—mind you—*if* you could get the labor."

This was all true. My investigations in Manila told me that. I knew that the ordinary exploitation of Mindanao had been always doomed to failure. The Moro is a warrior, or at best, a worker for himself. He is proud, and manual labor with him is for serfs. But those serfs are treated well, according to Moro ideas—rarely exploited for a stranger's need. You might find gold sticking out of the ground, but you'd play hell getting Moro labor to mine it.

But my father had done it, I knew, because of his friendship with the Pang Pang *dato*, Abdul Dinn. How Garson Clough had carried on that initial success I did not know. And at the moment I did not care. The cool, almost whimsical effrontery of the man amazed me. He was telling me to my face, without a sign of guilt, proudly almost, his every move in ousting my father from his land.

"I'm aware of all that," I said. "And now I'm to assume that my father cheerfully surrendered the work of years to a man who casually walked in here with a couple of pieces of paper?"

He smiled as though I had made a clever point. "Legal papers, though. It just goes to show how unbusinesslike your father was, Steve. What would have happened to this place if he had never surrendered control? He'd have lost it in the end. Why not to me? A sharp business man, an experienced planter."

I stared at him almost with unbelief, that he could talk so cheerfully to my face.

"You had no qualms? Throwing a man off his property even with *two* pieces of legal papers?"

"Throw? Now, Steve! That shows how bitter your father must have become, not to tell you the truth of the matter. Why, I offered him a berth for life. Suggested plans for getting control of adjacent land, which I now have. He'd have an interest in that; more in the end than—"

"Yes," I said. "Aren't you forgetting the promise he made to Dato Dinn? The same one Van Sholtin made? Not to bring in outsiders, or to expand beyond the present holdings?"

He shrugged. "Like your father. Quixotic! Right there is where he made his mistake. Naturally, I couldn't agree to any such folly. I'd already committed myself to a corporation arrangement with some Manila capitalists before I came down here. And—like him—he blew up. Threatened me! Of course, legally he didn't have a leg to stand on. Deeds were recorded and regular in every way. Really, he seemed actually mad there for a time. And walking off the way he did, never returning—well, I've always thought the sun had got him. After that Pang Pang affair, he never was the same."

"THAT'S strange," I said. "Especially for a man with my father's pride. That never occurred to you, did it? What pride will make a man do?"

"I've got a great deal of pride," he said, as casually as if we were discussing an academic case. "And now you speak of it, mine was probably the dominating factor in that scene. Yes, I remember clearly how I made it plain to him that I'd had enough of his innuendoes."

"That's a good word," I said. "You ran him off the place. You'd even brought a detail of constabulary with you in anticipation of the dispossession. You threatened him with Bilibid."

I could feel the heat in my face; my hands were balled tightly on the arms of my chair. But he was as cool, as relaxed as though we were talking of the weather. He said, languidly: "The place was a gift, you know. From an unknown Dutchman, a sunshiner. A mere piece of luck! Something he'd picked up by chance and lost by chance. Really—"

I stared at him, baffled. It was like, I thought, a burglar appearing before a householder suddenly with a gun, and

being received as a childish guest. Should I shove the gun at him, or be deprived of my initiative by his sophistry and indulge in an amazed study of the man? I thought of Gabrielle Clough. Could I rob a house with her as a witness? But I wasn't robbing a house. I had come for what belonged to me: to my father. My father had said that I was brutal. Not vicious, but brutalized by what he had carried me through. I felt now that he was right. I felt like kicking this man to his feet and taking it all out of his hide: The shame he had brought on my father, the sin he had committed against decent society. Making him pay for that in a way that could give me complete satisfaction. Sergeant Doan had told me once that was the only way ever to get real satisfaction from a man who had wronged you. You were face to face while it was happening, and you shared the emotion of victory and defeat. Physically.

My mind came back to his last words with an effort.

"Just a gift from a Dutchman!" I repeated. "I was only a kid, but I remember that Dutchman. He was kind, like my own father to me. And when we came back from a prospecting trip into the mountains—my father and I, and my father was staggering, helpless with fever yet hanging onto a seven-year-old kid who could hardly walk. That old Dutchman took us in here. This very spot. And he nursed my father like a woman. Fed and looked out for me. Maybe you don't know it—but giving sometimes arouses more affection and love than receiving. My father worked hard here, learned the cinchona and helped make possible what the Dutchman finally accomplished before he died. Sunshiner, hell!"

CLOUGH waved a soothing hand at me, and drank deeply of his whisky.

"Time for another one." He glanced anxiously at my half-filled glass. "Drink up. I never feel right until the second. I hope I haven't been rude. But I have a passion for straight talk. And I thought it would be best to get this out of our systems before we joined the others."

"The others?"

He nodded pleasantly as he made himself another drink and handed the bottle to me. "Yes. Puasa. We're celebrating. All my friends are here—a great get-together every year. You met Consuela? What did you think of her?"

I didn't have the passion for straight talk he did, apparently. I certainly didn't intend to answer that question as it should be answered, so I said nothing—by this time realizing my silence would in no way affect his style.

"What every other man does; I can see that," he went on, unperturbedly. "Strange," he said, shaking his head with the wonder of it, "since Gabrielle's mother died, you know, for years I never looked at another woman. Never went in for this native stuff, as so many white men do over here. Deteriorating. I realized that. It lowers your standard. Does something to your self-respect. And as for the white women I met—and I've met many since I became wealthy—couldn't see one of them. And I met the pick of them." He made a gesture of distaste. "None even gave me a twinge. And then I met Consuela. Old Spanish family. Her people were grandees from years back. One of her grandfathers was Governor General over here. Love at first sight. We're to be married soon."

I'd heard that one before. An old Eurasian fiction, and my father had told me about the Philippine equivalent. But it was nothing to me. In a way, it pleased me. Fate had caught up with him at last, then. Fate in the form of the glamorous mestiza Consuela Pilar. And I wondered how long love would last when she learned that all his loot was soon to be shaken loose from Garson Clough. What price his love then?

I still wouldn't give him normal satisfaction, startled as I was. I simply nodded as though he had announced a commonplace. But it didn't faze him.

"I see it appears a perfectly natural thing to you," he said, pleased. "And it is. I'm somewhat older, of course. But what of it? I'm in the prime of life. Not a particle of change since I was thirty. Unless for the better. I drink less, sleep better, eat better. I'm tough as *bijucca*. Look at that arm."

I looked at it. He had flirted the wide kimono sleeve away from it almost to the shoulder. It was hard and muscled, and he flexed it for me like a child working a mechanical toy.

But the hell with his arm, I thought. I said at last:

"I suppose, Mr. Clough, that you have a pretty good stake banked? Plenty to live on?"

That was an odd question, surely. But apparently not to Garson Clough. He smiled pleasantly at me. "I'm a smart business man, as well as a smart planter, Steve. Didn't I make that clear?"

"Then that's all right," I said. "Because my father, as you also said, was a bit quixotic."

"I'd go even further than that."

"Yes, he was different than I am."

"I'm not so sure," he said, his eyes twinkling. "I've sized you up, Steve. And there's your own admission: this foreign-war folly. At your age you'd not have stuck that nonsense without liking it. You're a romantic. You're even the perfect physical specimen: typical Richard Harding Davis hero. A fool for danger, a fool with money, a fool for a woman. Wasn't he the one who said that if you had to make a fool of yourself, it should be because of a woman?"

The hell with his irrelevancies!

"No woman has ever made a fool of me. And I'm so different," I went on harshly, "that I resent his wish that no action be taken to deprive you of your stolen profits. You can take them. But this place, the Hacienda Mirage, comes back to where it belongs. To my father."

"I thought your father was dead?" He said it as though I had mentioned that my father was coming for a visit.

"Belongs to *me*, then, if you want to split straws. I'm his legal heir."

"You're a damned amusing fellow," he said. "And I'm tickled to death you popped in on us like this. You'll amuse people."

"Look here," I said, angered. "I'm not staying here for any party, if that's what you're talking about. I—"

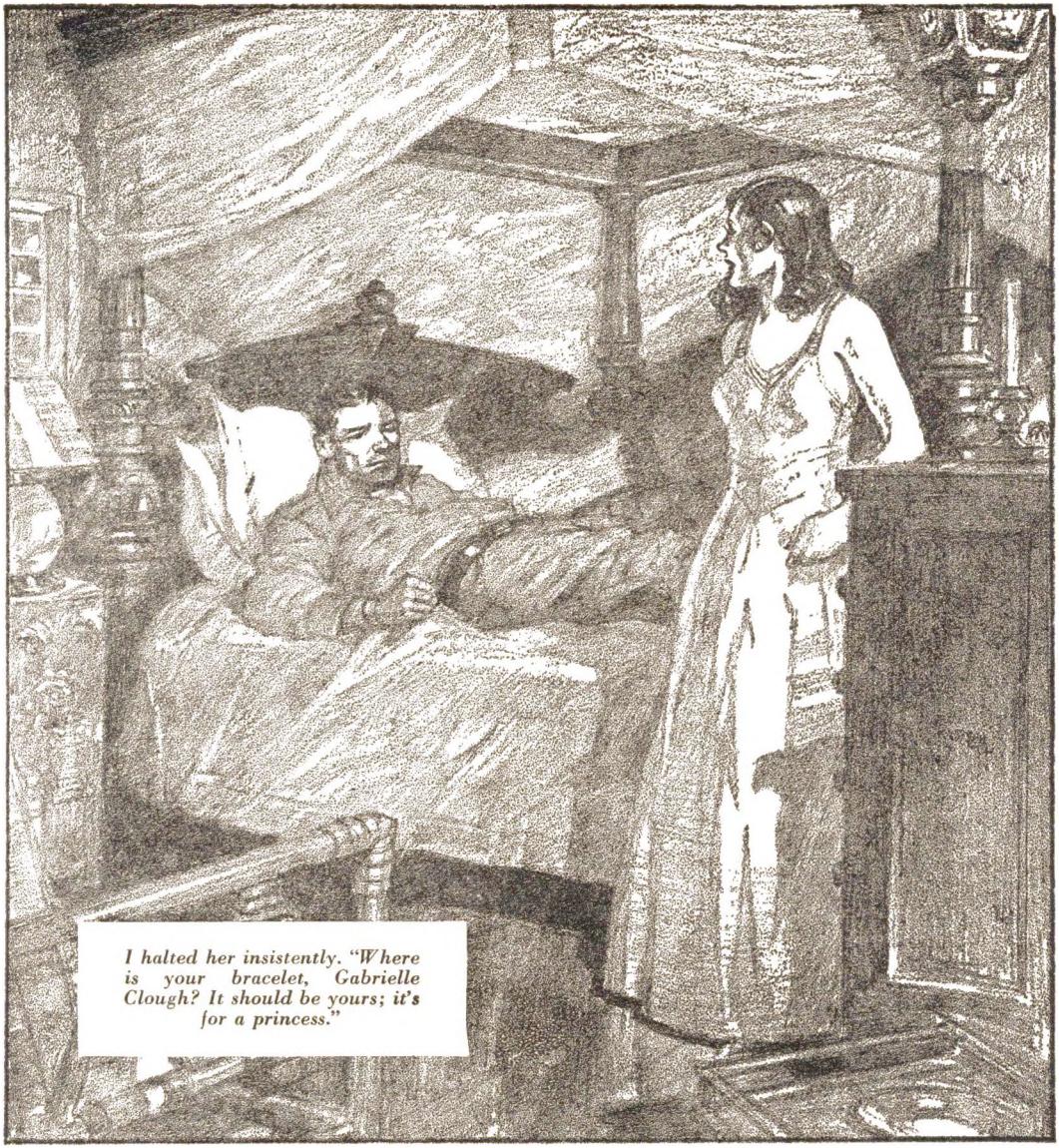
He cut me off with a quick wave of the hand. "Forgot you were on a hike. Prospecting, Gabrielle said. Just your trail-clothes, I suppose. Well, if I do say it myself, I've a wardrobe equal to any occasion. I've come to respect good clothes and the appropriate time to wear them. We're of a size, though you're a bit slimmer from your soldier-of-fortune antics. A week or two here will put some meat on your bones. Cheng will see that you have everything you need. Properly dressed, you'll be a handsome man, Steve."

I STARED at him, unbelieving. "You still don't seem to understand what has happened," I said. "I'm not a polite visitor—in spite of your evasions and trick amenities. I've spent some days checking certain things in Manila; a week checking other things in Pang Pang. I've got all the evidence I need to dispossess you from the Hacienda Mirage. Legal evidence. I've even brought a witness or two along."

He was listening to me, entirely unperturbed, and now he said, as though politely reminded of the fact:

"I almost forgot. Gabrielle mentioned you had quite a party. She'll have seen to that. There's room in the foreman's area in back to put any white men you have. Unless they're close friends, of course. In that case, one of the guest-houses. Later I want you to go over the place with me. The *obrero's* quarters are really a model—a model little *barrio*."

The Chino came in and lighted a lamp, moving quietly about the room and sliding some of the windows shut. Garson Clough gave me a sly side smile and then talked steadily to the man in Magindinaw. From the deep past



some of the words came back to me, but not enough for me to understand the import of the talk. The Chino nodded almost mechanically as he went about his work; and when he left, Clough turned to me as though he'd performed a neat magician's trick.

"Magindinaw. The local Moro dialect. I've always been good at languages. Speak Spanish perfectly. Now, about this—"

I got up, staring down at him. "I consider it only fair to confront you with a man I've brought along. After that, my plans are to camp along the Pang Pang trail. Arrive there tomorrow. The *Basilan* is due in a day or two. Then I'm going to Manila. My idea in coming here was to try to convince you that this should be settled out of court. I don't seem to have succeeded."

He looked up at me, puzzled but not angry. "A man, Steve? What man?"

"A man named—" I paused, maybe for dramatic effect. Because the name of that man should shake him from this clever calm. "A man named Gregorio Gruspe. Now do you understand?"

"I'm afraid I don't," he said—incredibly.

"Then I'll explain," I said. "Gruspe was a young clerk when you and my father worked for the Inter-Island Products Company. He was the employee who happened to open the envelope that contained the deed to half this estate sent by my father. You were still the manager of that company, and because there was a note in it for you, Gruspe put the whole thing on your desk. The note explained that the deed was sent to you for transmission to the head office in Manila, because the law might require it to be recorded in the province here, and because my father wanted you to know that he was making what effort he could to wipe out the loss of that stolen money. The

company never got that deed. It was later recorded in your name. I've personally seen the substitution. As an official of the company, the trick of transferring it to yourself was simple—because only you and Gruspe knew the original existed. And my father being the 'quixotic' character he was, it was simple to convince him that the Company had made it over to you. I believe you said you'd suggested it to the Company as a gamble against your yearly bonus, and thinking it worthless or not in their line of business, they were only too willing. But you forgot Gruspe, Clough."

He was almost smiling at me. "You've certainly been sold a bill of goods, Steve," he said. "I mean the angle you've got. What you say is very true. Except that what I told your father is true—not false, as you've been led to believe. Surely a man who has been about, as you must have been, wouldn't take the word of some mestizo clerk? I don't recall the man you name, but we had quite a number of them at Pang Pang. None too reliable."

I was about to reply, when through the window behind him a flood of light came on. I could look down onto the lawn and see the drive winding through it. I heard the click of hoofs. The lights were thrown from the front of the house, and they lit up an arc of beauty. They made the green of the lawn theatrical in color, and the boles of the high palms, the heavy thick tops of the mango trees. As I stared, I saw my trail-worn Moros patiently bending to their packs, their eyes in spite of this wonder of light still fixed on the path at their feet. I saw Sergeant Doan, his hard face expressionless. And beside him, swaying with exaggerated grace in his saddle, I saw Mitras. As I looked down at him, he lifted his handsome head. I could see the gleam of the light on his white teeth, on the eyeballs as they turned upward to meet my stare.

For an instant he grinned at me in that insolent way he had; then as though a sound had caught his attention, his head dropped, swung toward the arcade in front of the house. I moved to the window and looked down. On the rim of the porch, just under the thrusting light, I saw Consuela Pilar. She was dressed differently now. She was encased in a gown of gold—gold lamé. A yellow Spanish shawl was thrown over one rounded bare arm. Her gleaming black hair was bound up on her small head, and a star of jewels caught the edge of the light and threw from it sparks of beauty.

Mitras swept the wide hat from his curly head, bowed. And then the Chino, Cheng, appeared, and the woman stepped back into the shadows. I was about to call out the window, to call Sergeant Doan, when I heard Garson Clough speak. When I turned, I saw Gabrielle Clough. Her father was smiling at her, and as far as my actions had interested him, I might as well not have been in the room.

I looked at Gabrielle Clough. She too had changed since I last saw her. She wore an evening gown of white. Except for the gleam of the great pearls at each ear, no jewels. Her arms, her lovely throat, were a pale, glowing tan. Her hair was parted on the side. It flared out thick below her ears, thrown back on one side, and on the other swept over the high cheek-bone. Her eyes fascinated me: the glow, the deep steadiness of them. Looking at her there, I felt a helpless rage—the frustrated agony of a nightmare. What I wanted to do was tear myself out of this room, out of this mad unreality of the Hacienda Mirage, and forever afterward think of it, if think I must, as a mirage in fact.

THIS girl was the only woman who had ever stirred me beyond a passing excitement. Any more of her, and I'd be powerless to act with practical sanity. And this, hitting me suddenly, the panicky realization of it, scared me to death. I had to get out of here!

I dragged my eyes away from those steady, questioning ones. I faced Garson Clough.

"I see my men have arrived," I said to him. "And you and I have covered everything, I think. I don't want to keep them waiting." I bowed to Gabrielle Clough; and I meant, there and then, with no more ceremony, to walk out of that room. I meant to go down the stairs I had arrived by, through the door into the patio. I meant to make my way to the rear of this strange place and call out to Sergeant Doan.

I got as far as the top of the broad, heavy-planked stairs. There was a strange feeling about it all. About me. True, I'd ridden hard all day, and the lowlands before we came onto the high plateau had been stifling hot. But in China that had been my daily lot: a handful of greasy rice when I could get it; the heat of the past summer: fighting and worn and weary marches by night to escape the concentrating rings of steel, the searching eyes of the Japanese planes.

I felt light-headed. Myself unreal, yet outside myself, airily detached, watching myself with wonder. I stopped at the head of the stairs and put a hand out to steady myself against the wide balustrade. I heard the voice of Gabrielle Clough. It was soft, husky, low but far off. I turned and saw her close beside me. I felt the touch of her hand on my arm.

"WELL, I'll say good-by to Gabrielle Clough," I thought. "For the last time I'll speak to her, even though in pretense in a friendly way. . . .

"Good-by, Miss Clough," I said. "You've been very kind. You're very beautiful, Miss Clough."

I realized that the last words I had said were not normal words. But to me, though I hadn't planned them, though they surprised me pleasantly; they seemed the exactly right ending to all this.

She looked at me, I thought, a long time before she spoke. I felt that I was smiling. And then she said:

"You mustn't leave. Arrangements have been made for you and your party to stay. Father just told me."

I just looked at her and smiled.

"Why, it's night. You couldn't go over the trail now to Pang Pang."

"Why not?"

"It's very dangerous," she said, and her hand tightened on my arm.

"Dangerous?" I laughed. "Twenty years ago as a boy, I went over it many times with my father." I was boastful, full of big things. I felt very airy and brave. "What sort of danger—snakes?"

"Not snakes," she said quietly. "Things have changed since you were a boy. Peace is never an absolute thing in Mindanao."

"Listen! Dato Abdul Dinn was a friend of my father. See this ring?"

I lifted my hand and held it out to her—the coiled, beautifully built-up ring that ended in the head of a python. "He gave that ring to my father. Why, even in the Cotobato Valley, on my way here, it worked like a charm. Every Moro in Mindanao knows and respects Dinn."

"You can't show rings at night. And Abdul Dinn is now an old man. And he has a successor—a very different type."

I had had two drinks—on an empty stomach. Was it possible that something about this climate had combined with that bit of alcohol to make me feel the way I did? I held out my hand, to take her hand as a gesture of termination. I had her hand. It felt cool and strong and capable. But I didn't let it go. It was something I had to hold on to, to use for support, as a touch of sanctuary. For as I moved my feet, they seemed no part of me; my head felt far away, light and useless. I said something, some blundering, probably meaningless words. Her arm was about me, and I was walking with her, close to her: I could feel the tickle of her thick hair against my face. It felt, I thought, like the touch on your jaw when a tooth is to be pulled—when you are tingling with the beginning of local anesthesia from novocaine.

I was leaning on her, and my feet were stumbling, almost dragging beside her. We went down a long hall, and the

floor was slippery, heavy underfoot like the steps of the stairway. There was faint light ahead, the greater light from the outside night coming through wide-flung windows into the darkness of the hall. Words wouldn't come now, though I tried desperately to force them from me. I was trying to tell her that it had hit me, the fever. That I was ashamed. And that I must take my shame of weakness out of the house.

Her voice came to me, low, soothing, meaningless as far as words went. She got me to a wide four-posted bed, the high mosquito-bar draped above it like the canopy above a throne. She got me onto the bed.

"There," she said. "There!" And her cool hand lay for a moment on my forehead. The sweat was seeping out on me, my forehead bursting with it. She moved pillows under my head, and her arm was about me. It was cool and firmly rounded, and I could smell the faint, stirring odor of some perfume from her.

My head fell away, lay on her arm.

"I'll get Cheng," she murmured. "You just lie here."

"Are you coming back?" If I didn't say that, I tried very hard to say it.

She said, earnestly: "I'm coming back. Please be quiet."

But I halted her insistently. I was like a drunk: persistent, childish, babbling. "Where is your bracelet, Gabrielle Clough? It should be yours: it's for a princess, not a Rani. . . Where did she get the bracelet of a princess, all jade and red rubies?"

She stared at me. Humoring me, she said: "Consuela? It came from a friend. A Chinese from Manila. Our guest here. Now, please, you are ill—"

I didn't hear her go. I didn't hear anything. There was no sound in that great house. Or, no sound that I could hear, except the ringing in my ears, the pounding of the blood in my head. I lay loosely on the pillows, and I tried to think. But no thought would stay long enough for me to continue it to its conclusion. And finally no thought started. There was nothing.

Chapter Five

I DIDN'T have the fever. I'd been in some tough corners of the world since I could remember, and I knew about Mickey Finns and knockout drops and that sort of thing; I'd even been slipped one once in a China Coast town, and ended up on a French tramp bound for Saigon.

It was dim in the room: you usually woke up late the next day. I sat up in the bed. There was some moon, not on this side of the house, but it was bright enough for me to see without searching for a light. I remembered the big bed then, the canopy of white net about it. It was all the same. And more than I had at first noticed: It was a large room, almost as large as Clough's, and in the dimness I could get an idea. It was carefully and pleasantly furnished as a man would want a place furnished in the Islands. Big cane chairs, luxurious-looking *patates* on the polished floor, several *nipa* tables.

I sat up. My head felt all right—only a little ache. And that was surprising. Someone had undressed me, slipped a light crêpe kimono on me. On the *patate* by the side of the bed were *chinelas*—soft, heel-less, open-front native slippers.

I slipped my feet into the *chinelas* absently, thinking hard about it all. My wrist-watch was on my arm, and it showed nine thirty-five. The bent hands glowed up at me. Nine-thirty-five: tonight or tomorrow night?

I heard music. I sat with my feet shoved into those new *chinelas* and listened. It was good music. It sounded like a first-rate dance orchestra, not a radio. I went to the side of the room where the moon was, and stared out. I saw no orchestra, though I almost expected to. Below me was a wide flagged terrace. It was raised above the patio level, one side against it. It was surrounded by a low wall. Palms planted along the wall hung over the terrace; the moon was silver white on them. Lower, along the line of palms, soft lighted, warmly glowing, were strung huge Chinese lanterns. People were dancing out there, under the moon and under the glow of the wind-swayed lanterns. And along the wall other people were sitting at low, roomy tables. I could hear the laughter and the call of voices above the music. I heard the faint crash of a glass fallen to the stone floor. The music swelled, dropped: and when I lifted my eyes, unbelieving, needing a surer, more believable sight, I saw the high backdrop of mountains, the moon edging them with a bright blur.

CLOSE to the screen I leaned, staring down. And among those people I saw first, not the one I was most eager to see: I saw Mitras. I saw his sharply cut face lifted, the white of his bared teeth, as he smiled. He was dancing with Consuela Pilar, and the smile was lifted up toward the sky as though invoking witness to what he had said to her.

I watched them as they moved gracefully, professionally it seemed to me, among the other less graceful dancers. Then I skimmed the faces, the figures of the others. Some twenty people must be there, I judged; and I wondered where they had come from. Clough, of course, was not the only white settler in Mindanao. And certainly not in this, one of the most fertile parts of the great Island. Lumber, hemp and copra were big business in this part of the world. A war-boom was on. And twenty-odd miles away, lower, through a well-roaded jungle, was the port of Pang Pang.

The men down there all wore the evening dress of the tropics. The women looked as though dancing at a New York night-club. I saw waiters in white coats—Filipinos, I supposed—passing with trained ease in and out among the guests. And there were champagne bottles as well as the inevitable whisky and *tan-san* bottles on most of the tables.

The music was doing something to me. For years I had been in the interior of China with my father. First with a big oil company, and since the first Japanese invasion, following his steps with the Chinese army. There had been little music or dancing. No white women of the sort I was now looking down on. The few I'd seen had been the sorry White Russians of the north border cities. Boyhood had been hard and lean for me: adolescence cruel and brutal. My father had said it had brutalized me, and I remembered at this minute the expression on his face as he said it. A sad expression: one of deep self-reproach.

Now, listening to that music, my heart went down deep in my stomach. Revolt for all I had missed in life; shame and a burning sense of deprivation in no way my fault. Nor especially the fault of my father, who had gone on year after year with the burden of it in his heart.

I looked for Clough in that gay crowd, but before I had seen them all, I saw his daughter. She was away from the line of lanterns, close by broad stone steps that led to a sloping lawn. She was standing alone, and the moon touched her alone, or so it seemed to me as I watched her. I watched her raise a hand to brush the wind-blown hair from her eyes, saw her breathe deeply, the lovely shoulders lifting, the breasts lifting. She stood very still, graceful, alive, but as motionless as a dead thing. Her chin was raised a little, and I felt she was looking away toward the edge of those distant, moon-blurred mountains.

I felt sorry as hell for her suddenly. Far more sorry than I had ever felt for myself.

I turned from the window and dressed swiftly in Garson Clough's clothes, laid out for me on a cane *chaise-longue*.

I knew as I hurried out the front door and made my way around toward the terrace steps that I was hurrying to see Gabrielle Clough. To see her alone, as I had last seen her—standing with the night wind lifting her hair away from that still, beautifully molded face.

This story continues in the forthcoming August issue.

Tavanne rode through the forest with his Indian henchmen, singing drinking-songs of Walid the Bad.

Desert Blood

Wild horses and wild men in a day when the Mississippi was frontier.

by HERBERT RAVENEL SASS

"I TELL you," Tavanne said quickly, "that wild one is of the true Arab blood. All you have told me of him proves it."

He smoked for a while in silence, his half-naked body—for the spring night was warm—sprawled on a pile of skins against the wall of the hut. A big man, this Tavanne, and even swarthier than most Frenchmen; a fine aquiline head upon powerful shoulders; a great shock of coal-black hair streaked with white above the temples; jet eyes, restless and bright with some inner fire. Through the open doorway of the small bark-roofed lodge floated the night-sounds of the Indian village—an intermittent murmur of guttural male voices, a dog's persistent yapping, a silvery music of mockingbirds singing in moonlight, the careless laughter of young girls.

Tavanne spoke again to the Indian standing just within the doorway: "You say he is white, Choola? White with no dark mark on him?"

"A white horse," answered Choola the Fox a little wearily, "white as an eagle's head—"

Tavanne cut him short. "Aye," he said, his voice vibrant with excitement. "An Arab stallion, from all you've told me of him, and the Arabs are the noblest horses in the world. They were made from a splinter of the seven-terraced throne of Mohammed; I, Jean Tavanne, a good Christian schooled by the monks of St. Auburn, tell you this. You say his head is small but wide between the eyes, and his ears are delicate and pointed, and his bearing is noble and proud, and he moves lightly like a panther, and he is short-backed yet slim—short-backed, that is important, Choola, that is the mark of the Arab—and his mane and tail are long and flowing, and his neck well-arched and his shoulders deep and strong. And you say he is white with no blemish on him—"

The words were pouring from him in a cataract. They seemed to intoxicate him like strong wine, to lift him bodily. His big torso heaved upward as he spoke and in a moment he was on his feet, his shaggy head thrown back, his jet eyes shining.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" he roared. "An Arab stallion—a Prince of the Blood—a Child of Heaven! An Arab stallion here in this thick American wilderness, this land of endless trees. He who belongs to the desert, the free spaces. He who was the fourth thing that Allah made: first, the flowers and the fruits, then the steel of fine swords, then the beauty of women, then the matchless speed of the horse. A white Arab stallion, finest of all the Arabs, a prize for which a man might sell his soul! *Eh bien,* my Brave One, wait just a little. Wait just a little and I, Jean Tavanne, will have my hand in your mane."

Choola the Fox stood like a bronze image. He knew that Tavanne might declaim like this all evening, partly in Provençal French and partly in Chickasaw, striding up and down, his head thrown back, his eyes glittering, his hands beating the air. He stopped suddenly before the Indian.

"Name of a name!" he cried. "Here is a thing! Here am I, Jean Tavanne, trader and *coureur du bois,* who come each year from the French post at Mobile to trade with your people for skins. And we do not talk of skins but of a horse. We do not hunt for skins but for this horse. Day after day we hunt for him but we can not find this wild stallion. *Eh bien,* Choola, to you it is a folly, a madness. But I am so much more than the man you see. I am so much more than Jean Tavanne, trader of Mobile."

He placed his hands on the tall Indian's shoulders and his voice sank almost to a whisper.

"How shall I say what I am so that you will understand? I am of the Moriscoes, the Moorish Arab people who came from the deserts and conquered Spain and passed over the Spanish mountains into France. My father was a Frenchman of Provence but my mother was a Morisco woman. So there is Arab blood in me and it is a strong blood, for it made me go back to the deserts from which my mother's people had come. I once lived there, Choola, with the Arab sheiks and there is no man alive who knows the Arab horses better than I. You tell me of this wild white stallion more beautiful than any other. I tell you, Choola, I know him well—I who have never seen him. I know that he is of the fine desert blood which the Moors brought into Spain and the Spaniards brought to America—"

The grip of his hands on Choola's shoulders tightened.

"Listen! Soto the Spaniard marched through this Chickasaw country on his way to the Great River. Some of his horsemen were killed in battles with your people and their horses ran wild in these forests—this you know because your old men have told you that it was told to them by their old men. I tell you, Choola, it is from some grand Arab charger of Soto's army that this wild white stallion is sprung—"

He broke off suddenly and began to stride up and down in the little hut. In a moment he continued:

"I know too why we have not found him. Because he is Arab, a son of the desert, he has never been happy in this wilderness of trees; something tells him that westward beyond the Great River is a better country than this—a land of wide plains like those his ancestors knew. He has gone now to find that land. Because we have hunted him so hard, he has gone at last to cross the Great River. It is there that we shall find him, Choola—on the bank of the Mississippi, for he cannot cross until the spring floods have gone down. We shall trap him before he crosses and he shall feel my hand in his mane and he shall be mine, this Prince of the Blood."

Tavanne moved quickly to the door of the lodge and glanced upward. "There will be no more rain," he said, "and Red Sint's leg has healed. We will start tomorrow."

THEY took four other Indians with them, young men whom Choola selected from the ablest in the village, and they rode day after day through an apparently endless forest opening here and there into green savannas

alive with game. They followed first a well-marked path of the Chickasaw war-parties, then a succession of game-trails leading west.

Tavanne revealed no doubts, no misgivings. Sometimes, strumming his musket as he would a fiddle, he sang as he rode: love-ballads of the Provençal troubadours or strange chants of the Saharan tribesmen or wild wine-songs of Walid the Bad, the Arab who was poet as well as caliph. Sometimes he raved to Choola of the splendor of Arab horses and of the wild white stallion whom he named Saladin in honor of the noblest of Moslem heroes and whom he coveted as another man might covet gold or a girl. Sometimes, leaning forward in his deerskin saddle, he talked to Sint the Snake, the tall red horse that he rode.

"The time is near, Sint," he would whisper, "the time of your revenge. When you were a wild horse, you knew him; you and he were enemies then. You have not forgotten him, Snake—this one who took your mares. When we find him on the bank of the Great River, the time of your reckoning will come."

He spoke as though he knew that Sint understood, as though with each word he fanned into fiercer flame the hate in Red Sint's black heart. He knew Sint now as he knew himself. Soon after his arrival in the Chickasaw town, he had traded the big red stud from the Indian who had captured him, and later he had learned how the horse had been taken.

A strange white stallion had appeared in the savannas and had challenged Sint's mastery of his wild horse band. While the two were fighting furiously, a party of Chickasaw horse-hunters had surrounded them. Sint had been caught, but the white newcomer had escaped.

Tavanne's interest had been aroused at once. He knew that the small bands of wild horses which eked out a precarious existence in the West Tennessee savannas traced back to the horses lost by De Soto's army on its disastrous march, and he knew that the Spanish horses were rich in Arab and Barb blood. Questioning Choola and the others who had seen the white stallion, Tavanne became convinced that the horse was either pure Arab or else a throw-back to the finest Arab type.

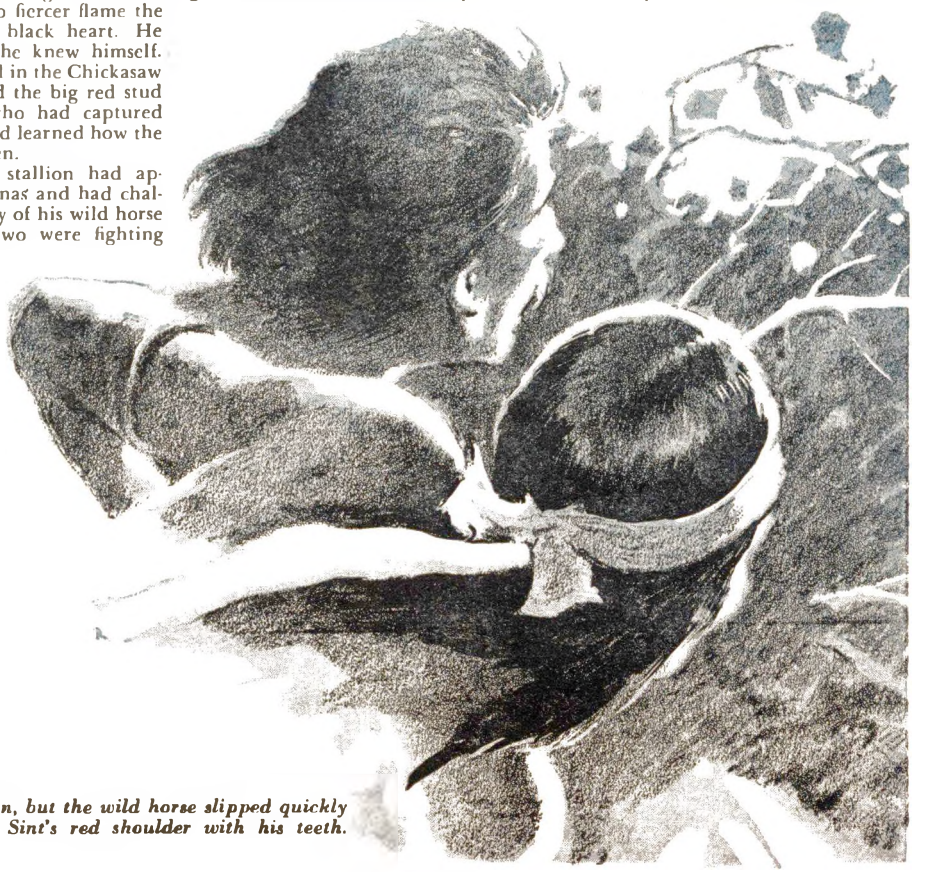
A strange excitement grew in him. Himself a child of the desert, he felt a kinship with this horse of desert blood whose lot was cast in an alien wilderness of trees. No horse that was true Arab in soul and body could survive long in such an environment, Tavanne believed. His desire for the wild stallion became an obsession. Yet for weeks he had not hunted the white stranger. He had devoted himself instead to the taming and training of Sint the Snake—a task which only his intimate knowledge of horses, gift of his Arab blood, made possible.

Sint had tested the man's skill to the utmost. Cheval de l'Enfer, Tavanne called him, Steed of the Inferno, Horse of Hell; a treacherous, brooding devil, the fiercest and craftiest horse Tavanne had ever known.

Little by little, however, his patience and his subtle understanding of horses had prevailed. When finally Sint's training was complete, Tavanne had ridden him day after day and week after week in search of the white stallion. They had combed the forests and savannas vainly. It had become clear at last that the white Arab and his mares had disappeared.

All this was behind Tavanne now; the weeks of fruitless hunting which had ended only when Sint had injured a foreleg; the time of waiting for the spring rains to cease and for Sint's leg to heal. All this was behind and ahead was victory.

There was apparently no particle of doubt in Jean Tavanne's mind as he rode on through the forest with his five Indian henchmen, singing his love-songs of Provence and drinking-songs of Walid the Bad, while heading westward toward the Great River, the mighty Mississippi beyond which lay the vast plains which few white men



Sint charged again, but the wild horse slipped quickly aside and raked Sint's red shoulder with his teeth.

Illustrated by Maurice Bower

had ever seen. This wild horse was Arab, and Tavanne knew the Arab. As certainly as though he had watched him on his way, he knew where this Arab had gone.

"Child of Satan," he whispered to Sint the Snake, "you whose soul is as black as his is white: we shall find this Saladin, this beautiful son of the desert; we shall find him beside the Great River, waiting for the floods to go down."

He leaned closer to the red stallion's ear. "I tell you, Snake, I can read his soul; because I too am a son of the desert, I can read him. I know that he has been like a caged falcon here in this wilderness of woods. All his life a voice in his heart has told him that westward lie the wide plains that he needs, and at last—for we have hunted him hard—he has gone to seek that wide land. We shall trap him before he crosses the Great River, and you shall have your revenge, red devil, and he shall feel my hand in his mane."

THEY struck the Mississippi, swollen and tawny with the floods of spring, in the afternoon of the fifth day. Two days later they found sign of a small wild-horse band. It was old but the Chickasaws were skillful trackers. They turned northward confidently, and tracks and sign grew fresher day after day. It might be Saladin's band or it might be another; there was nothing to do except follow.

They made camp one afternoon on a high bluff above the river. An hour before dusk Tavanne rode out to kill a deer for meat, keeping in the cover of beech forest bordering the open ground. All at once he felt Sint stiffen under him, and his eyes searched the thicket ahead for a panther, the one animal that the red stallion feared.

Suddenly Tavanne's hand clutching the musket began to shake. He knew from the peculiar twisting motion of Sint's tossing head and his flattened ears that the scent which he had caught had roused not fear but anger.

"Name of a man!" Tavanne whispered through clenched teeth. "Careful now, red devil!"

He tightened his rein and craned his neck to look through an opening in the dense screen of foliage hiding the meadow from him. Slowly his puckered eyes widened, narrowed again to glinting points of jet. In the open meadow, standing at gaze near a small band of grazing mares, he saw the white stallion.

He saw him at first in a daze of wonder that paralyzed hand and brain. All that Choola had said, all that he, Tavanne, had hoped for was true. Milk-white and of flawless symmetry, lithe as a deer yet muscled like a tiger, the wild stallion was indeed pure Arab or else a marvelously perfect throwback to some ancestor of that superb desert race which Tavanne adored. His breath came fast; for a dangerous moment he sat rapt in an overpowering ecstasy.

Abruptly came realization of the danger. He knew that the wild horse could not scent him, for the breeze blew from the meadow, but the scent of his enemy was filling Sint with a swiftly increasing fury. Tavanne had trained the horse to silence in the woods, but now in his rage he might forget his training and scream a fatal challenge.

Tavanne tore his gaze from the white Arab. Leaning forward, he spoke into Sint's ear, and gradually tightening his rein, he turned Sint's tossing head slowly, firmly. Cautiously at first, then at a racing gallop, he rode back to the camp where Choola and the others waited.

Two hours after dark he was ready. When the moon had risen well above the eastern woods he started. He took with him Choola and three of the other Chickasaws, all mounted. Himself on a claybank mare belonging to the fourth Indian and leading Sint, who wore neither saddle nor bridle, they rode back up the meadow toward the spot where he had seen the wild horses.

The breeze had shifted slightly, so that it blew straight down the meadow. Tavanne, watching Sint closely, saw him begin to sniff the air with distended quivering nostrils. Tavanne dismounted and, slipping the halter from Sint's head, stepped back.

"*Voilà!*" he said. "Red devil, do your part."

The red stallion stood motionless a moment, his wide head uplifted, muzzle outstretched, and heavy ears pricked forward. Tavanne could see the fury flame in him as his nostrils drank in the scent that he hated. His thick neck seemed to swell with rage, his bulk grew more grotesque in the moonlight. Then he bounded away into the gloom.

Tavanne mounted the claybank mare hurriedly. The four Indians following him, he rode rapidly upwind in the direction that Sint had taken. Over the meadow the moonlight was growing brighter, but as yet they could see no moving form. Suddenly, ahead and to the left, they heard Sint's fierce battle-scream. Tavanne's heart jumped as his eager ears caught Saladin's answering challenge.

They rode on fifty yards farther, then dismounted. As they did so, five shapes flitted past to the left—the white stallion's mares. Tavanne saw that he was approaching the head of the meadow where the river on one side and a deep ravine on the other converged. They moved cautiously forward, keeping in the cover of low bushes dotting the meadow here and there. Tavanne and one of the Chickasaws were empty-handed; the others, including Choola, carried an assortment of rawhide thongs and ropes.

Tavanne dropped suddenly behind a bush-clump. He motioned a warning to the others and they crept forward and joined him. Ahead, clearly visible in the bright moonlight, they saw the two stallions.

They stood facing each other, perhaps twenty feet apart. In the magnifying moonlight Sint the Snake loomed grotesquely huge, a fantastic chimera of the night. Tavanne was aware only of the white Arab. The wild horse seemed a shape cut from gleaming marble by some inspired sculptor. His fine head was high, his neck was proudly arched, his thin nostrils were dilated to the utmost. Doubly magnificent in his anger, Saladin thrilled the man with an unutterable desire.

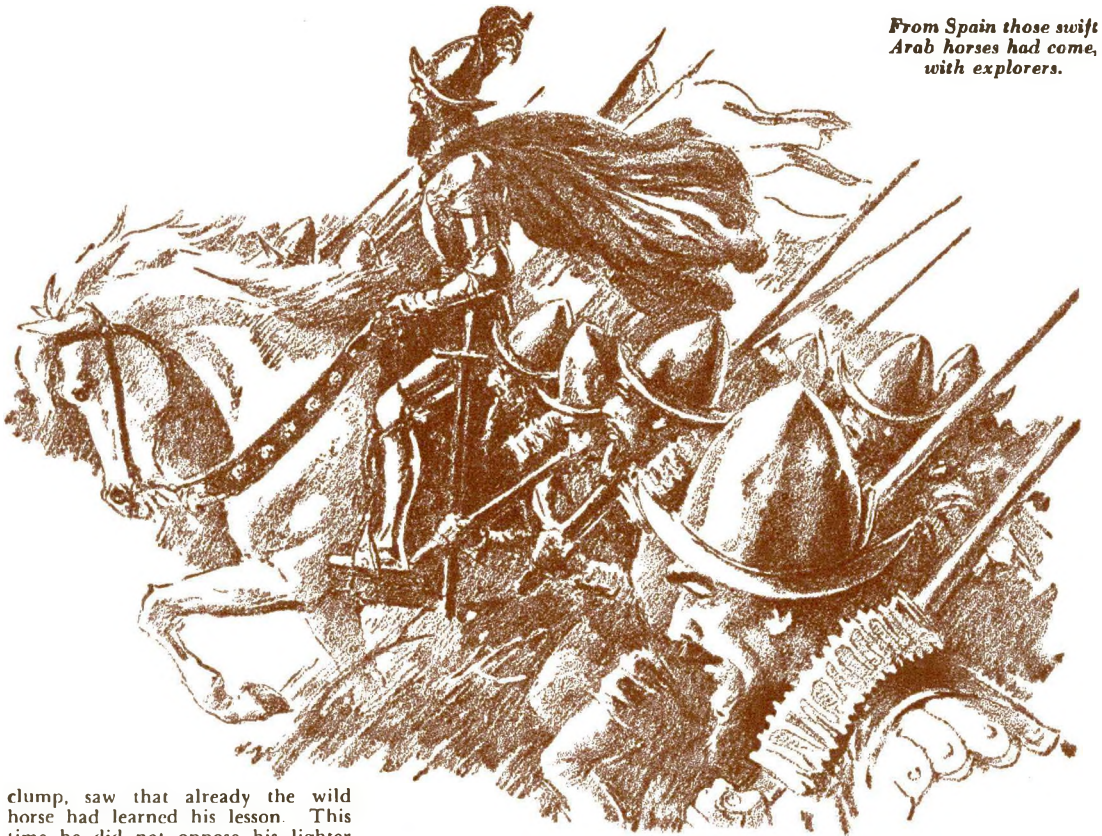
A sudden horror assailed Tavanne. In a moment this splendid being of stalwart grace and inner fire would be bruised by battering hoofs and soiled with blood. Another thought half-formed itself. He remembered a talk he had once had with an old French *voyageur* from the Canadas, a man of incredible wanderings, who told of a vast country which he called Dakotah, far beyond the Great River and reaching perhaps to the Shining Mountains—a land of boundless plains and prairies where millions of horses might find sustenance. But no horse had ever set foot on those plains, the *voyageur* said, and the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians who lived there did not know that such an animal existed. Those were the wide free spaces that Saladin was seeking; and the thought came to Tavanne that those great plains were waiting for the white Arab's coming.

Well, they could wait! They would never see this wild stallion because he, Tavanne, wanted him and was going to have him. He had hunted him down and now, by the *bon Dieu*, he would have him! The trap was set, the time had come. Tavanne's eyes, again hard as jet, were on Sint the Snake. At any moment now—

SUDDENLY Sint charged. Squealing savagely, neck outstretched and twisted sideways, lips curled back above his gleaming teeth, he flung himself forward.

Saladin met him fairly. Shoulder to shoulder, rearing, striking, biting, they battled fiercely; then Sint's weight bore the white Arab back. He staggered and almost lost his footing, but, recovering himself, he leaped clear. Whirling, he slashed the red's flank with his down-flashing hoofs.

Immediately Sint charged again. Tavanne, breathless behind his bush-



From Spain those swift Arab horses had come, with explorers.

clump, saw that already the wild horse had learned his lesson. This time he did not oppose his lighter body to his enemy's onset. Instead, he slipped quickly aside at the last moment and raked the red shoulder with his teeth as Sint rushed past.

The big red wheeled with a squeal of frenzy. In his rage his craftiness seemed to leave him. He attacked with an almost blind fury, while Saladin whirled, feinted, dodged aside, giving ground constantly, dashing in to strike with slashing hoofs and raking teeth. Again and yet again did he escape Sint's hammering hoofs by no more than an inch. Against weight and bulk he matched the flashing speed of the desert horse, surefooted, light as a dancer; and as yet his gleaming sides were almost free of wounds, while Sint was streaming with blood.

Tavanne knew that it couldn't last; he must strike soon or his opportunity would pass. He whispered a word to Choola crouching beside him. The Chickasaw nodded, glancing quickly at something held in his right hand—a short rawhide rope weighted at the ends with grooved stones. Sint charged again, and again the wild horse gave ground before him. They were close to the bush-clump now.

Tavanne touched Choola's arm. "Now!" he whispered.

The Indian darted across the moonlit grass like a shadow. In an instant, whirling his snare around his head, he was close behind the white stallion; in another instant he had thrown his weighted rope. It wrapped about the wild horse's hindlegs below the hocks, binding them together.

Saladin made a short staggering bound to the right and fell heavily on his side. Simultaneously Tavanne and the three Indians dashed from their hiding-place.

Each knew his part. Tavanne—who had taught Choola to throw his snare, a trick picked up in the East—had planned this, the crucial moment, with careful foresight. He and three others were to stop Sint, keep him from trampling his prostrate enemy. Choola was to slip a hobble on Saladin's forelegs and then make the thong around his hindlegs secure.

It was well planned. But Fate, in the form of a big red stallion mad with hatred, brushed Tavanne's plans aside.

One thing Tavanne hadn't foreseen or at least hadn't been able to forestall: that Sint the Snake, aflame with the lust of battle, would be a raging demon utterly beyond control. They got the loop of a plaited rawhide rope around his neck, but he knew only that his enemy was down, that now he could kill him.

He rushed to that murder with a resistless fury that hurled one man to the ground, forced Tavanne to leap for his life, and jerked the two men on the rope off their feet. Next moment he reared high, his flailing hoofs threatening not only the white Arab but also Choola bending over the white stallion, trying—vainly as yet—to slip the hobble over his thrashing forelegs.

Choola saw his danger as Tavanne shouted to him. He rolled sideways to escape Sint's destroying hoofs. Out of the corner of his eye Tavanne saw something else—that the wild horse's struggles were loosening the weighted thong wrapped around his hocks which Choola had had no opportunity to secure. It seemed to Tavanne that time stopped while Sint's bulk towered over the white Arab, the drag of the two men on the rope around his neck holding him upreared on his hindlegs.

They could not withstand the strength of that hate-frenzied devil. The battering hoofs came down, but

Though Choola threw his rope, it fell short as the white Arab soared outward in a long curve.

the pull on the rope spoiled his aim and the hoofs missed Saladin by an arrow's length. Tavanne saw with dismay that the wild horse, redoubling his struggles, had now almost freed his hindlegs from the loosely wrapped thong. Choola saw this at the same moment. He darted forward and seized an end of the thong as it switched across the grass. He jerked it violently to tighten it around the wild stallion's hocks.

Instead, it pulled loose and came away in his hand. Saladin was free.

He gathered his feet under him and surged upward. Tavanne sprang for him but with a snort Saladin bounded away.

He had been facing the head of the meadow as he gained his feet. It was in this direction that he ran and Tavanne yelled to the Indians to spread out. A hundred yards in front of the fleeing stallion the meadow ended in a sharp V where the deep ravine on the right cut through the bluff to the river. Tavanne, remembering how the mares had run past, judged that the ravine was impassable. Saladin must either leap from the bluff into the swollen Mississippi or else try to dash past Tavanne and the others ranged across the narrow mouth of the V. In the latter case there was at least a chance of roping him as he passed.

The white stallion swung to the left, heading for the bluff above the river. On the brink he halted and, turning his head, gazed at Tavanne and the Indians advancing toward him, two of the Indians swinging ropes as they came on. He seemed to be considering which he should choose—the ropes of the horse-hunters or the swirling waters below him.

Suddenly he turned his head to the river. They saw him gather himself for the plunge and, though the distance was too great, Choola threw his rope. It fell short by a dozen feet as the white Arab soared outward from the brink in a long descending curve.

They ran to the verge and looking down they saw the moonlight gleam bright on Saladin's head and neck. He was swimming strongly, almost straight outward from the shore, and Tavanne's great head flung upward as he gazed. His jet eyes were blazing.

Here was a soldier! Flood or no flood, Saladin was crossing the Mississippi. He had left forever the country of prisoning woods where his desert heart had never been content. He would win to that wider land that had called to him or perish. Better death in the river than a rope around his neck!

"Ah, soldier!" Tavanne shouted. He wanted this horse more than ever. And there was still a chance. When the full sweep of the current struck Saladin, he might yet turn back or be forced back. The thing to do was to catch him in the water—

Tavanne was already running toward Red Sint. He snatched a halter from one of the Indians as he passed, got it over Sint's tossing head. His hand in the thick red mane, he leaped upon Sint's back. "Let him go," he shouted to the two Chickasaws holding the long throw-rope.

He guided Sint not toward the high bluff where Saladin had made his leap, but to a point a hundred yards farther down the river where the bluff was neither so high nor so steep. Down this slope he rode headlong, shouting, "Ah, soldier! Ah, soldier!" to Saladin whom he saw upstream.

The current was sweeping the white Arab down, yet he hadn't experienced its real strength yet. As though in answer to Tavanne's shout, Saladin neighed loudly.

But it wasn't an answer to Tavanne nor to Sint's scream of fury; it was instead a summons to the wild mares. Farther down the stream, Tavanne saw first one shape, then another and another put out from the shore. Three of the mares had obeyed Saladin's command; three of the five were trying to cross the Great River with their lord and master.

Red Sint was in the water up to his neck; next moment he was swimming. Whether he saw Saladin's white head and neck above the turbid flood or only scented him, the red stallion knew that his enemy was out there in the river and hatred seemed to double his strength. Astride him, Tavanne laughed exultantly.

"He took your mares, red devil," he muttered into Sint's ear. "That one took your mares. And they are still following him. They like that white Arab, that beautiful son of the desert, better than they like you."

His strong fingers were busy; they were loosening the noose of the long rope around Sint's neck. Presently he had it loose; leaning far forward, he cleared it from Sint's head. He looped the line around his wrist so that he wouldn't lose it.

All the while his eyes were on Saladin. The current was stronger out there where he was; it was sweeping

the white Arab downstream, though he was still making good headway.

Tavanne slid from Sint's back. His hand in the red stallion's mane, he pulled Sint's head around to the left, kept pulling it, forcing him to swim not directly toward Saladin but toward a point downstream from him. Thus cutting across the arc of a circle, they might intercept him as the current bore him down.

It happened as Tavanne hoped. Minutes later they were close to the white stallion and upstream from him. Tavanne gave a shout that rang out above the surging sound of the river. "On guard, soldier!" he cried. "My hand will be in your mane." He plunged away from Sint like an otter leaping from a log and, after three powerful strokes, he felt Saladin's mane in his clutching fingers.

IT was in that moment that the full sweep of the current struck them; it flung them along like corks, almost straight outward from the shore. In a flash Tavanne realized the mad thing he had done.

He could not get back. Until now, some unseen promontory or hidden sandbank upstream had sheltered them from the real strength of the river. Now suddenly, before he could get his rope around Saladin's neck and head him toward the shore, they had passed from this sheltered zone and the great Mississippi had them.

It had them and they could only go with it. Tavanne knew that they would live or die together, himself and this horse. Somehow he got the noose of the rope around Saladin's neck; the white Arab, fighting the river for his life, could not fight also the strong man swimming at his shoulder, a hand twisted in his mane. Once Tavanne thought he saw Sint, but it proved to be a tree-trunk sweeping past them. Again, when he thought he saw another tree-trunk, it was one of Saladin's mares.

Tavanne talked to Saladin, calling him Prince of the Blood and Child of Heaven and Sultan. "Courage, Son of the Desert," he cried above the hissing growl of the torrent. "Fight, fight, my Brave One! We are both soldiers and the same blood is in us. You and I will beat this cursed river!"

But after a while he had no more breath for boasting. If they won through, the victory would be Saladin's. But for the grip of his hand in that white mane, but for the strength of those white shoulders, the courage of that great heart, Tavanne would soon sink.

After that it was desperate. Tavanne prayed briefly, regretting that he had sung so many wicked wine-songs of Walid the Bad, regretting also various other things. A long time they were helpless, helpless as the green branches and jagged driftlogs sweeping along with them. But even then Tavanne felt the courage in Saladin and knew that the horse would die fighting. "Ah, a soldier! A soldier!" he muttered, half-strangled with the water in his throat.

The tawny river pounded them, wrestled them, whirled them about, flung them along, hurled battering-rams at them in the form of floating trees, half smothered them with curtains of yellow foam. They fought on. But mainly it was Saladin's fight. Tavanne knew that, left to himself, he would have died half an hour ago.

Then, when the river had beaten them and Saladin's strength too was almost spent, the great Mississippi flung them to safety. As suddenly as they had entered it, they passed out of the swift current into almost still water. Minutes later, they staggered ashore on the low western bank; first the horse with the long rope trailing behind him, then the man.

Tavanne, reeling drunkenly, got the end of the rope around a tree-trunk and knotted it; then he slumped to his knees. When the rope tightened and stopped Saladin, the stallion stood quietly, flanks heaving, legs wide apart. His hindquarters collapsed under him and he went down.

As though in a dream, Tavanne heard a whinny behind him. He turned his head slowly, with infinite effort. In the bright moonlight under the scattered trees, two of the wild mares were stumbling up the slope from the water. The same current which—after playing with them as a cat plays with its prey—had brought Saladin and himself across the river, had spewed the mares ashore.

Before he fell over in a trancelike sleep, Tavanne's glazing eyes looked for Sint the Snake, but did not see him.

Choola and two of the Chickasaws came upon Tavanne two hours after sunrise. They had found a canoe belonging to some river Indian and, as adept in the water as beavers, had paddled across. When they landed, Tavanne was standing with his sheath-knife in his hand, looking at Saladin. The white stallion also was on his feet, gazing at the man but making no effort to free himself from the rope—the other end of which was fastened to a tree-trunk near the river bank.

Tavanne held up his hand, waving the Indians back. He did not want them to frighten the two mares grazing two hundred yards away, lifting their heads now and then to stare nervously at Saladin and the man near him.

Tavanne was thinking. He wasn't thinking so much of the fact that he owed his life to this horse. He was thinking of what the old *voyageur* had told him—of those great plains of Dakotah where countless horses might flourish but no horse existed. He was thinking of what might happen if Saladin and his mares reached that land.

His mind could see it—the quick imaginative mind of the Provençal Frenchman—but he couldn't put into words the thing that might happen on those Dakotah plains. He caught the full splendid sweep of it, a drama reaching back a thousand years.

From the Arabian deserts they had come into Spain long ago with the conquering Moors—those swift, fiery-hearted Arab horses, the most beautiful and the hardiest in the world. From Spain after long centuries they had come to America with De Soto and the other explorers—to America, where, beyond the Great River, lay wide plains that had never seen a horse. It was for this that those plains were waiting—for the coming of Saladin and his mares. From them in that new home a new race would spring until a million manes would be tossing on prairie and desert, and plodding nations of red men, earthbound no longer, would leap to the saddle.

Yes, it might happen—a rebirth of that noble Arab blood in a vast new land. The thought of it blazed in Tavanne's mind. He didn't know that already it had begun to happen in the far southwest where studs and mares lost from Coronado's army had started the mustang bands of the Comanche lands. He couldn't know the future: the droves of wild horses shaking the Cheyenne and Sioux prairies with the thunder of their hoofs; Red Cloud and Roman Nose riding at the head of their plumed and painted squadrons, the most picturesque pageantry in the story of America.

He couldn't see this in detail. He had no mysterious faculty of prevision: only an Arab's intimate knowledge of horses, a Frenchman's bold imagination. But he knew—for he knew the virile, fecund Arab blood—that something like this would happen if Saladin and his mares reached those Dakotah plains. They would flourish, increase. A new race would be born.

AND they were on their way. They had passed the barrier of the Great River. All that was needed was that he, Tavanne, should let Saladin go free. All that was needed now was his knife against that rope.

He stood gazing at Saladin, drinking in the white stallion's beauty. He wanted the horse more than he had ever wanted anything else in his life. His long fingers, grasping the knife, trembled. His jet eyes were luminous. Finally his big shoulders shrugged.

"Well, soldier," he said, "for an hour my hand was in your mane." He bent forward and cut the rope.

An agent of the American secret service takes a long chance in an affair that starts—and ends—in powder-smoke.

The BASEL

IT began as a routine matter. Tellegan came back to the Grand Hotel from the American Consulate at five, and said to Wyatt: "The Berlin Express will pass the St. Ludwig Road at seven-twenty. One of our agents aboard will toss out a message. You and Sunburn must be there to get it."

Wyatt accepted the order eagerly enough, for three weeks of Basel had definitely bored him. He had thought, when the American Diplomatic Secret agents had been assigned to Switzerland, that there would be excitement and intrigue, danger and bold venture. Instead, there had been mutton and early blackouts, gin rummy and book-reading, occasionally interspersed with night trips along the German frontier, where professional spies came to surrender information of doubtful value in exchange for fat bundles of Swiss francs. In Washington, he supposed, where the brass hats put this intelligence together, it must have value, else the three would not have been kept in Basel. But of all the assignments since he had surrendered riches and polo for secret service and anonymity, this was the least exciting.

Even Sunburn Sanderson was glad of the change. He got out the Renault sedan that the three agents rated as presumed members of the American-Swiss Trade Commission, and drove cheerfully north toward the German frontier. A thin driving snow smote the car when they cleared the gloomy city, and it suddenly became bitterly cold. Only necessity would bring anyone out on such a night.

"Just as well, Handsome," Sunburn said. "What these Swiss detectives don't know won't hurt them." His broad freckled face lighted in a grin. "They're a scream, aint they? The town is lousy with spies and agents. French and English, Dutch and American, German and Russian; and the Swiss dicks do nip-ups trying to prevent violations of neutrality. They remind me of a blindfolded guy trying to pin a tail on a wall-paper donkey."

Wyatt smiled, but he was also aware of the peril. If the Swiss officials had the slightest inkling that the Americans were bossing a bunch of spies inside Germany, immediate deportation would follow.

The car made slow work of it to the railroad crossing. The snow piled on the road, kept the windshield wipers thumping; and there were times when the headlights could not penetrate twenty feet. It was within ten minutes of the train's arrival-time before Sunburn stopped the car in the snow-ruts and switched off the lights.

Wyatt wondered who this American agent was who was going inside Germany, and heartily envied him. As if reading his thoughts, Sunburn muttered: "I almost wish we were found out. Then we'd get that assignment to Iran or India. Get some action."

Wyatt did not reply. What was the use? Presently, looking south, he saw long flashing blue sparks, like molten flame, dripping from the ice-coated railroad trolley. Behind that, dimly seen, were the lighted windows of the coaches.

"Here it comes," he said. "Get set."

Sunburn started the engine, turned on his lights and moved up closer to the crossing, then stopped as if waiting for the train to pass. The snow danced in the yellow headlight beam. Now you could hear the roar of the train, and the ugly whistle shrilled.

An instant later the electric engine, shooting sparks from the snow-laden wires, thundered over the crossing. The coaches clattered behind, carrying with them a swirling cyclone of snowflakes. Anxiously Wyatt opened the window and peered out. A message, even wound with bright ribbon, might be missed in this blizzard.

Suddenly Sunburn cried: "Hey, there's a guy at the window! Good God!"

Wyatt saw the figure at the window too. Then he saw the man jump, dark against the snow, turn over in the air, and hit sickeningly in an explosion of powdery snow. The train flashed by, vanished in the pelting snow.

by Frederick Painton

Wyatt flung open the door and plowed through the drifts. He knelt beside the twisted body of the man. Sunburn ran up, kicking snow-clouds.

"He alive?"

The flesh beneath Wyatt's probing hand was warm, wet and sticky.

"He's been shot," he muttered. "He's in a bad way, Sunburn. . . . He's dying."

In the yellow headlight radiance the man's face, wet with melting snow, moved slightly.

"General Antonu—coming Berlin. . . . Magda Totelescu is the key. . . . Antonu knows Hitler's . . . Middle East—going—to settle. . . . Caught me—was shot—jumping out." He fainted, and was silent.

Wyatt ripped off his shirt-tails, made a bandage. Then he and Sunburn lifted the broken body and got it to the car.

"I don't think he'll last," Wyatt muttered; "but for God's sake, keep moving."

As Sunburn leaped into the driver's seat, red and green lights winked suddenly out of the snow-swirls on the right.

"You said it," cursed Sunburn. "The so-an'-so's are coming back."

The rear door of the backing train was crowded with men. And as the car leaped forward, flashlights suddenly glowed, powerful beams that picked out the motorcar as if it were on a stage. Sharp commands in German rang out. But Sunburn had the car rolling. He beat the train to the crossing by seconds, was making forty miles an hour on the other side.

From behind came four spats of sound, like a beater whacking a big carpet. But the bullets did not hit the sedan. And in another twenty feet the curtain of snow hid the car.

The return drive was terrific. Sunburn was bucking the snowdrifts recklessly and Wyatt could only cradle the injured spy's limp body in his arms to break the shock. Sunburn did the twelve miles to Basel in fourteen minutes, which was good even in fine weather.

As he drew the car up under the Grand Hotel's neon sign, Sunburn muttered: "Oops, Handsome! There's that nosey Swiss dick talking to the cop in the patent-leather hat."

Wyatt saw the two officers, but he knew that any risk must be run to get the dying man and his message to Tellegan before it was too late. Hastily he stripped off his burberry, got the limp body into it.

"Give us a hand, me big freckled friend," he hiccoughed. "He seems to be one over the eight."

He began to sing:

Oh, give me a home,
Where the buffalo roam,
And the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard,
A discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Sunburn whispered, "Nice work," and pretended to help them both into the hotel, while actually carrying the wounded man. The round-bellied detective stared after them, shook his head and looked disgustedly at the policeman.

"*Amerikaners!*" he muttered, as if that explained abnormal conduct.

Wyatt had one horrible moment on the hydraulic elevator that mounted with the speed of a tired turtle. He looked down at the white linoleum. Three red splotches! Sunburn caught his horrified look, coughed explosively and dropped his handkerchief.

"Hellish climate," he growled.

The ancient elevator-operator with the handlebar mustache said complacently: "Basel is most healthy, they say, *mein Herr.*"

Sunburn picked up the handkerchief. The red stains were gone.

Wyatt kept on singing his Western songs even as they went up the corridor. "Oh, lay off," muttered Sunburn; "you sound like a homesick coyote." But it did cover the sounds of dragging feet.

Tellegan opened the door. At sight of the putty-colored face in Wyatt's arms, his own went gray.

"Boy," muttered Sunburn, "that doll was born knowing the answers!"

"Is he— Should we risk the hospital?" His voice was bitter.

Wyatt shook his head as Sunburn helped him place the body on a couch.

"Not a chance, Major Jim. The man's dying—may be gone."

They ripped at the clothes, and made a new and better bandage. But Wyatt saw the man's body was like an empty wineskin.

"Captain Fred Atler," muttered Tellegan. "One of our best—he was our ace in Bucharest." He hesitated, hating what he must do, then got the whisky-bottle and poured some of the liquid into the man's sagging lips. Whisky would hasten death, but might mean a precious message.

Minutes passed in silence. Death seemed here. Then, as sometimes happens before the end, Captain Fred Atler's eyes opened. He spoke distinctly:

"General Antonu—dictator of Rumania—coming to Berlin Wednesday, incognito, Major Tellegan. He will sign agreement on Hungarian fuss over Transylvania. That will swing Hitler's Middle East policy. Tried to find out what agreement was—got shot." He smiled bleakly with blue lips. "Magda Totelescu at Geneva—once Antonu's sweetheart. Her *dossier* in my lapel. . . . Was going to suggest—"

He never finished the sentence. He breathed loudly, horribly, for brief seconds. . . . Then in the room there was no sound at all.

In his career as secret agent Wyatt had seen many men die violently, but he had never got used to it. Now he walked to the window, stared out at the swirling snow. Too often, it seemed, death took the chips in this game.

Tellegan called him back: "Cut off all the labels, Jason."

With a knife Wyatt removed every identifying trace on the clothing. Tellegan had ripped the man's coat lapels and took out a small piece of watered silk. Sunburn emptied the pockets.

Now all three stood staring down, knowing what must be done, and loathing it.

Finally Tellegan said gently: "Nothing can harm him now. Take him out to the crossing, Sunburn, where you found him. When he's found, it may be thought he fell from the train."

"Okay," Sunburn muttered. "Take hold, Handsome, and down the back stairs. I'll pick him up in the alley."

In the black alley the snow pelted them, and the flakes melted on the dead man's face. Soon they would lie there unchanged.

Sunburn backed in the car without lights, and Wyatt gently placed the body on the floor by the rear seat. As he folded the limp hands on the chest, he pressed one of them.

"So long, soldier," he muttered.

Sunburn, who usually chided him for his sentimentality, said only: "I'll be back in an hour."

The wind seemed bitterly cold, the snow pummeling like devilish fists, as Wyatt turned and entered the hotel. He was visualizing a pitiful frozen body lying in the snow, presently to be found, and shoveled underground.

"No praise if you succeed, no recognition if you fail," he muttered, quoting from Tellegan's words.

His depression lay upon him still as he entered the warm bright living-room, at odds with the cold blue night, the hissing snow.

Tellegan pushed up his glasses; he had been studying the piece of watered silk.

"I've got to catch the midnight express to Geneva, Jason." His voice was troubled, harassed.

Wyatt nodded sympathetically.

Tellegan began to talk. "The diplomatic situation as Atler got it is this: Rumania resents the loss of Transylvania, which Hitler gave to Hungary, resents it so much that the Rumanians are ready and willing to fight over it. So are the Hungarians. Both countries have mobilized most of their reserves. Hitler wants to use these troops, partly on the Russian front, and for police work elsewhere in the Balkans, to relieve German troops needed at the front. But each dictator is afraid that if he moves out his troops, the other will attack. Our agents have been aiding this suspicion, because extra German divisions on the Russian front may make the difference now between a quick or a long victory. Hitler has apparently worked out a compromise. If Antonu signs it, and Admiral Horthy, then forty German divisions are released. That we must stop. Before we can make a move, though, we must know what agreement Hitler has worked out. Antonu will know that."

Wyatt was listening alertly now. This was big-league stuff.

"We must get Antonu to tell us," resumed Tellegan.

"But how?"

Tellegan smiled grimly. "It seems that Georg Antonu was an Army career captain, and in love with Magda Totelescu, a red-haired beauty from Jassy. He got a chance to marry Helen Tendescu, daughter of the premier under King Carol. He threw over Magda for the marriage which meant his advancement. He became a general, and eventually dictator. Atler's memo says Magda was forced to flee because she knew something that could destroy Antonu."

He paused, went on softly: "She is now living in exile in Geneva. I'm going to see her—buy her secret—use it as a club over Antonu."

"Boy!" breathed Wyatt. "That'll take a lot of doing."

Tellegan stood up. "It's *got* to be done."

Wyatt and Sunburn took the older man to the *Bahnhof* at eleven-forty-five. With him Tellegan took a hundred thousand Swiss francs.

"And I'll treble it if necessary," he said grimly. "We'll have to work fast. I'll be back tomorrow."

The next queer incident occurred the following morning in the Grand Hotel's gloomy half-empty dining room. Sunburn was saying, "My God, mutton chops! Roast mutton, boiled mutton—that's all they eat in this crazy country. What I wouldn't give to sink these drugstore snappers into a three-inch steak covered with pounds of onions!"

He ceased to speak. A shadow loomed over their table. Wyatt, looking up, recognized the thick-necked burly Otto Stieber, presumably an attaché at the German Consulate, actually chief of many German agents.

The man was smiling, but his eyes were rock-gray and small.

"Herr Wyatt," he said, "I understand you and your American compatriots are leaving tonight for America. I stop a minute to wish you *bon voyage*."

Wyatt's face was expressionless.

"You are mistaken, Herr Stieber. We expect to remain all winter."

Now the German laughed outright.

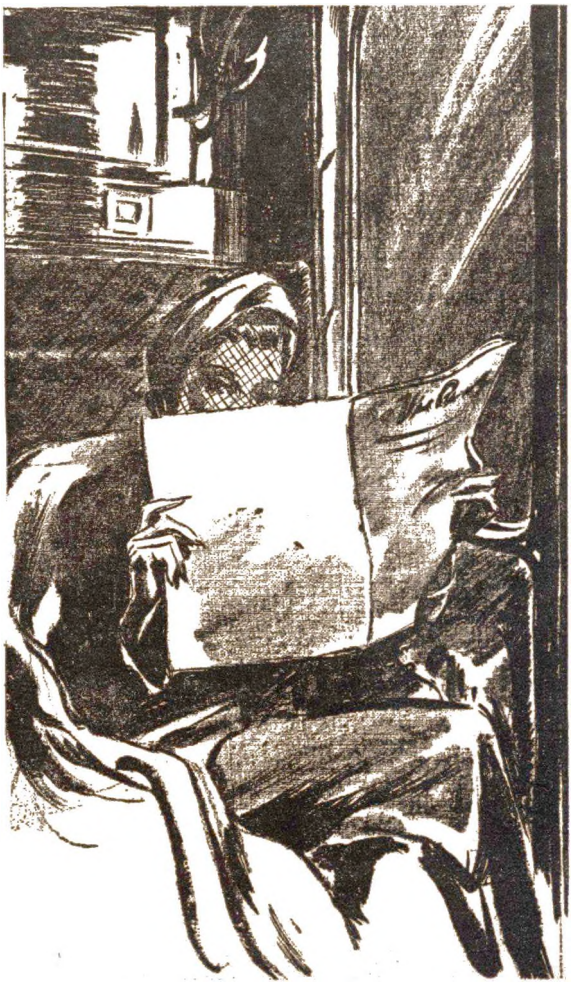
"No," he chuckled, "no, Herr Wyatt. My astrologer tells me you leave." He turned away, still chuckling. "*Herr Gott*, you Americans are so simple!"

He waved a fat, pudgy hand on which three diamond rings glittered, and went out.

Sunburn broke the silence.

"I'd say he was only one jump out of the booby-hatch!"

Wyatt did not reply. A sudden fear assailed him. And as he walked out of the dining-room a few minutes later and saw the fat-bellied Swiss detective and three other men, he knew this was major trouble.



They saw Magda in her compartment with a big magazine.

"Police," he muttered. "Let me do the talking, Sunburn."

A tall thin man with a big lantern jaw, a massive gold watch-chain across his stomach, approached them.

"I am told Major James Tellegan is not here, Herr Wyatt," he said gruffly, "so I will speak to you. I am Heinrich Gusselman, chief of the Basel police."

Wyatt's heart sank. So, they had been uncovered. And damn Stieber! He had known it all the time!

But the young secret agent gave the police chief a cordial smile.

"By all means; come to our sitting-room."

He led the way upstairs, saw the four men seated, and grinned: "Lovely day after the storm. Nice of you to call. What can we do for you?"

Herr Gusselman, who looked like a prosperous undertaker, frowned.

"Herr Wyatt, your car—a Renault—was at the St. Ludwig Road railroad-crossing last night at seven-twenty."

Even Sunburn's jaw fell agape at this.

"How do you know?" Wyatt asked boldly.

"Do not try to deny. Your license plates were seen by—er—certain persons, and turned in to us. There was also found the body of a man shot through the chest. Murdered."

Wyatt inwardly cursed Stieber. He it was who must have turned them in.

"My dear Herr Gusselman," he cried, "do I understand you are accusing us of murder?"

"You do," said Gusselman grimly; "and if you did not have a diplomatic passport which gives your party immunity, I would arrest you at once."

Wyatt had hoped wildly for a chance to stall, deny, explain. This blunt charge stopped him cold.

"But—but that's impossible!"

"Why?" demanded Gusselman.

Wyatt stifled a groan. He could not say Atler was a spy. That betrayed Tellegan, Sunburn and himself.

"Herr Gusselman," he said, "I can only repeat, the charge is preposterous. We have killed no one."

"None the less, let me see your firearms," said the chief.

This was a break. Swiftly Wyatt got them, his own .38, Sunburn's big .45 and Tellegan's old Webley. Carefully Gusselman looked at them, and smelled the muzzles.

"You have one more, a Luger .44," he said.

"Was—er—was the man shot with a Luger?" cried Wyatt. "That is a German gun—and we don't have one."

His enthusiasm failed to register. Gusselman and his men searched the place thoroughly. Wyatt had an inspiration.

"If Herr Stieber told you we shot the man, he lies. He probably shot him himself and wants to cover up."

Gusselman now returned, angry and baffled.

"I have no love for Herr Stieber," he said, "but he would have no reason to shoot—which you would have, being secret agents."

He drew himself up. "I am instructed by my government to inform you that you are *persona non grata* in Switzerland. You are ordered to be across the frontier within forty-eight hours. A note is being sent your Government."

He turned, gestured to his men and clumped out. After the door had slammed, Wyatt sank into a chair and said softly: "Hell!"

"They must have spotted our license-plates with them flashlights on the back of the train," said Sunburn.

Wyatt started up. "And Stieber was on board. That's how he knew." Then he fell back. "A lot of good it does to know that. Here's Marse Jim got a big *coup* by the tail—and we're kicked out before he can finish it."

Tellegan arrived at four o'clock. He looked tired and gray, but in his eyes was grim satisfaction.

"I bought her—it cost a half-million francs," he said.

"Wasted money," said Wyatt sadly, and told him what had happened.

Tellegan rarely swore, and he did not do so now. But his face grew dark and stony.

"General Georg Antonu is passing through here tomorrow on the Berlin Express," he said resolutely, "and before he crosses the German frontier, we're going to know the contents of his dispatch-case."

Wyatt felt better. The job, then, could be done before the police saw them into unoccupied France.

"Jason," Tellegan ordered him, "you and Sunburn will go to Geneva tonight. You will meet Magda Totelescu at the Majestic Hotel. Reserve two first-class compartments on the coach directly behind the special from Bucharest. She will be in one. Do not go near her unless she is in trouble. Take your guns—and don't let her be hurt."

He vouchsafed no more; nor did Wyatt press him for details—he only wondered how Antonu was to be got off a through train. . . . He and Sunburn caught the midnight express.

GENEVA lay cold and bright under the new snowfall, only the unfrozen parts of the lake gleaming dark blue. The mountains so awesome, the brilliant blue sky, reminded Wyatt of an overpainted picture postcard.

There were cheerful sleighbells and steaming horses, and befurred occupants as he and Sunburn strode into the Majestic Hotel. The *concierge* called Mademoiselle Totelescu's room. But yes, they were to wait. She would appear directly.

"Goofy country," said Sunburn. "In Basel they all speak German, and here French, and down south Italian. You'd think they'd get a language of their own."

Wyatt did not reply. A sense of suspense gripped him. Eagerly he watched the elevator doors. What kind of woman was this Magda Totelescu, who would sell her lover and her country for a half-million francs?

A moment later he saw her. A tall slender woman, wrapped in sables, came into the lobby. She wore a fur toque on red-gold hair that framed a face of high cheek-bones, big long-lashed eyes and full red mouth. She must not have been, Wyatt thought, more than twenty-six or so; yet she was not a girl, but a woman—and a most seductive woman at that.

Sunburn muttered: "Is that her? My God, she's an elegant dish."

She came directly to them.

"Monsieur Wyatt?"

"And Leif Sanderson," smiled Wyatt. He saw her weigh them in the balance of her wide-eyed regard. Then she smiled.

"An American agent, and so young," she murmured. "Why, you are only a boy."

Wyatt flushed to the roots of his dark hair. He was older than she by at least two years—but he did feel juvenile in her age-old regard.

"We'd better get going," he said lamely. "And you'll need a veil. A German agent named Stieber may be aboard."

"He?" she smiled. "What an odious bore he is! He talks of nothing but that his great-grandfather was the Stieber who organized Germany's first espionage service under Bismarck."

She slipped a hand through Wyatt's arm and clung with that intimate helplessness that makes a man feel strong.

"We shall attend to him." Her glance swung to Sunburn, who was goggling. "Shall we go, then, my friends?"

Sunburn gulped and fell in on her other side. Wyatt could hardly suppress a grin. Sunburn was taking this woman hard.

Wyatt already had the train reservations, but when the Berlin Express thundered into the station, he let Magda Totelescu go aboard alone, and feeling like a Gilbert and Sullivan conspirator, stole into the after-coach, coat-collar up, Homburg hat pulled well down. They moved forward to the coach next the Bucharest car and saw Magda in her compartment, veil down and a big copy of an illustrated magazine raised.

"Boy," muttered Sunburn, "that doll was born knowing all the answers."

"But how will she get Antonu off the train at Basel?" puzzled Wyatt.

"She will," said Sunburn. "Oops—here comes Stieber! Get inside."

They slid into the next compartment of the *wagon-lit* and peered intently out. The next minute the train slid smoothly off toward the mountains. Wyatt wondered if Stieber suspected a trick or was merely along as Gestapo protection to a powerful leader. He stepped out into the corridor. Magda was all right, still reading her magazine.

Minutes passed now in bored parade. The *wagon-lit* steward called: *"Billets pour la première service!"*

Out of the Bucharest car came officers in the brilliant uniforms of Rumanian cavalry officers. General Antonu must be incognito, but he had plenty of guards. Wyatt thought dismally that the man was too safe ever to get off at Basel.

Then suddenly Magda Totelescu stood beside him.

"Wait and watch for Stieber," she whispered breathlessly.

She moved along the corridor of the speeding car. Wyatt could have sworn she talked to no one, did nothing. Yet after permitting a Rumanian officer, gay in black and gold, with a furred pelisse at his shoulders, to apologize for crowding past her, she returned, darted into her compartment. Her vivid face lifted in a satisfied smile. Wyatt entered for a moment.

"All is well," she said. "That is Kyril, Georg's aide, and sometimes his double when there is trouble in Bucharest. Stand watch outside, and all will be well."

Wyatt nodded, withdrew.

"The master player has a lot of pawns moving on the chessboard," he muttered.

"Huh?" said Sunburn.

"Nothing," sighed Wyatt. "I'm beginning to feel that I'm again in knee-pants."

The sun was dropping toward the mountains to end a short winter's day before the next act occurred. Out of the Bucharest car came a man in dark broadcloth—a man tall, slim, with prematurely white hair, a white, waxed mustache, large brown eyes. The mouth was stern, the whole expression charged with the authority of command, the aloof aura of the great.

"Antonu!" Wyatt muttered. "And better-looking than his pictures."

The dictator crowded by with no apology, pulled back the sliding door of Magda Totelescu's compartment and went in. Three Rumanian officers began idling up and down the corridor, giving Wyatt and Sunburn hard, suspicious glances.

"That guy's nuts," said Sunburn. "If I could have that dish, I'd give Rumania and all the rest of the Balkans."

Wyatt grinned, then watched intently through the compartment glass. What were they saying? How went Tellegan's scheme?

The purple shadows in the fantastically beautiful mountains lengthened. Suddenly Magda's eyes lifted; she gestured. Wyatt and Sunburn went inside.

"Georg, my dear," she said, "these are the two American agents representing Monsieur Tellegan. Messieurs, General Antonu."

Wyatt nodded. Sunburn said: "Hi, yuh!"

The General merely frowned and said: "This is blackmail."

"I have told Georg," said Magda, "that unless he descends at Basel and agrees to meet me at the Chalet Waldenburg tonight, I shall turn over to Monsieur Tellegan the evidence in the assassination of Father Paul."

By a supreme effort Wyatt kept his lean tanned face knowing. Father Paul! That Orthodox priest had been the idol and the leader of the Rumanian People and Peasant's Party. He had been brutally clubbed to death under mysterious circumstances, and the Communists had been charged with the murder by Antonu. He had leaped to power on the strength of his arrest and execution of several Communist leaders.

But Magda's statement accused Antonu. And if she could prove it, the common people of Rumania would rise in wrath, revolt, throw Antonu out. Wyatt suppressed a gasp of dismay. Magda was monkeying with dynamite. Antonu would not hesitate to kill anyone possessing a secret that could destroy him.

He felt the General's hard gaze on him.

"If I refuse to surrender to this threat, what then?" asked the General.

"We shall make public the evidence in Father Paul's murder," said Wyatt quietly.

"And if I accept this proposal?"

Illustrated by Austin Briggs.

"Take him out to the crossing; when he's found it may be thought he fell from the train."

Wyatt spoke clearly: "All right, Sunburn, whenever you're ready."

Wyatt shrugged. "You are an intelligent man, General. You know Hitler is doomed, and those with him will also fall. He can win battles, but not wars. Your coöperation now would be favorably noted at the peace-settlement table."

"Damnation!" growled Antonu. "The Germans are dangerous to trifle with. If they knew I played a double hand—you do not know this Hitler as I do."

Boldly Wyatt said: "No, but I know the Americans and the United Nations—and so do you."

The General glanced at his wristwatch, a fantastic thing of diamonds and platinum. He rose.

"Not being rich," he said dryly, "I cannot bid against the United States for possession of Magda's lovely tongue. I shall be at the Chalet Waldenburg at eleven tonight sharp. My personal fee for being there will be a million gold Swiss francs." He smiled coldly. "To be deposited at the Bank of International Settlement. One has to be prepared in days like these."

He bowed over Magda's hand, brushed it with his lips.

"You are a lovely scoundrel, Magda," he said. "I could wish matters different. With Helen dead, I am a lonely man. In the high places of the earth, darling, is only hatred, danger and echoing loneliness."

He went out and strode up the corridor, pursued by his uniformed guards.

Magda looked after him, her eyes queerly alight.

"And once," she murmured, "before he reached the peaks, he was human and filled with the glow of life." She shrugged; her full red lips drooped. "The affair," she went on, "arranges itself. Messieurs, you had best remain outside until Basel."

In the corridor again Wyatt suddenly scowled.

"By the Lord, Sunburn, I don't like this," he muttered. "It's full of dynamite. I smell a double-cross."

"That doll is the one who is in danger," said Sunburn. "Antonu would slit her throat and sing hosannahs to cover her death-yell."

They stood in silence watching the majestic blue of winter night descend coldly. . . .

To make matters worse, as Wyatt and Sunburn got off the Express at Basel, close behind Magda Totelescu, Wyatt saw Otto Stieber staring at her. She wore her veil, but his attitude was tense, suspicious.

"Man, oh, man!" muttered Wyatt. "This is a mess. That guy is going to draw cards now, and he's bad joss."

He saw Magda checked in at the Grand Hotel and located next to his and Tellegan's suite. General Antonu also arrived with his retinue.

All this, together with what had transpired on the train, Wyatt duly reported to Tellegan.

"They're going to trick us if they can," Wyatt concluded, referring to Stieber and Antonu, "and my hunch is that they'll try to kill Magda."

Tellegan went to the telephone, made a call that would swiftly put a million gold franc certificates in his hands at nine P.M. Now, returning, he said keenly: "You've got some ideas, Jason. What are they?"

"Ach, Himmel! Here is powder to blow Rumania apart."

Wyatt had been staring dreamily at the fire. Now he turned.

"We've got to be prepared to meet a triple-cross," he said, "and here is how we might beat their game."

He began to talk; Tellegan listened intently, frowning. Sunburn, on the other hand, suddenly began to grin. When Wyatt had finished, he burst out: "My God, Handsome, you ought to have been a general. That's a terrific idea—and it might work okay."

"It's got to work," said Wyatt. "We're only going to get one chance at this, and if we can blow Hitler's Middle East plans, we can cinch his defeat."

Tellegan ran his fingers nervously through his mane of white hair.

"It's so melodramatic—fantastic," he muttered; "but then, we are dealing with fantastic people in a fantastic war." He nodded. "Very well, Jason, we'll do it the way you suggest."

The swift moves in the diplomatic *coup* that followed were these: Sunburn drove to the American Consulate and came back with a passenger. Both he and the passenger went unseen to Magda Totelescu's suite, where Wyatt awaited. From here Wyatt went to General Georg Antonu's suite and sent in a message. The aide came out, said: "The General permits me to inform you that he will go in your car from the rear door of the hotel at ten-thirty."

At ten-twenty-five Major James Tellegan handed a woman garbed gorgeously in sables into a rented Mercedes, and himself drove the car off.

At ten-thirty Wyatt stood in the blue night cold of the hotel alley, waiting for Antonu. A chauffeur was at the wheel of the running Renault.

At ten-thirty-one a man buried in greatcoat, muffler and wearing a big-brimmed felt hat, came out and climbed into the Renault.

"Well," he growled at Wyatt, "do not delay. I must go on to Berlin by the two o'clock express."

"Very well, General." And Wyatt climbed in. "Okay, Sunburn—the Chalet Waldenburg."

The car began to bump over the snow-rutted road. The tire-chains slapped the fenders with monotonous rhythm. Wyatt had his .38 pistol in his overcoat pocket, and kept his hand on it.

The tall man spoke only once until Basel was left behind.

"Is it far?"

"About fifteen kilometers," Wyatt told him.

A half-moon was bright on the snow, and the black trees were gaunt scarecrows begging with crooked arms. As the looming towers of Chalet Waldenburg came into sight, Wyatt's companion said: "I never thought when I gave that place to Magda that I would come to her like this."

"She is a beautiful creature," Wyatt said.

The car pulled under the *porte-cochère* and stopped. Wyatt backed out and waited for the muffled man. He followed to the door. At the rap, Tellegan opened the door. Wyatt's companion entered. Tellegan slammed the door behind Wyatt. His face was drawn, haggard.

"Jason," he began, "it appears—"

"I will do the talking now, Herr Tellegan," said Otto Stieber.

He stepped out of the shadow behind Tellegan. He had a Luger automatic pistol. In the wide doorway to the left stood another man with a pistol, a big-boned man, all hands and feet.

"Quite a welcoming reception, Stieber," said Wyatt, staring hard at the man who had ridden out with him. "Was it necessary?"

"Quite," said Stieber. "This threat to General Antonu must be liquidated once and for all."

Wyatt's companion now removed muffler, coat and hat. He had silvered his hair and mustache, but the boyish contours of his face were those of General Antonu's aide. He was grinning triumphantly.

"He never once suspected," he said.

"Enter," said Stieber, gesturing to a huge hot living-room where a big wood-fire blazed. "Then you can tell me where Magda Totelescu is."

Wyatt walked in, saw the girl from the American Consulate trying to look brave, but very pale indeed. He smiled encouragingly.

"It was quite clever," said Stieber, "sending out another girl. But if I know Magda, she will risk much for money. She is near. Where?"

"Where," said Wyatt, "is General Antonu? You, it seems, sent his assassination-double."

"I ask the questions here," Stieber was red with anger, his rock-gray eyes merciless. "Where is Magda?"

Wyatt smiled. "She decided not to come. Too dangerous. She figured we could do the details."

Stieber slapped Wyatt's face, hard, so that he nearly fell over. Wyatt took it, merely clenching his fists.

"I can try better measures," said Stieber softly. "Speak the truth."

"She was afraid to come, afraid of you," said Wyatt.

"That woman? She is afraid of nothing but poverty. She—" He suddenly broke off. "*Herr Gott!* Of course—she—I should have realized—"

He jerked out his gun, raced to the door and out. Wyatt's heart sank. Stieber was much, much too clever!

A MOMENT later Stieber came in, thrusting before him the chauffeur of Wyatt's car.

In the living-room he jerked off the greatcoat, the hat. A mass of red-gold hair tumbled down, and Magda Totelescu, looking boyish in breeches and boots, stood there.

"Ah," said Stieber, "that was most ingenious, Herr Wyatt. She was here if all went well, concealed if matters were foul."

Wyatt said nothing.

He could not, for the German with the big hands and feet was searching him roughly. He took everything loose, including Wyatt's .38 pistol, which he pocketed.

Meantime, Stieber, grinning like a wolf, was saying to Magda: "You brought the evidence in the unfortunate Father Paul case, Magda. Let me have it."

She was smiling softly, but her eyes were hard and unafraid.

"Monsieur Stieber, you must think me a fool to risk everything on the chance that these Americans could succeed. I have brought nothing."

"We shall see," said Stieber curtly. "Strip!"

"Here? Before these—"

"*Herr Gott!* Strip, or Emil here will do it for you, and less gently."

Wyatt marveled at her calmness. She took off the tunic, the black leather puttees, the breeches. She stood, now clad only in panties, bra and long sheer silk stockings. She was calm and somehow looked less the all-wise woman, and more soft and girlish.

Stieber went through the uniform seam by seam. Suddenly he grunted in satisfaction, and out of an inner lining took some papers and some photographs.

"*Ach, Himmel!*" he muttered, glancing through them. "Here is powder to blow Rumania apart."

Quickly he turned and hurled the mass of documents into the fire. Wyatt watched them flare brightly, sending flame-brilliance dancing over the room. Then they were gray ash.

"That ends one matter," smiled Stieber; "and now we can attend to the rest."

He looked around, his mouth a thin curved line like a shark's. Magda had moved closer to the fire. The flame glints tinted her ivory thighs. She had remained completely calm.

"Let me make a little play," said Stieber. "Suppose you, Herr Wyatt, were found here with Magda in this charming intimacy of hers. Most certainly the police, if properly persuaded, would think: '*Ach*, yes, a jealous lover has shot his mistress and then himself. Too bad!'" And they would close the case."

Wyatt nodded quietly. "Most ingenious, Stieber. And what of Major Tellegan and Miss Marie Anderson?"

"It is only a few miles to the German frontier," said Stieber, "and after that only a short journey to our concentration-camp at Dachau in Bavaria. I'm sure, in the circumstances, your American Government would not care to protest too loudly at Geneva."

Wyatt nodded. The old rule would obtain: no praise if you win, no help if you're caught.

Tellegan said: "You could spare Miss Anderson in this. She knows nothing, did only as she was told."

"Fräulein Anderson has seen too much here," said Stieber.

"Too many rats," said Miss Anderson bluntly, and Wyatt grinned at her courage.

"So, Emil," said Stieber, "if you will undertake the sad task—"

The German with the big hands and feet moved forward.

Wyatt spoke clearly: "All right, Sunburn, whenever you're ready."

STIEBER laughed. "Such bluffs, Herr Wyatt, are foolish. Quick, Emil; do not—"

The door behind Stieber opened. Sunburn said: "I'd put down that gun, Stieber. I'm nervous in a place like this."

Stieber whirled, his face suddenly chalky. But it was the big German with the huge hands and feet who acted. He whipped up his gun, and he was very fast for a man of his size. Still, it was foolish.

The big Colt .45 in Sunburn's hand roared once. The big man belched as if he had eaten too much, and with both hands on his chest at the V of the ribs, sank slowly to the floor.

"I told you I was nervous," said Sunburn. "Now, Stieber, drop that gun."

He was speaking in English, but the German agent knew what he said. He dropped the gun.

"Get it, Handsome," said Sunburn, "and keep this monkey covered while I bring in Antonu."

Wyatt picked up the pistol, checked it thoroughly and then covered Stieber. The German stood there, his face purple with fury.

"You knew that the General would send his double," Stieber said thickly.

"I rather planned on it," said Wyatt cheerfully. "Sunburn was what you'd call an ace in the hole."

A moment later Sunburn came in with General Antonu tucked under one arm like a sack of wheat. The Rumanian dictator was bound and gagged and trussed like a mummy.

"I had to crack a few heads on the fifth floor after you left, Handsome," Sunburn chuckled, "but the General was quite willing to come. However, I had to drive and didn't want to take chances, so I wrapped him up in a little cellophane."

Wyatt laughed.

Sunburn now undid General Antonu and stood him on his feet. Despite his unkempt appearance, the General retained his aloof dignity.

"I told the fool I'd not resist, but he is childish enough to like to tie knots." His eyes took in Magda's charming dishabille. "Darling, you are entrancing, but you'll catch cold. Put something on."

She was smiling brightly now. Indeed, despite the dead man on the floor, cheer was in the room.

"Stieber burned some papers and photographs, Georg," she said, slipping into the chauffeur's greatcoat,

"but they were only copies. I still have the originals."

"No doubt," said Antonu.

Wyatt said gently: "Okay, Marse Jim, you carry the ball from here in."

Tellegan, looking old and pale, came forward. "Jason," he said, "you must have been psychic, to have fathomed this plot."

Wyatt only grinned, pleased at the compliment.

Tellegan said to Antonu: "You will give us the copy of Hitler's proposed agreement between Horthy and you. In exchange, Magda will give you the evidence."

General Georg Antonu stared thoughtfully at Magda Totelescu.

"You know I hate to be driven, Magda. Why do you make me hate you?"

She returned his regard smilingly.

"You do not have to give them anything, Georg, darling," she told him. "I have no intention of surrendering the Father Paul evidence—or of using it now."

"What?" cried Wyatt, astounded.

She ignored his exclamation.

"Georg, you married Helen, and you climbed the peaks far beyond where I could reach you. I have brought you down to where we can talk." She paused; then quietly: "Georg, I can bring you within reach, down off the heights, unless you wish to come of your own will because you can remember our precious moments together in Jassy."

Antonu was smiling slightly, but Wyatt could not fathom the expression.

Suddenly Antonu said: "Magda, to tear me down within your reach, would you bring revolt, tragedy to Rumania?"

"A woman, Georg," she told him, "thinks of her heart and not of her country. You know that."

"Yes," said Antonu. "I know that. You kept silent over these years, not for the money I sent, but because you wanted me to climb the heights and find them sterile."

She nodded.

Stieber suddenly grated: "She cannot hurt you, General. Goebbels will deny and deny. We will attend to her. No one will believe."

Tellegan said harshly: "But they will. Your people listen to America, General. Furthermore, we paid this woman—made a bargain, and we will force her to keep it."

He took a step forward. Wyatt, perceiving Tellegan was in Sunburn's line of fire, jumped forward.

"Watch out, Major Jim," he yelled.

BUT he was too late by a divided second.

Stieber moved like a flash of light. He struck Wyatt a stunning blow on the base of the neck. Wyatt staggered, fell. The gun was snatched from his hand, and Stieber had swung and fired almost in one single movement. But there was another shot almost simultaneous. Wyatt was not struck. He saw Magda gasp and blood spurt on her bare thigh. He saw Stieber clasp at his right arm and yell. The gun fell to the floor.

The affair was over that quickly. Sunburn stood there, cool, commanding with his gun.

"Now," he said, "the meeting will take up where it left off. Get a bandage on that gal's leg, Handsome. It isn't bad, but it spoils the effect."

Wyatt bandaged the thigh with his handkerchief—it was only a scratch.

"I believe," said Antonu slowly, "that I have a solution." He reached into his pocket and brought out a series of flimsy papers. "Here are copies of the agreement I am to sign in Berlin. Which I shall sign, but which I shall not keep."

As Tellegan took them, the dictator went on: "If you give them proper publicity, Monsieur Tellegan, pressure at home will prevent me from keeping my deal with Hitler."

Tellegan's eyes skimmed the papers. He whistled softly.

"You agree to a plebiscite to settle the ownership of eastern Transylvania," he muttered; "and in return for twelve Rumanian divisions placed at the command of the German High Command, Hitler agrees that you shall win that plebiscite."

"That is correct," said General Antonu.

"But good Godfrey!" cried Tellegan. "If we make this public, Hungary will refuse to accept such a decision."

"Unless," agreed General Antonu, "Hitler has promised Hungary a similar arrangement—and plans to trick us both."

"Ah!" murmured Tellegan. "I begin to see. Your people will refuse the plebiscite, want to fight. You must keep your army at home. So must Horthy."

Stieber, despite the pain of his wounded arm, cried: "Antonu, if you trick our Führer, he will smash you. He will—"

"Ah, yes," said Antonu, "there is another little matter to arrange."

Before anyone could make a move, he stooped, swiftly picked up the gun that had fallen from Stieber's hand. He leveled the gun at Stieber at a distance of not more than four feet. The gun roared once, and Stieber with a scream fell backward, shot through the heart.

In a stunned silence Antonu wiped down the gun-butt carefully, and delicately inserted the weapon into Stieber's relaxed fingers.

"It would never do for him to report to Hitler," said Antonu. "You gentlemen might have had too many scruples against silencing him. I have not."

All eyes were on him as he went to Magda.

He looked around thoughtfully. "You gentlemen have shown yourselves clever and resourceful. I am sure you can arrange this scene so the Swiss police will have no real clue."

He paused. Then: "Let me see—Stieber told me he was getting you deported over a murdered man at the St. Ludwig Road. He told me he himself shot this American agent—doubtless with the gun he now holds. The Swiss police know ballistics. They will be glad to be rid of Stieber. They do not like the Gestapo." He shrugged, smiled. "Need I say more?"

He turned his back, put his arm around Magda.

"Darling, if you had gone through with your threat, I would have found a way to kill you. As it is, perhaps now the heights can be made less lonely. You could join me, eh?"

It was Marie Anderson who gasped: "My Lord, he loves her!"

NEXT day Herr Heinrich Gusselman came into Tellegan's suite at the Grand Hotel. Tellegan, Wyatt and Sunburn rose to receive him.

"*Herren,*" said Herr Gusselman, "new evidence has been found that proves Herr Otto Stieber killed the unknown man at the St. Ludwig Road. We found the Luger on his body at Chalet Waldenburg. He had evidently been drinking heavily and quarreled with one Emil Schwartz. They used guns, and both are dead."

"How tragic!" said Tellegan. "We were just packing to leave."

"That is unnecessary, *Herren.* You have been falsely suspected, and I bring my government's apology, together with news that the deportation order has been rescinded. You are free to remain as long as your business keeps you."

Tellegan thanked him. The man shook hands all around.

"It was odd that Schwartz used an American gun," he said, his eyes twinkling. "But the Germans are odd people." He turned to go, then halted to say: "I see in today's paper a new crisis between Rumania and Hungary over Transylvania. They will fight yet, despite Hitler's scheming. *Guten Tag, Herren!*"

He went out, and Wyatt let go a breath of relief and laughed.

"We know where his sympathies are," he grinned.

Tellegan nodded. Sunburn looked pensively at the wall.

"I'd like to be a general," he said dreamily. "They get all the breaks." He sighed. "That doll was certainly an elegant dish. It was a pleasure to see her work!"

A SHORT NOVEL of ANCIENT AMERICA

by Rupert Hughes

The Man

"THIS is your day, Tutul. Today you're certainly a nine-souled man," said Nabtu Yacman. That was scant praise; for in giving his rival nine souls he meant no more than to call him lucky. There was envy in his tone; and there might well be, for he had bet his very clothes on making a better score than Tutul Chi in the game of buttock-ball—and had lost them.

Tutul merely smiled off Nabtu's bad manners; but his friend Kukum Pacab flared:

"You had nine souls yourself today, Nabtu. Don't forget; you wanted to bet your liberty and make yourself Tutul's slave if you lost. A good thing for you he didn't take you up!"

But Nabtu still looked for excuses:

"Tutul would have had to stake his own liberty against mine; and I'd have been sure to win—if I'd had something worth fighting for."

Tutul did not explain that the reason he had not bet his liberty was because he felt it not his own to lose. He

Illustrated by
John Richard Flanagan

With Nine Souls

was in love. He was very young, very suffering, in all the anguish of that first slavery to beauty, which young men feel to be the first slavery anyone ever felt in all the world.

And yet, being a rash young Mayan who would gamble his dearest treasure, his clothes, his blood, his freedom, even his life if challenged, he lacked the grit to refuse a second time, when Nabtu dared him again.

"The bet's still open, Tutul, for the second half of the game. My liberty against yours—what d'you say? The one who scores the most goals from now on is the master of the other—for a year—or forever, for all I care. Take it or quit!"

"It's a bet," said Tutul, though he felt within him that minor shame the gambler feels when he barters honor, love and wealth he has no right to squander, simply because he is afraid to face the cowardice of refusing a wager.

These lads, by the way, were Mayan young gentlemen of important families in Chichen Itzá, chief city of Yucatán in the year 1241. The city had a population of some

two hundred and fifty thousand then; and the grandeur of its architecture, the precision of its astronomy, the magnificence of its luxury rivaled almost anything to be found at that time in the Europe that had never heard of Chichen Itzá, and would not hear of it for three centuries more. Then the "discoverers" would destroy its people, its learning, science, literature and art with a cruelty surpassing anything ever known to the Mayans, though they were cruel enough, God knows, to their own as well as to alien people.

The young men were resting between halves of the national game—a kind of mixture of two that would flourish seven centuries later; basket-ball and football.

They called the game *tlachtli*, or *pok-ta-pok*, and waged it on a court a hundred and five feet long, forty-five feet wide. In each of the side walls, twelve feet high, a stone ring was set, and the points of the game were scored by such players as could send the ball high enough, straight enough and with just the proper arch to fly through the ring. Only—and here was a rub indeed—they could not toss the ball with the hand, or kick it with the foot. The player who made the try must receive the ball on his hindquarters and by incredible agility so snap his hips that the ball bounded off and up, into and through the ring.

The ball was a great heavy mass of solid *kiki*—what we call rubber; for the resinous milk of the sapodilla tree had long been known to them. Since they practiced the trick from childhood, the impossible became the commonplace; though it was never easy even for them to score a goal. Multitudes turned out for all the big games, and there were annual tournaments. When the teams of rival cities met, there was desperate betting, often bloodshed. Sometimes the losing captain was held so blameworthy that a priest of the offended town gods cut off his head with a knife of flint or obsidian. The Mayans had no other knives—no iron or steel; nor did they have wheels either; no wheeled carts or chariots, no cattle, no horses, no beasts of burden; yet they achieved unsurpassed accomplishments in many fields.

The players of their national game of buttock-ball were armored almost as heavily as the football players of posterity, for the game was tough, the ball was heavy and hard and it hurt where it struck; collisions were violent, fights frequent, and slithering along the rough stone floor was sure to grind off the skin. So their heads and faces were encased in helmets and face guards in which eyeholes were cut. Their chests and shoulders were covered with hide; they wore thick gauntlets on both hands, heavy leggings and shoes; and about the hips a stout skirt of leather, well padded at the back.

NABTU was so elated when he had shamed Tutul into taking his bet that he plunged into the second half with fury. For a time it seemed as if the nine souls of luck had been transferred to him, and he played with as much ferocity as if this were the final game of the year between the Chichen Itzás and the hated champions from Mayapán. He blocked and passed and dodged with uncanny skill; and twice he butted the ball through the ring, while Tutul failed four times.

But he played himself out and Tutul doggedly overtook him, passed him. The crowd, increased by rumor of the high stakes, filled all the free space and shrieked and made side-bets on the outcome. As Nabtu began to lose points, he lost his sportsmanship. He tried to trip and throw Tutul; to play foul yet to claim fouls; to blame the other players for his own misses; to appeal to the referee for help, then insult him for penalties imposed.

He fought viciously for the last point, and howled with rage when he dipped and made a bunt that barely missed the ring, only to see Tutul run under it before it struck, point his head to the ring, bend low and receive the ball on the base of his spine and high-tail it right through the stone circle.

Now Nabtu abhorred himself as much as he loathed Tutul; for he was no longer the scion of the proud Yacman family; he was the bond-slave, the servant, the valet of Tutul. He was mad enough to draw his knife and slash his new master's throat across. But Kukum Pacab already had his own knife out and was a little too carelessly proving its edge on a bit of wood. So Nabtu bowed low and said:

"And now I am your slave, Tutul. What is Master's first command?"

Not meaning so much contempt as his light words implied, Tutul emancipated him with a smile:

"My slave? You! What could I do with you? I can hardly stand it to play against you. The thought of having you around me all the time would— Oh, take back your freedom and leave me alone!"

At this insult beyond insult Nabtu tore off his helmet and flung it down, and cursed with the name of the god of all the gods, the god of whom no statue or painting ever was made, nor any mention but with reverence by any pious tongue:

"Well, by *Hunab Ku*, that's the dirtiest foul blow you ever gave me! You win me, then throw me away! I won't have it. You're going to be my master or I'll knife you here and now."

Tutul laughed and merely tossed back *"Mitna!"* (Their word for "Hell!") *"Mitna!* But you're hard to please, Nabtu. Well, so am I. Still—since it hurts your pride not to be my slave, go on and be my slave. But my first order is to keep your distance till I call you. Take every day off for a holiday. No, wait! Some day I may need you mighty badly. Then when I call you, come! And do as you're told that one day, whatever it is. If you don't, I'll turn you in for torture as a runaway slave. Will you pledge yourself to that?"

"I'm yours," Nabtu muttered. "It's for you to say what I'm to do, and when."

"Then I say: When I call you, come! When I tell you what to do, do it! Till then, you're your own master."

Nabtu tore off his gauntlets and kilt, and left the court, vowing never to play again. How could he? He could no longer bet, because he could call nothing his own; being a slave, he could no longer play with gentlemen as an equal of gentlemen. He took it so hard that he began to study for the ministry; entered a temple, and became one of the minor physician-magicians.

Seeing him take his defeat with such ill grace, Tutul smiled again his usual sad smile as he said to Kukum Pacab:

"Good riddance, eh, Kook? Nab ought never to play games. He's the worst winner that ever was, and still worse a loser. What fun does he get out of a game—or out of life, for that matter?"

"You're no comedian yourself, Toot," said Kukum. "You haven't laughed for a month, and your smile is sadder than a funeral. What in the name of old *Sacacantun* himself, is eating your heart out?"

"Nothing, nothing," Tutul sighed and began to strip off his leather armor as he walked to the dressing-rooms. Not to bathe, however, and that was a hardship for the Mayans. But a great drouth was drying out the land and only in the deepest wells was there any water left. . . .

Tutul was sorrowful because he was at war with himself. All of his nine souls were at war with one another. He was bitterly in love, and that was an anguish to him; since youth, even more than age, hates to have its strength and its pride softened into surrender to the rule of some girl whose very power is her helplessness; whose strength is in how soft she is; whose domination defies rebellion because it is so meek.

His slavery to love was still his own secret. It had begun just before the people began to call him "Ek Balam," because he had fought and killed a *balam*, a black jaguar. The victory did not endear him to the

temple people because the jaguar was "the guardian of the gardens," an almost sacred animal, saving the crops as it did by killing the little deer that preyed on the precious maize. Deer were hated, but fawns were cherished as pets; some of the wives who kept them suckled the little spotted creatures at their own breasts.

IT was a pet fawn—the pet fawn of a young girl—that had won for Tutul his nickname of Ek Balam. As he changed now from his ball-togs to his street clothes, his memory was busy recalling how on that day the deerlet had escaped from the high-walled, sumptuous garden of the Shiu family, a family long at feud with that of Tutul, which was the house of the Chi.

For lack of something better to do, Tutul was on his way to the jungle to lasso iguanas. He happened to be passing the Shiu gate when the fawn slipped through. He smiled as it bounded past him in a revelry of freedom. But after it came a girl so beautiful that Tutul guessed she must be Stactani, that sequestered daughter the Shius were so proud of.

As if she were a queen and he a slave, she called to him:

"Catch him! Fetch me my fawn!"

With a laugh the proud youth saluted, flung off his light hunting-cap and ran. He followed the fawn deep into the ever-thickening forest, cursing yet praising the little imp leaping and curveting, and always escaping his clutch. Fast as he ran, it ran just as little faster as it needed to elude him. Deep into the jungle it plunged, and finally straight into the lair of a roving black jaguar.

At the beast's first growl the fawn halted as if turned to stone. But the Shiu girl, who had followed all the way, screamed to Tutul:

"Save him! Save him!"

Tutul had not come prepared for such a battle. He had no spear or throwing-stick, no shield. He was naked save for his sandals and a strip of embroidered cloth about his waist and loins. He had no weapon at his belt except his knife of volcanic glass. Yet a man cannot, merely for his life's sake, be timid in the presence of a girl.

The jaguar hurled itself through the air at the fawn. Tutul leaped and met it midway. The jaguar clenched him tight, ripped him with its claws, set its teeth in his shoulder and would have reached his throat if Tutul had not throttled it first with all the might of his left hand. By its hairy neck he held it fast while his right hand drove the knife in deep and deep again and again.

It seemed the beast would never yield; but at last the jaguar grew limp; its claws relaxed, withdrew slowly from Tutul's tattered flesh; the body fell backward on the ground.

The jaguar was dead, and Tutul nearly so; thrusting his gory knife back in its sheath, he turned for home in complete pain and weakness. His glazing eyes saw the cause of it all staring at him breathless across the snow-flaked tawny body of the fawn she huddled in her arms. He thought with disgust:

"I've thrown away my life for a silly fawn and a silly girl I never knew—and shall never know."

His eyes were darkening, but he noted vaguely that her beautiful face was filled with sorrow for him, and with terror of the blood spouting from his wounds. He saw her fling away the fawn with an angry word.

She was suddenly close. When he fell forward, he fell into her arms. She caught his hand, drew his arm across her shoulder and supported him slowly a long, long way; then eased him to the grass in shade. He guessed that she ran to a well, scooped up water in her palms and ran back; for the next he knew was the feel of her little cupped hands at his lips, and her voice commanding him again:

"Drink!"

He wondered that she had not fainted or run from him. He had known blustering giants who fell to sobbing at the sight of blood; but this frail girl was strong and calm.

"Who dared tell you such monstrous lies?" demanded the Ah-Kin.

When she had seen her fawn escape, she had not paused to throw on a mantle. Being an unmarried girl she did not often wear the long blouse, the *huipil*. She was clad only in the short skirt of the *pik* that fell from her waist to her knees. But even from this she tore a strip and, running again to the well, brought back the fine soft cloth drenched in water. She bathed his wounds, turning him on his side to reach his ravaged back.

She was gone again. He could hear her ripping leaves from a tree.

She was close again, laying the leaves on his wounds. They smarted, but stopped the flow of blood. She must have selected them learnedly. He remembered—or imagined—that she had a brother who was famed as a temple surgeon. He must have taught her some of his lore.

WHEN at last Tutul's strength came back a little, and his vision, he stared up at her with a sculptor's eyes; for he was apprenticed to a sculptor. Her face and her torso were like the statue of a hovering goddess. Her breasts and her throat above him were sculpture beyond all human art.

She looked him straight in the eyes and did not flinch; yet he thought none the less of her for that audacity, though nice girls did not meet a man's gaze. Or if they did, their parents threw red pepper into their eyes to teach them modesty. The beauty of this girl was as red pepper in Tutul's eyes.

"You would be Stactani Shiu," he mumbled.

She nodded. "Not that it matters. All that matters is to have you carried to your home, so that you won't die. It was wicked of me to ask you to save my worthless fawn; but it was foolish of you to obey me. You ought to have beaten me."

He had to laugh, much as it hurt him:

"I've never beaten a hummingbird, or a rose."

She laughed, too, but only for a moment. Then she made sure that the medicinal leaves were still thick on his

Tutul asked: "Why were you crying?"
"That was Shaeel! She knows now!"

wounds, and that there were no jaguars or serpents about before she said:

"I must go now. I mustn't be found with you. You see I am meant to be the bride of the Rain God, and he must not know of this; nor my people; nor yours. I'll send someone to take you to your mother. You must never tell on me. You mustn't know me when you see me. You must forget me. If—if only—"

But she dared not say it. Her eyes were pitiful with sudden tears. He caught at her. His fingers slid along her escaping arm. But her hand blessed his brow a moment. Then she was gone. He fainted, as if in losing her he had lost all his blood.

The next he knew, he was in bed at home, and being mauled by the family physician. He heard his mother explaining that a passing wayfarer had found a dead jaguar and, not far away, Tutul wounded, his knife all red, and his wounds stanched by healing leaves that had been placed on them—doubtless by some passing god or goddess. Tutul did not undeceive her. He might have reasoned that she spoke the truth.

When he was recovered of his wounds the people began to call him *Ek Balam* and tell of his miraculous healing through divine aid. Nobody knew what part Stactani Shiu had had in that famous battle or what that battle did to the two of them.

She had told him to forget her and never know her if he saw her. He did not try to forget her. He tried only to see her. But her family kept her in seclusion against the day they hoped for when her unblemished beauty should be sacrificed to the Rain God.

In spite of her forbidden sanctity, Tutul haunted the lanes about her home until, one twilight hour, he heard her voice in the garden. He leaped, caught the branches of a great tree that leaned across the wall. He hid in its leafy ambush and waited till she was alone: then spoke to her softly.

She was astounded to see him, but glad; yet afraid for him. She motioned him away. But he was afraid of nothing so much as losing sight of her. He beckoned until she stole to him and was as brave as he. After that they met often secretly, in spite of her unsuspecting parents and every danger.

Once Stactani's old nurse, Shkitza, came upon them. She scolded Stactani and reviled Tutul, but yielded at last to their prayers for mercy, and thenceforth served as their guardian and watchman against any surprise. The happiness of the two was an aching woe when they were together; but when they were apart, it was unbearable.

And that was the chief reason why Tutul refused to accept Nabtu as his slave when he won him in the game. He wanted no companion but Stactani. An attendant

would have been a nuisance. Nabtu would have been a spy. He could not abide the company even of such former cronies as Kukum Pacab, except in the heat of the games—which he always won, because he could not win Stactani.

And so, after helplessly wounding Nabtu's pride, he wounded Kukum's feelings, too; for when he had taken off his *tlachtli* armor and washed himself with a damp towel, he wrapped his waist-cloth about him, put on his fresh sandals and the wooden frame of his headdress with its gorgeous quetzal feathers flaming in the breeze, and left the court without waiting for Kukum or any of his fellow players.

He went sidewise down the steep narrow steps to the street, and did not lift his eyes to the vast palaces and temples he passed, with their intricate carvings telling the stories of the gods and the conquerors; the huge pyramids of pyramids, the colossal rattlesnakes twining everywhere, the feathered deities with their ornate earplugs, their lip-ornaments, their cotton armor, their jewelries of jade, their greedy weapons, their harness of stone on stone.

He might have glanced up at the parade of jaguars on the temple close to the *tlachtli* court, but he was tired of jaguars. He did not even salute the columns of the serpents of the hero god, the plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl. Nor did he salute the vast pyramid upholding the temple of the conqueror Kulkulcan. The colonnade of the thousand columns meant only his thousand woes. The high tower with its snail-shell spiral passages did not interest him, for he could never understand astronomy or why the scientists took their observations of the planets and based their complex calendars on the revolutions of the Great Star *Noh Ek* that we call Venus. He had to carve the symbols in the harsh stone as part of his apprenticeship, and that was all he cared for astronomy. He preferred to think of planets as lamps whose business it was to shine on Stactani when she huddled in his arms in their nest in the high tree.

Exhausted by his game with Nabtu, he did not go back to the shop where he worked at his art of sculpture. He was tired with a mortal fatigue of soul and in no mood to beat at the hard stone with the crude implements of harder stone or the soft blades of copper.

The sun was merciless upon the polished surfaces everywhere, and the glare would have been unendurable if it had not been softened by the dust that filled the air. The rains had not come in their due season. There were no rivers, or even brooks, and the few springs in the wilderness had long been silent under the dead leaves. Nearly all the wells were dry. The poor were dying of thirst and of the famines that come from thwarted harvests.

WANDERING like a wraith—like a *pixan*, one of the wandering dead—Tutul moved as silently in the muffling dust. He passed through the thronged streets, and the marketplace with the heaped-up towers of fruits and melons, guarded by old crones squatting and whining prices, dust lying thick on both merchandise and merchants. He passed the sellers of the feathered plumes whose silken strands the sculptors tried so hard to carve into the stone.

The dust floated from them in the hot wind.

If anyone spoke to him he did not hear or see. In spite of himself he paused on the brink of a big oval crater, a hundred and sixty feet across, two hundred and fifty feet long, the walls of limestone in layers thick or thin, and far below—seventy feet down—the jade-green pool of unknown depth. This was Chen Ku, the Sacred Well. Because Tutul had tried to keep away from it, he was driven to it by its dreadful fascination. There was water there. Always, even in the greatest drouths. For there the Rain God himself, morose old *Yum Chac*, made his home, dwelt in his temple out of sight of his ancient enemy the Sun God, *Kun Ich*.

Here at the brink many harrowed people were gathered, sending their prayers downward, begging *Yum Chac* to climb the sky and pour his blessings for their salvation.

In times of such disaster the people gathered to fling to *Yum Chac* their treasures, ancient heirlooms cherished for centuries in the families, even the precious jade that they could no longer find. They flung in also living young men selected as messengers. They never returned. When all else failed the people sent down through the air the most beautiful girl they could find, selected for her perfection, reared from childhood for this supreme gift to the surly god, and offered to him as his "bride."

Standing on the edge of the huge charnel, Tutul saw again the sacrifices he had seen: the gorgeous spectacles, the ceremonies of pageantry, the processions, the music, the endless prayers; then the arrival of the temple attendants carrying the girl in their arms, taking their stand on the platform on the ledge; swinging her perfect body back and forth, back and forth until, at the final cry of the high *Ah-Kin*, they flung her out into the air and she gleamed as she spun and fell and fell. Sometimes she shrieked in terror or whimpered faintly. When she struck at last the stone-like surface of the water, it often broke her gentle flesh before it opened to let her in, then closed above her. Sometimes it cast her up again for one last glance at life before she sank.

NOW it was Stactani that Tutul envisioned as thrown into the Well. He clenched his eyes against the imagined sight; he clenched his throat against any outcry. But clench his heart as he would he could not stifle the blasphemy that poisoned it:

"There is no Rain God! There is no marriage in the deep waters of the Sacred Well! There is no temple there, no happiness for a bride, no bridegroom. Down there is only deep dark water, clammy serpents, slimy ooze, skeletons of fish and snakes and men; the white frail bones of drowned girls wasted, flung away like the bowls of jade, the vessels of pure gold, the carved beads, and all the other precious things the people break and kill and toss into the Well."

In Tutul's eyes, Stactani was more exquisite than any gold, more smooth and glowing than any polished jade. The bitterness of it was that her very perfectness caused her doom. The artist in him abhorred the casting away of such beauty. The lover hated everybody, everything but Stactani. He hated her parents, who consented to her fate, hated the temple people called *chilans*, who gave sanctity to such savagery. As for the gods whose hideous images covered the walls of the temples and scarred the scene everywhere in monstrous effigies, he could not hate them. He annihilated them with denial.

Yet he had to admit that they had power even if they had not existence. The time of the festival of sacrifice was near. The *chilans* were completing their long fasts and vigils of prayer.

Even now Tutul heard about him the voices of good neighbors who gathered by the Well in reverence. One of them was saying:

"Why does the *Ah-Kin* keep us waiting, and dying? Why is the sacrifice delayed so long? The rains are only waiting for the rain-bringing bride."

He heard two matrons near him gossiping and one of them was saying:

"I only wish my own daughter was good-looking enough and good enough. I'd cast her into the Well myself."

The other said: "And so I would with mine; but she's as homely as she's wanton. She's the devil's own."

Lest he revile such mothers, Tutul hurried away. Ugly girls and wicked girls were safe. His perfect one was damned! Suddenly he was mad for a sight of her and a word with her. There would be so few more glimpses, so few more moments of listening to her voice, feeling the touch of her hand. . . .

The dusk that had helped to conceal them was hours away but he would not wait. He was in a mood to storm the doors of her father's palace and strike down any who kept him from her.

The sun beat on him like a slave-driver flogging a captive. The dust was ankle-deep, blinding, choking. The air was dead, the flowers, the trees. Only the rich still had green leaves or bright flowers about their homes. None of them had so many as the Lord of Shiu, the father of Stactani.

In that hushed garden there was no sound except a tinkling of tiny bells—so faint a tintinnabulation that one might have thought he heard the flowers chiming as the sleepy breeze stirred them. Out of the house came the withered Shkitza, dull of eye but keen of ear. She knew that the bells she heard were fastened to the doeskin sandals of the beloved girl she had cared for since her birth. The garden was like a portion of the jungle's very self and Shkitza could not see Stactani; so she called to her:

"Baby! Where are you?"

"Here I am."

"But where's 'here'?"

"Here by the *tishzula* bush."

"What mischief you up to now?"

"No mischief. I'm just watering the poor flowers."

STACTANI stood in the almost visible fragrance of the long white petals wakening to a song of incense as their thirst was quenched. But Shkitza scolded:

"My baby knows every drop of water is precious as a gold bell."

"The flowers are precious too. They're dying."

"Better flowers die than people. I ought to tell your father, but he'd beat you."

"It's my own share of the drinking-water I'm giving them."

Stactani's soft answer brought a storm from the old woman.

"If you give your share to the flowers you'll shrivel and wilt yourself." She stopped short and changed her tone. "Maybe that might be best. Better be ugly than dead. Look at me! I was always ugly and I'll live forever! Being ugly is the only safety in this cruel land."

Stactani looked amazed.

"How can you call this beautiful land cruel?"

"The land is beautiful enough, but the *chilans* are cruel, cruel!"

"Since I was a baby riding on your hip, you've taught me to look on the temple people as the best of men—and holy, too."

"Such things are easy for old people to tell and for young ones to believe," said Shkitza. "But I've seen too many sacrifices that never did any good. And now just because you're the most beautiful thing in all the world, they want to throw you out of it."

"I'm not beautiful at all," Stactani protested. "You call me that because your eyes are dim."

"Oh, no; you're not beautiful," Shkitza laughed dismally. "The day you were born, they looked you over and couldn't find a flaw. Didn't they put you to sleeping on feathers instead of cotton so as to keep you dainty? Didn't they put that temple woman, the *Ishkatun*, in charge of educating you? All they've thought of was fitting you for the sacrifice. And this very day your father is bringing the *Ah-Kin* to our house!"

"That's bad news for the chickens. He'll stay for dinner. He always does."

"And always keeps his old eyes on you, and says how beautiful you are. He watches you as if he fattened you for the market."

"Hush! Someone's coming from the house."

This shook Shkitza into a new fear: "*Ish-chel* save me, I forgot to tell you what I came out to say: your cousin, Shaeel Shiu—she's here to see you."

Almost treading on the words, Shaeel came forward with her royal stride. She had more beauty than Stactani—more at least in quantity, though its quality was less fine. Her eyes were black fire in her high head. Her shoulders were broader than Stactani's, her bosom deeper, rounder. Her loins were amorous and her great thighs strained the tight skirt about them. Though the day was hot, she wore a blouse of soft cloth. She always wore a *huipil*, but not for modesty as she pretended—it was to conceal a mole under her left breast, since that alone might be adjudged blemish enough to keep her from being a Rain God bride. She was opulently beautiful, but plainly had even greater gifts of anger, hatred, passionate love, and jealousy. Her voice was sullen as she protested now:

"Stac, did you have to keep me waiting in the house till I had to hunt you out here in the hot sun?"

"It was all my fault, lady," the old nurse broke in. "I forgot."

"I'll teach you to forget!"

She raised her hand to slap the old woman across the face, but Stactani checked her.

"You can't strike her. You sha'n't!"

Shaeel rounded on Stactani:

"Only you can beat her till she weeps."

"She'd never weep if she waited for me to beat her. She's crying because she's afraid I'll be chosen for the sacrifice."

This filled Shaeel with a sick jealousy. Jealousy for such a fate would have been strange if the girls of Chichen Itzá had not been brought up from childhood to look on death in the Well as a supreme victory. In their belief, the brides of the Rain God dwelt in palaces that made hovels of the richest palaces on earth. So there was bitter rivalry among the Chichen Itzá maidens for the privilege of that death. Their parents even tried to wheedle or bribe the *chilans* to select their own best children.

Stactani herself had looked forward nearly all her life to such a fate for herself without fear, thinking it the natural thing, the lovely fate. It was only when love wakened the woman in her, and made Tutul her ambition and her life, made her his property and his alone, that she had begun to dread the day of sacrifice and think of it as an hour of doom.

She would have been all too glad to yield the prize to Shaeel, who took umbrage even at Shkitza's mourning for Stactani.

"Why must Stactani be the one choice?" Shaeel demanded. "There are other girls in Chichen Itzá."

"There's you," Stactani broke in. "You and I agree that you're the most beautiful girl in town."

"That's not for me to say," Shaeel went on, "but—well, there used to be competitions before they chose the Rain God's bride. My mother says they put each girl on the throne before the pyramid of the Great Serpent and counted the drum beats until a cloud crossed the sun. The girl the sun shone on longest was the one they chose. My mother would have been the bride in her day; but the *Ah-Kin* cheated her in the count. And now I am to be cheated by having no count made at all."

TRYING to hold back the wild longing to live that welled up in her breast at the thought of her lover, Stactani offered: "You're more than welcome to my chance—if I have any."

"Everybody is saying that you've been chosen already," Shaeel said. "There's no hope for me."

"Hope?" gasped Stactani. "How could anybody *hope* to be thrown into the dark Well?" She had once looked on the ordeal as a mere passage from sunlight to the light of heaven. But loving only Tutul now, she could shudder: "That horrible moment, how can you bear to think of it?"

"It's only a moment, and then you're in the palace of the god," said Shaeel. "But I was thinking of the days

"I find no flaw in you, my dear. I am not the Rain God, but I could wish I were!"

before the sacrifice, the honors, the jewels, the songs, the flowers they heap on you; the great procession; the thousands of eyes; the *chilans* and the musicians celebrating you as the fairest of all women; the young men hating to see you taken from their sight—"

"I don't want to be covered with jewels and flowers, and stared at," said Stactani. "I'd be thinking only of that frightful moment when I should be cast out into the air and strike and sink and drown and die—"

"Die?" cried Shaeel. "But you don't die!"

"No, but dying would be better than living down there in the clammy arms of *Yum Chac.*"

Shaeel's dark head swung sadly as she muttered, half to herself:

"Better the loving arms of a god than the indifference of a man."

There was such despair in her words that Stactani's head came up with a start. Being a woman and in love she could explain anything by laying the blame on love.

"What young man could be indifferent to you, Shaeel?" she asked.

Before she realized it, Shaeel let slip the name:

"Tutul. Ek Balam."

In the still garden that name was as startling to Stactani as if a thunderbolt had crashed from the drouth-charred sky. Never dreaming that the sheltered Stactani had ever seen the youth, Shaeel went on:

"He belongs to the Chi family. He's the champion at *tlachtli,* a sculptor, a soldier, everything that a woman could love. But he loves no woman. One day he fought a jaguar and killed it, and was nearly killed. He was found alone but with his wounds dressed. Who dressed

them, he couldn't—or wouldn't—say. Perhaps it was one of the witches—a *shtabai,* maybe. She may have left her home in a ceiba tree and saved his life. Sometimes, they say, those witches fall in love with men, and put a spell on them. Perhaps Tutul is bewitched by one of those demons. If I thought he loved a mortal woman, I'd win him away from her—or kill her if I couldn't. But how can I fight the spell of a *shtabai*? The man I love won't look at me! There's no happiness for me in this world. And they won't send me to the other."

She was sobbing wildly now—so proud and beautiful a one so humbled and distorted with grief! Stactani laid a tender hand on her hair. But Shaeel, hating her own weakness, struck Stactani's hand away and ran into the deeper garden where the thicket hid her and the great tree went up across the wall, the great tree that Tutul climbed to when he kept his trysts.

STACTANI was glad that it was not his hour to meet her there, and stood irresolute, longing to follow Shaeel and comfort her. Yet she felt guilty, and a hypocrite, too, for letting Shaeel believe that she did not even know Tutul.

Before she could move, Shaeel was back from her retreat, her tears and her grief gone, her face ablaze.

"You liar! You little harlot!" she cried. "You're the *shtabai* that put the spell on Ek Balam. He comes to visit you in secret. He's there now. He heard me and thought I was you, and called down to me, 'Stactani, my sweet.' You let me think you'd never seen him, you—you—"

Shkitza thrust herself in front of Stactani to save her. Shaeel struck the old woman in the face, seized her by the hair and beat her about the head till Stactani, who would not move in self-protection, caught Shaeel's arms and wrenched them aside, flung her to her knees, and—

"Lady Stactani, your father has come home and brought the *Ah-Kin.* They are waiting for you."

It was the voice of a household slave who at that moment came from the house. He must have been startled to find the two young ladies in such battle and dishevelment, but he knew his place. Bowing as if he had seen nothing, he turned and went back into the house.

The two girls forgot their war in their terror of the Lord of Shiu and the *Ah-Kin.* Shaeel rose and began to straighten her hair, her *huipil* and her *pik,* while Stactani made herself as proper as she could, with the help of Shkitza.

But she was in a four-fold terror, afraid of her father and of the *Ah-Kin* and his fatal mission; afraid of the vengeful Shaeel and what she might say; afraid for Tutul and the peril of his discovery.

Shaeel's thoughts were in equal tempest. Her first impulse was to denounce Stactani to her father, and, better yet, to the *Ah-Kin* for her evil knowledge of Tutul Chi, and his evil knowledge of her. His invasion of the garden would be held almost a deathworthy offense—especially since his family and Stactani's were ancient enemies. With a word Shaeel might have Tutul killed, and perhaps Stactani, too.

But the prospect of Tutul's death, and at her own hands, filled Shaeel with horror. Any accusation of Stactani would be readily believed since a whisper could blow away a woman's good name. If the scandal were known to the people and the *chilans,* Stactani would never be chosen as the virgin bride of the Rain God. Then the honor and the glory might well fall to Shaeel. But the sight of Tutul had reawakened her love of him—and her hope, too, now that her rival turned out to be no witch but only another girl.

If Shaeel did not speak, then Stactani would be sacrificed, and Shaeel might win Tutul for herself. In any case Stactani would not have him.

Whatever Shaeel said now would be irretrievable. She wanted to deal the most harm to Stactani and gain the most profit for herself. But what was harm and what was profit? That would take long quiet thinking, and her thoughts were worse tangled now than the thread about the spindle-whorl when she fell asleep at the eternal spinning that filled a woman's hours.

In any case, she was in no mood to face the *Ah-Kin* and the Lord of Shiu. So she ran to a little gate in the garden, slipped through it and was gone, leaving Stactani utterly unable to decide which way to turn. Her father had sent for her, but she must warn Tutul that he had been seen; that their secret was no longer a secret. Shkitza urged her toward the house, but she tore her arm from Shkitza's feeble grasp and darted into the thicket. There was Tutul seated on the great tree trunk, half-lost in the leaves and all dappled and gilded with the light that pierced them. He called down to her:

"Why did you run away? Why were you crying?"

"That was Shaeel! She knows now! She's gone. There's no telling what she plans to do. But she hates me more than ever because of you."

"Because of me?"

"She loves you and she thinks you love me."

"*Thinks* I love you!"

From the house came faintly the sound of her father's voice calling her angrily. She whispered up to Tutul:

"He'll kill you if he finds you here. Tonight—after dark! Here!"

She was gone. Snatching a flower from the *tishzula* bush and fastening it in her hair as an excuse for her delay, she ran to where her father waited for her. She was so beautiful as she dawned out of the dark foliage that he forgave her, as one forgives beauty for everything. When she would have bowed to her knees before him, he caught her up and hurried her into the presence of the *Ah-Kin,* a strange old man almost lost in his robes and ornaments.

From far above him sheafs of feathers went up and the plumage of many quetzal birds in many colors cascaded

down about the enormous miter where serpent-heads were twined, and pendants drooped. In his ears were buttons that held more feathers, and long strings of carved beads. At the corners of his mouth were ornate labrets of carved wood. From about his neck drooped a breastpiece of most complex jewelry. His arms were hugely bracelets. From his waist hung a skirt of gorgeous fabric madly colored. A mantle of jaguar skin and scarlet fabric hung from his shoulders and was bedecked with feathers. Below his knees were further ornaments and his high sandals were a hodge-podge of color and of ornament. He carried the *caluac*, the wand of his sacred office.

Only his eyes seemed to live beneath the mass of raiment and plumage, his fierce old eyes and the one sharp tooth in his ancient mouth.

BEFORE him Stactani dipped to her knees and bent forward till her brow was at his feet. With a senile laugh of approval, he groaned and creaked with rheumatism as he reached out a hand and raised her head.

When she sat trembling before him he peered so closely into her eyes that his feathers fell about her head and his beads rattled against her bare shoulders. He studied her as if she were some new statue of one of the goddesses—perhaps *Zuhuy Kak*, the Virgin Fire, who was patroness of infants; or *Ish Tub Tun*, the patroness of jewelers, "she who spits out emeralds." But as his harsh, cold old palms rasped Stactani's flesh, her blood flowed away from beneath them. In her heart she might have been *Ish Tabai*, the patroness of suicides.

When the dotard had fondled her all he dared, he snickered:

"These eyes of mine have seen many brides and many who wished to be brides of *Yum Chac;* but never a prettier, never a prettier. I do not see as well as once I did; but I find no flaw in you, my dear. I am not the Rain God, but I could wish I were!"

Stactani loathed him for his lascivious laughter. He was as untrue to his god as he would make her untrue to her own god, Tutul. Her father did not dream of defending her from the *Ah-Kin's* touch or his words. Her father was blinded by his overweening pride, and eager only to deliver the oration he had prepared:

"My child, you have brought great honor to our house. The memory you leave with us when you go to your new home will be forever sweet. We shall never forget you."

The *Ah-Kin* had found her too much alive; but her father spoke of her as if she were already dead. He tossed her into the pit of oblivion without a word of regret. He did not love her—had never loved her. She had loved him, revered him. And now suddenly he had killed himself in her heart. The loss was so great that she whirled and fell at his feet, clutching his ankles and crying:

"Father, father, don't throw me away! I loved you. Love me a little. Save me!"

It was not her woe or her fear that hurt him. It was his pride that she shamed. Yet he must finish his oration over the corpse she already was:

"My daughter's name shall be immortal among the saviors of our people. She will not yield to womanish cowardice."

That angered her. She dared—after all what had she to lose? What more could they do to her? She stood to her full height, scant as it was, and dared to answer:

"Not be womanish, you say? What else am I selected for? Does the Rain God want a man and a warrior for his bride? Or is it a soft young girl he craves?"

Her father could have broken her bones if he had not been saving her for the sacrifice. He spared her now as coldly as he would have spared a fragile bowl of age-old jade. He even dignified her with argument.

"My daughter, being my daughter, is brave. They will say of her, 'She was the child of a soldier. She loved her country, her people. By giving herself to the Rain God, she saved the lives of thousands on thousands, saved the harvest, the nation.'"

"I love my country," she answered stoutly. "If my going to *Yum Chac* would save the people, I could go to him singing. But—tell me, Father. I have heard of many, many girls thrown into the Well, but I have never heard of any rain that followed soon. When the rains fell at last, it was always long afterward. Perhaps the Rain God took so much pleasure in his new bride that he wouldn't leave her even to save the people. I've been told that never once have the clouds come sooner than they might have come if there had been no bride."

If this infuriated her father, it threw the *Ah-Kin* into a palsy of wrath. He rounded on the Lord of Shiu.

"Do you teach such sacrilege to the young in this house?" Then he gripped Stactani's bared shoulders and left a bruise there as he demanded: "Who dared tell you such monstrous lies? Who was it?"

It was Tutul, of course; but Stactani would never betray his name. She answered calmly—perhaps with the calm of the same terror that had held her fawn still before the jaguar:

"What does it matter? The brides fell into the Well; but did the rains fall?"

Perhaps she had a faint hope that they might punish her insolence by dismissing her. Perhaps the *Ah-Kin* saw through the ruse. He put out his hand to stay the uplifted fist of her father and said with that sickening snicker of his, as if Stactani were not there to hear:

"We must not forget that it is the nature of brides to be afraid; and to seem unwilling; and to ask foolish questions. The Rain God will like her all the better for her reluctance. It will give him something to overcome. Too eager a bride, too meek a mate would probably be rejected by *Yum Chac* and thrown back out of the Well. Let the child have her thoughts and her questions, and let the Rain God answer them in his own way. She is the perfect soul in the perfect body. I think she will be this year's bride. See to it that nothing is done to disturb her serenity and peace."

Again he passed his hands over her, and she despaired indeed, because her rebellion had only tightened her chains. When they went in to dinner, her father dealt very tenderly with her; but she looked on him as a stranger, as one dead to her, though unburied.

When a Mayan died and his people did not want his ghost to return, they set food by the coffin. But for the loved one whose presence they desired they kept a pathway plain.

At table Stactani pressed food upon her father. He did not understand why. He thought she was wheedling him to forgive her.

After the dinner when the *Ah-Kin* had gone, she heard her father angrily telling her mother what had happened. She heard her mother cry out—not against her father but against Stactani, and promise swift punishment. Her father commanded her mother to be patient with her, but now her mother was also dead. Stactani was an orphan indeed, with no faith left, and no friends but the old nurse and her mad young lover.

WHEN night fell, she slipped out into the garden, and, finding Tutul there, climbed the tree and flung her arms about him without waiting for his embrace. She clung to him with a ferocity that bewildered him till she told him what she had endured.

Then his anger blazed. She had to caution him again and again to lower his voice. She had to stop his mouth with kisses, lest he be heard. The hideous unbearable fact was that she was perfect and she loved him.

"Why, why weren't you born plain and crooked and ugly to look at?" he groaned.

She sighed in answer:

"You wouldn't have loved me then."

"Oh, but I would have—more than now, if that could be."

The Mayans believed that the flesh was briefly tenanted by a separate, an immortal spirit, which they called by almost our own word for "soul." They called that deathless self the *yol*, and were assured that after death it went, according to its good or evil life, to the hell called *Mitna*, or to heaven, *Hun Anil*, where it basked in bliss under the great evergreen *Yaxche* tree. So it was natural for Tutul to sever Stactani from her flesh and believe that their beauties were separate.

"The real You is your soul!" he said. "It would be beautiful in any flesh. I could almost hate you because your body is so shapely, your teeth so white, your eyes so beautiful."

Still she sighed: "You wouldn't love me if I were crooked and ugly."

"Yes, yes! This little body of yours is adorable, but it's only a robe around you. In the dark here, I can't see you; yet I love you. When I'm away from you I can't see you, yet I love you. Don't you believe that I'll love you when you are old and—oh, my sweet, you never will grow old! You are to die just as you are, and soon—soon!"

"I should have loved you," she whispered, "loved you maybe even better when you were feeble and wrinkled. Oh, why could we not grow old together like other people? I'm as good as dead. But don't—oh, don't forget me! Remember always that I'll be thinking of you down there in the Sacred Well. You say there's no Rain God there. It will be worse for me if there is. But no god can ever keep me from loving you. If it had been you instead of me—if they had done with you as they have with so many other men—stretched you on the altar stone while the cruel *chacs* held you by the hands and feet and the *nacon* opened your breast with the flint dagger, and—"

Stactani could not bear the vision she conjured from her memory. The Mayan men were used to blood. They shed their own in rites obscene and torturous. They smeared their blood on one another and on the images.

"If the *nacon* thrust in his hand and tore out my heart and flung my body down the temple steps, it would have rolled to your feet, my love."

"And I would have lifted it up, all dust and blood, and pressed it to my lips and laid it on my breast against my heart."

He caught her to him so close their two hearts seemed to knock against each other, beating at walls that kept them apart. He was so desperate that he cried:

"I'll never let the Rain God have you! I fought the sacred black jaguar and killed him. I'll fight *Yum Chac* under the water and and in his own palace—if he has one. If *Hunab Ku*, the good, kind father god will help me, the evil gods shall never touch you. If *Yum Chac* were good, he'd never ask to have little girls torn from the men they love and flung to him—like bones thrown to dogs. He'd send the rain as a gift to the people. After that, he could come for his bride and make her love him, then ask for her hand."

"No matter how glorious he might be," Stactani whispered, "I'd rather be your mate in the jungle."

That word illuminated the night that filled Tutul's soul.

"The jungle? The jungle! Would you run away into the jungle with me?"

"Going into the jungle while we're young and strong—it would be as if our souls passed through death into the gardens of *Hun Anil*."

SUDDENLY their midnight was dawn. It was as if the gracious god *Itzamna*, the god of the East, god of the morning dew, and his wife, the rainbow goddess *Ish Chel*, smiled on them.

"We can easily escape into the jungle," Tutul said. "We might push on to Mayapán. I could earn a living there as a sculptor."

"No, no," said Stactani. "They might be afraid of offending this city and the *Ah-Kin*. They might send me back, and kill you, or sell you for a slave. Let's hide in the jungle and live there, just us two."

That was enough. All the riddles were answered. He was what Nabtu had called him, a nine-souled man. The jungle might have its bad points, but the city was dying of drouth, reeking with bloody sacrifices. In the wilderness there were poisonous snakes, tigers, clouds of insects. But what jaguar could be more cruel than was Stactani's own father? What famine more heartless than her mother?

They could live on the fruits of the trees and on the wild deer. They could reach the seashore and fish. They might find their way to some foreign land where he could make his fortune as a maker of statuary. They would travel light to escape pursuit. He would take his spears and his throwing-stick, his bow and arrows, his knives, and a little food and water. She must slip away with only her heaviest sandals and her warmest cloak. They would waste no time, but escape the next night. They were so happy that they were laughing when they parted.

THE following day Tutul was busy with preparations. He let no one know that he even dreamed of going. He dared not tell his father and mother of his plans, devoted as they were to his happiness; but he spent a late afternoon hour with them, telling them how good they were, and how much he loved them both. He pretended that he was going to sleep early so that he might set out at dawn on a hunt.

But just as he was saying "good night" for "farewell," a slave brought word that his friend Kukum Pacab was outside asking for a word with him.

A friend is a friend no longer when a man is madly in love, and Tutul was hard put to it not to be curt; for Stactani would be waiting at the tree and in danger of discovery. He made it plain to Kukum that he was pressed for time. Kukum said in a low, cautious tone:

"You know an old hag named Shkitza?"

Startled, Tutul tried to dodge the question.

"Shkitza?"

"Shkitza," said Kukum, "a servant of the Shius."

"The Shius?"

"Asking you questions is like calling down a well," said Kukum. "I get my own words back. Well, I'll tell you: On my way home this evening, I passed the palace of the Shiu. An old woman opened a little gate in the garden wall, and beckoned to me. She asked me if I knew Tutul Chi. 'He's my best friend,' I said, bragging. 'If he's your friend,' she said, 'tell him Someone has betrayed him. Someone else is locked up and can't meet him tonight by the tree. Her father doesn't know his name, but he'll be watching for him to kill him.' The old woman said they tried to drag your name from her. They beat her, tortured her. Her face was covered with welts and she could hardly stand to finish what she said. She said that Someone you knew had threatened to kill herself if they hurt old Shkitza any more. She said to tell you all this, and you would understand, even if I didn't. She begged you in the name of *Itzamna* not to try to see a certain Someone tonight, or ever any more. Then she began to weep and closed the gate. And now I've told you. Does it mean anything?"

"It means everything," Tutul said. "But life doesn't mean anything any more."

Now that his love was lost, his friend became precious to him again. It helped him a little to tell his whole story. He thanked Kukum for his good offices and bade him good night till the morrow.

He guessed that it was Shaeel who had betrayed Stactani and he was wondering what revenge he could take on her when he found at his door Nabtu Yaxman waiting for him. He was clad in temple robes but he bowed low and saluted Tutul with the word "Master!"

Tutul was in no friendly mood. He said:

"I told you to keep your distance till I sent for you."

"Yes, Master, but I come as a messenger of someone else—from someone who says she loves you."

Tutul's heart beat fast with hope that he came from Stactani; but it sank as Nabtu went on:

"She told me not to tell you her name, but she does not own me. You do. Her name is Shaeel."

"Shaeel? And she said she loved me?"

"Shaeel's saying a thing does not prove it true. Still, that was what she said to say. She said to tell you that she was in a certain garden this afternoon and saw you there. She would have told no one of it but you were also seen there by a tattling slave-girl. The father of the girl you were visiting tried to drag your name out of Shaeel, but she would rather have died than betray you. Unable to learn your name, the father swore that he would set a trap for you and kill you when he caught you.

"That is the story Shaeel told me to tell you. How true it is, you would know better than I could. All I know is that Shaeel begged you not to go to that garden tonight or ever. And now you have her message. Has my master any answer to send back?"

"None," said Tutul.

Nabtu lingered.

"Has my Master any errand for me to run?"

"Yes. Go to *Mitna!* And stay there till I send for you."

Nabtu bowed low and returned to his temple.

Now Tutul's head was in a whirl. The two messages agreed on the warning to Tutul not to visit Stactani's garden on peril of death. Shaeel had undoubtedly betrayed Stactani. According to Nabtu, Shaeel loved Tutul and was trying to save him from assassination. But if she had not betrayed him, he and Stactani would have been on their way to the jungle by now. That dream was dead.

He went back into his house and told his mother that he had given up his hunting-trip. He went to bed but only to lie awake wondering whether Shaeel were a liar in everything; or only in saying that she loved him.

IT had taken Shaeel many a tormented hour to make up her mind just what she wanted most. In utter bitterness she had told herself that she could never aspire to the part of bride because of that mole. In less bitterness she had told herself that she would really rather be the bride of Tutul than of the Rain God. But how could she get Stactani out of the way without endangering Tutul?

She could blacken Stactani's name with suspicion and perhaps have her rejected as the Rain God's bride. But that would leave her alive and in possession of Tutul.

Two things Shaeel must do: keep Stactani from seeing Tutul again, and keep Tutul from going into that garden again. Next she must warn Stactani's parents of their daughter's unseemly behavior in the garden, yet also keep them from suspecting Tutul.

So, after much pondering and rehearsing, she visited Stactani's mother; found her and Stactani and Shkitza all spinning furiously, working at the bridal robe for the Rain God ceremony. They gave Shaeel a spindle whorl with a heap of cotton to thread, and set her to work. For a while she talked of this and that; then suddenly she said, in a voice loud enough for the Lord of Shiu to hear in the next room.

"Oh, Stactani, I heard the silliest story this morning. I was at the market buying melons and papayas and peppers for dinner; and two girls were there, marketing for their families. I don't know who they were. They were talking of the horrible drouth, of course. Nobody talks of anything else. One of them said, 'I wish they'd hurry and marry Stactani Shiu to the Rain God before everybody dies of thirst.' And the other girl laughed and lowered her voice and said, 'Her parents had better marry her to him soon, or she'll run off with a certain young man.' The other girl gasped, 'A young man? Are you crazy?' The other one said, 'I may be crazy, but she's crazier, for I saw a young man climbing her garden wall to a big tree that grows there. It was so dark I couldn't see who he was, so I hid to see what he was up to, and I saw her meet him there.' Then the other girl said, 'Her? Who?' and the first one said, 'Stactani Shiu. The young man called her by name and she—well, if the Rain God could have seen the way she acted with that young man, he would have drowned them in rain,' she said. Those were her very words, and then the girls moved on, still chattering. I lost them in the crowd.

"The lying hussy didn't give the young man a name because, of course, there's no such man. But I thought I ought to tell you. Isn't it sickening how people will make up lies? Even *your* name couldn't escape the gossips!"

AT Shaeel's first words Stactani's mother had stopped short in her spinning and was staring at Stactani, who sat staring at Shaeel. She was most horrified at her cousin's smiling duplicity and understood that Shaeel kept Tutul's name out of her story because she loved him and wanted him for herself.

And now Shaeel was frightened by her own success. She cast an eye at the sun and cried:

"It's later than I thought. My mother will beat me for being late. I hope I haven't upset you, Stactani. You know how women's tongues will clack. They spare nobody. Well, good-by."

Nobody answered her. Nobody went with her to the door. But she was not angry. She could hardly keep from shrieking with laughter till she was out of earshot.

Of course Stactani's mother began to question her at once and found her too stunned even to attempt an evasion. Instantly the Lord of Shiu came into the room. He had heard everything Shaeel had said. He stormed at Stactani:

"Your shamelessness is sacrilege. But I am forbidden to touch you. You don't belong to me. You belong to the Rain God. And he is more than welcome to you. But the man—that lover of yours, I can deal with him. I'll have his life. What is his name?"

She would not tell him, though he grew so desperate that he could not keep his hands from her. He took her by the throat, demanding:

"Tell me who he is or I swear I'll kill you."

"Please do, Father. It would be the one kind thing you've ever done to me."

His hands fell away from her. He could all too easily exchange the honor of being the Rain God's father-in-law for the scandal of being father to a common wanton. His eyes fell on Shkitza. When she refused to tell him the man's name, he could beat her—and he did; he had a slave flog her till Stactani threatened to kill herself if any further pain were inflicted on her nurse.

Helpless now, the Lord of Shiu could vent his rage on the guilty man. He vowed to have him lassoed, and dragged through the garden and beaten to death.

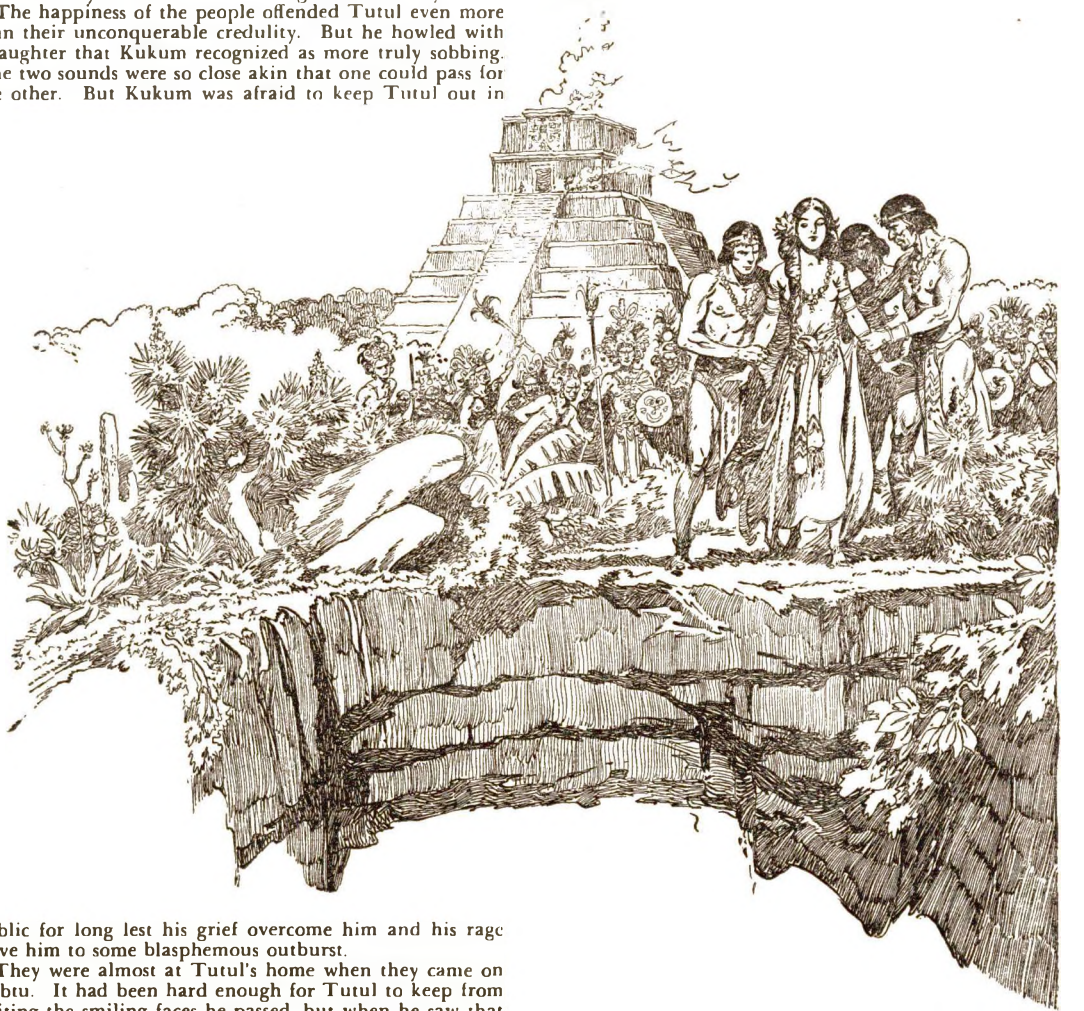
"Better yet," he cried, "I'll turn him over to the *Ah-Kin* for sacrilege. The *Ah-Kin* will have him stood up on a height and shot full of arrows by the temple dancers as they circle about him, singing. They'll shoot till he looks like a hedgehog."

But the Lord of Shiu abruptly realized that the public disgrace of Stactani's lover would bring equal disgrace on the family of Shiu; it would keep Stactani from the Rain God. He reverted to his plan of having his slaves lie in ambush for the man, kill him, and throw his body into the jungle. The Lord of Shiu and his slaves waited all night for Stactani's lover to appear. But no one came.

This was the only happiness that befell Stactani in the lonely room that was her prison cell. And the only happiness that Tutul found was in the friendship of Kukum Pacab, who clung to him like a twin brother, helping to divert from him the suspicion the Lord of Shiu cast on every young man in town.

It was Kukum who dragged Tutul out to the *tlachtli* court and made him play like mad, to keep him from going mad. When at last the name of Stactani Shiu was definitely proclaimed by the *Ah-Kin* as the next bride of the Rain God, Kukum forced Tutul to join the crowds revelling in the streets at the mere announcement, as if they could already hear the rain running across the sky.

The happiness of the people offended Tutul even more than their unconquerable credulity. But he howled with a laughter that Kukum recognized as more truly sobbing. The two sounds were so close akin that one could pass for the other. But Kukum was afraid to keep Tutul out in



public for long lest his grief overcome him and his rage drive him to some blasphemous outburst.

They were almost at Tutul's home when they came on Nabtu. It had been hard enough for Tutul to keep from smiting the smiling faces he passed, but when he saw that even the sour-faced Nabtu was aglow, Tutul seized him and demanded what he was so glad of.

"A great honor came to me and I accepted it," Nabtu stammered. "I forgot that I was still your slave."

"What honor?" Tutul said. "What do I care what honor comes to you in this town without honor? What honor?"

"The *Ah-Kin* said I had done so well at my studies that he was appointing me one of the two men who are to—to toss the bride of the Rain God into the Sacred Well."

"What?" Tutul cried. "What did you tell me? You are to be one of the two who will fling Stactani away?"

"Yes. The *Ah-Kin* has been instructing us just how she must be swung back and forth till the last signal."

Tutul knew what he meant: the bride must be pitched straight out so that she would fall and strike the water horizontally. Sometimes they had thrown the bride so that she went in head-first, and then she was hardly stunned, but came up again, and sometimes swam ashore or was helped ashore. This meant that the Rain God sent her back as a messenger to tell the people his will.

Nabtu was talking on:

"The *Ah-Kin* wants to make sure that Stactani Shiu will not return. He wants *Yum Chac* to keep her and release the rain."

Tutul was breathing hard. His mind was racing, trying to capture a thought while Nabtu was saying:

"Master, do you deny me the honor of that great task?"

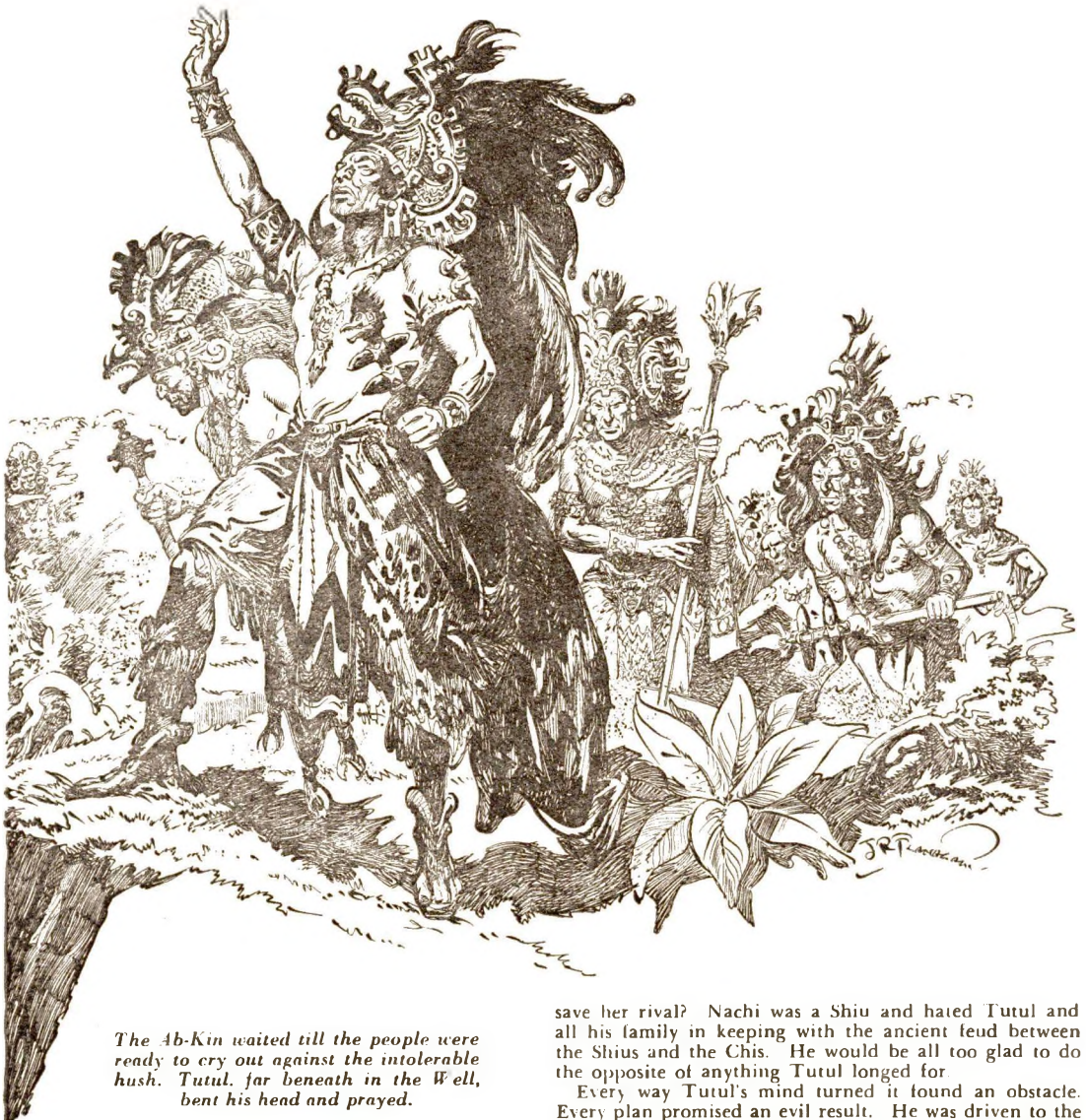
Tutul seized him again, and said:

"Listen, Nabtu, I told you that you were free till one day. Well, that day is the day of the sacrifice. This is your one command: See to it that when you throw Stactani into the well she goes in head-first like a spear."

"But the *Ah-Kin* told us—"

"Do you belong to him—or to me? If I speak a word, you will be turned out of the temple as a slave. If you fail me—"

"Master, Master, I'll obey you. But there's the other man. How can I compel him to disobey the *Ah-Kin*? How can I persuade or bribe him? I'd never dare even to ask him to commit the sacrilege. He is a temple physician!"



The Ah-Kin waited till the people were ready to cry out against the intolerable hush. Tutul, far beneath in the Well, bent his head and prayed.

"Who is he?" demanded Tutul hopefully.

"Nachi Shiu."

"Not Shaeel's brother!"

This was a blow to Tutul's wild new hope. Then Nabtu had an idea—a foolish one, worse than none.

"You remember, Shaeel told me to tell you that she loved you. Why don't *you* ask her to ask her brother?"

Tutul answered darkly: "That's your affair, not mine. I tell you once more: throw Stactani into the air so that she will turn and fall like a spear. If she does, and lives, you're free. If not, whether it's your fault or Nachi's, I'll kill you, or sell you to someone who'll make you wish I'd killed you."

He left Nabtu pondering what bribe or threat might bend Nachi Shiu to his will. Tutul was not even tempted to plead with Shaeel. Even if he pretended to love her how could he fool her sharp wits into asking her brother to save her rival? Nachi was a Shiu and hated Tutul and all his family in keeping with the ancient feud between the Shius and the Chis. He would be all too glad to do the opposite of anything Tutul longed for.

Every way Tutul's mind turned it found an obstacle. Every plan promised an evil result. He was driven to the hopeless surrender of deciding not to meddle with his fate, but let the good gods fight their own battle with the demons; then abide the result.

Long and black was the night he spent before the sacrifice. There was no way of sending a word of love or farewell to Stactani; he could think of not one step to take in her behalf. At midnight he stole from his home and waited at the brim of the crater for the first glimmer of light from the climbing sun. It found him clambering down the steep pathway to the edge of the murky water. There was a broad ledge in the striated wall and he hid himself beneath it. As morning filled the sky the people began to gather above about the great oval. They could not see Tutul; but as they bent over to look down, their reflected faces made it look to him as if the well itself were peopled by an upward-looking throng. In the mirroring water Tutul could see the inverted front of the temple towering high and wavering with every ripple as if in an

unceasing earthquake. Great braziers stood high, filled with copal. As they were lighted by a temple attendant, white smoke plumed up from them. Tutul could remember how fragrant all the air would be with the incense, but where he was, all was dark and fetid with the stench of an enormous grave.

On the platforms above while the people waited for the procession to arrive, they were kept excited by dancers in fantastic costumes, gyrating in orgiastic frenzies as men on high stilts stalked and whirled among them, singing to shrieking instruments. The comedians enacted a sacred drama of sacrifice. Everything was woeful elegies about drouth and death, broken with rapturous appeals for the blessedness of rain, rain, rain.

MEANWHILE, at the distant temple of Kulkulcan, the ceremonial parade was forming for its march along the Sacred Highway to the Sacred Well. Men and women from all the temples of all the gods and goddesses were gathered there.

Inside the temple was the helpless little girl whose immolation was the cause and center of the whole festival of death. The women of the temple were bathing her and anointing her and clothing her in the sacramental robe. Then the *Ah-Kin* sprinkled her with the sacred water, dew gathered in the morning.

Next he proffered her an ornate bowl filled with a consecrated liquor and bade her drain it. It was really a drug whose purpose was both the merciful soothing of her fears and an assurance that she should not go to her bridegroom fighting in terror.

She was now too sanctified a personage to touch the ground, so she was lifted and carried to a curtained litter carved and gilded and bedecked with plumes and jewels. As soon as she was ensconced there, music blared. The processional began. The high *Ah-Kin* led it, followed by the nobility, the generals, the judges, the guilds of merchants and architects, astronomers, sculptors, painters, weavers—the best of the populace. . . .

Stactani had been reminding herself to be brave because she was the beloved of the brave Ek Balam. The vanity and cruelty of her fate had kept her soul in turmoil, until she drank the liquor. Then a strange peace crept through her flesh and her spirit. All that was happening was a dream. The unending drums were the echoed thumping of her own heart. The litter she rode in was a canoe drifting along a shaded stream, and the songs and cries of the people, the clamor of the instruments only the plash of waves against the boat. She felt that it was gliding swiftly toward a steep cataract. Yet it did not terrify her. Her thoughts were of Tutul, but confused and sweet as if he were a youth she remembered faintly, and was sure to find again in a beautiful new land.

Behind the litter, carried by four slaves, walked Nabtu and Shaeel's brother, Nachi. The sight of the slaves kept reminding Nabtu that his future life depended on the way Stactani was sent into the air. However deftly he might make the throw, Nachi could thwart his skill and end his freedom.

Numberless were the pauses when the procession was checked by some delay ahead. Finally the tormented Nabtu spoke.

"Nachi," he said, "do you realize that your sister Shaeel is planning to marry Tutul Chi?"

"A Shiu marry a Chi?" Nachi laughed derisively.

"Shaeel told me so herself. She is desperately in love with Tutul. She sent me with a message to him."

"I'll see her dead before she marries him."

"There's an easier way than that. Stactani loves Tutul and he loves her. If she is not drowned—I mean if the Rain God sends her back from the Well, she will marry Tutul."

"But Stactani is one of our family, too. Her father would never consent to such degradation."

"She is no longer one of your family. She belongs to *Yum Chac*. If he keeps her, you can never save your sister from disgracing herself and you."

"You said there was an easy way to save us from that."

"If you and I should throw Stactani into the Well so that she plunges straight down, she will come back to the surface as a messenger from *Yum Chac*, but still no longer a Shiu. Tutul will claim her and Shaeel cannot marry him. But now Shaeel is waiting for Stactani to leave this world forever. Then—well, you know Shaeel. She'll have Tutul or tear the world apart, ruin herself and him and all of you."

The procession moved on again and Nachi did not speak. Soon there was another halt and Nabtu pleaded:

"This means more to me than it does even to you, Nachi. I implore you to help me."

"Help you? You want to marry Shaeel yourself?"

This was something Nabtu had not bargained for. But anything would do that might serve as a bribe for Nachi.

"Of course. I love her. I will make her love me."

"But you're asking me to disobey the *Ah-Kin*," Nachi protested, "and offend the Rain God."

"The Rain God can keep Stactani if he wants her," said Nabtu. "But I warn you. If she does not come back, you'll regret it all your life. And your family will share your regret."

The march began again. There was no further chance for talk before the *Ah-Kin* and the long, long line reached the temple by the Sacred Well. Now began an almost endless ritual of chants, prayers, invocations. At last the *Ah-Kin* called for the first oblation to the Rain God.

Every man, woman and child in the multitude had brought some offering according to his means, or hers. The wealthiest carried priceless heirlooms kept in their families for centuries, bowls and plaques, ornate pendants and chalices of jade, crowns and tiaras of pure gold, carved and wreathed emerald-studded amulets, chains of hollow golden bells, weapons, spears, throwing-sticks, swords, and daggers of jade, flint, obsidian. The poor carried household idols, vessels of humble pottery, balls of copal, strings of beads. Even the children brought along their dolls and toys, cheap things but the most genuine sacrifice of all.

Before the gifts were tossed into the Well, they must be "killed." So the people held them out in their hands while temple officers called *hol-cans* struck and shattered them with copper hatchets. Then the people gathered the fragments together and waited for the *Ah-Kin's* command.

THROUGHOUT the endless hours Tutul had cowered in his hiding-place, so tortured by the hateful rites and the maddening delay that he was almost ready to stand forth and shout to the *Ah-Kin:*

"Oh, let her die and have it over with." Even then he was thinking more of Stactani's imagined torment than his own.

Suddenly the first of the offerings was made. A *chilan* held high a basket filled with flaming copal. He offered it to the four gods of North, South, East and West, then let it fall. Trailing a lengthening cloud of aromatic smoke, it struck the water at last and sank in a flurry of eddying bubbles.

This was the signal for the general offerings and the air was filled at once with thousands of broken treasures. They fell on the dark water in a clattering hailstorm. When the last child had surrendered its doll to the greedy Rain God, and the Lord of Shiu had thrown in the most treasured and most ancient work of art in his possession, there was a solemn hush.

A madness of blaring horns, clangorous cymbals, squealing fifes, thudding drums, human voices in unhuman, inhuman stridor raged in enormous delirium. It ended at the uplifting of the *Ah-Kin's* wand.

A covey of girls in brightly embroidered robes swept forward across the platform at the brink of the Well. They

murmured little songs as they scattered flowers. They fell back to make way for the two young men, Nabtu and Nachi, who lifted the almost unconscious Stactani from her litter and brought her forward in their arms.

The multitude was mute. The very air seemed to listen and the soft footsteps of the men could be heard as they advanced to where one more step would have sent them down into the Well with their burden.

The *Ah-Kin* waited and waited till the people were ready to cry out against the intolerable hush. Tutul, far beneath, bent his head above his clenched hands and prayed to *Hunab Ku*.

The *Ah-Kin's* lean arm shot up. A great drum boomed. The thud reverberated and the trembling air carried the sound outward, miles upon miles.

Nabtu and Nachi standing face to face, swung Stactani's body out over the abyss.

BUT they did not let her go. They swung her back again and waited. The *Ah-Kin* thrust his hand high. The drum was smitten again. Nachi and Nabtu swung Stactani's body out over the abyss, her light robe fluttering about her. They brought her back again as if they were rocking a sleeping child.

Again and again the drum was smitten until the air shuddered for the eighth time.

Tutul gazed upward in an agony of fear and hope. The next drum-roar, he knew, would beat the sacred number nine, and then—

The drummer drew back his club. The *Ah-Kin* flung up his hand.

Thunder!

Nabtu and Nachi flung Stactani away with all their might.

Far out into space her shapeliness went, level and strangely beautiful. Then her head dipped along an invisible arc, leading her body after it. Slowly the curve of her course became a straight line. Downward she went like a javelin. At her sides, her arms fell of themselves, or some instinct drew them, in front of her head, and kept her hands joined there till they pierced the jade-green, jade-hard water with a little sound.

Her body followed. The water closed in. Circles of waves leaped, enlarged, hurried shoreward.

Thousands of eyes followed her till she was lost to sight. None of them perceived Tutul as he dived in from under his ledge and swam beneath the water with a fury of eagerness.

He had his jade knife in his hand for the Rain God, if there were a Rain God there. His eyes were wide but the water was so dark he could hardly see. A dim white robe loomed before him. He clutched it in his left arm. It was Stactani. But she was held there by something that might be the Rain God or the branch of an old dead tree. Whatever it was, Tutul slashed at it with his knife. It broke at last beneath his blows. Then he turned for the upper air, swimming shoreward as he rose.

It seemed that Tutul's lungs would burst before his eyes emerged. Digging his right hand into the water and kicking out madly, he did not quite die before he reached a place where he could clutch and stand and lift Stactani to the solid stone.

All the thousands above saw him now, and watched him, wondering that the Rain God let him carry off the bride. She must bring back some message.

But as Tutul stared down at Stactani, he was sure that he had been too late. He was sure that she was dead; that the serenity of her drenched face could only come from the eternal peace.

In anguish, he cried down at her her name. Her eyes opened a little. She smiled sleepily. The lids fell again. She began to shiver. The long fall and the shock of the plunge into the icy water were driving away the slumber of the drug and delivering her to a bitter chill.

In a new terror, Tutul gathered her into his arms and began to climb back up the winding path. He would never have made it if Kukum Pacab had not come dashing down to help him. Even the two of them might not have managed to save Stactani if Nabtu had not made haste to make the descent and lend his aid, saying, "Let me help you, Tutul." He did not say, "Master." He had no need to from now on.

The three friends were so busy carrying their burden to the top of the cliff that they neither knew nor cared what the multitude above was thinking and shouting. The first long turbulent panic of excitement came to an abrupt end in silence, at the piercing cry of Shaeel.

Such heart as she had had been stabbed with vain anger when Stactani's body turned slowly in the air and went straight down. But still she hoped. When she saw Tutul bring Stactani ashore, such heart as she had broke.

She wanted to kill Tutul and Stactani, and her brother, and Nabtu. Then she wanted to die. She ran to the edge of the platform, thrust even the *Ah-Kin* aside, and shouted till the people were stilled with wonder. Then she called so loudly that all could hear:

"You see! The Rain God has rejected the bride they sent him. It's me he calls for. He calls for me!"

She stepped out into space and opening her arms to her bridegroom, fell all in a huddle through the long air. When she struck the water it parted in a tumult of foam. Slowly the tumult was stilled. The surface was level again in its green jade calm. Shaeel did not reappear.

Before Tutul and his friends had reached the platform they had seen Shaeel fall, and Stactani was ready with her message from the Rain God. Unblushingly she laced the *Ah-Kin*, who had told her so many fables, and told him one of her own:

"Down there I saw the great god *Yum-Chac*," she said. "And he spoke to me. 'You are not the bride of my choice, Stactani,' he said, 'because you belong to Tutul Chi. I send you back to him,' he said, 'commanding that your families end their ancient enmity. The bride I choose,' he said, 'is the beautiful Shaeel. If she comes to me, I will send the rain.'"

The *Ah-Kin* and the Lord of Shiu and many another may have doubted Stactani. But here she was, returned with a message. Denying it would not bring back Shaeel. And just then a little child—the only one who had faith enough to look to the sky for an answer to the multitudinous prayers—pointed to the heavens and called out:

"Look! Look!"

On the brazen expanse like shining metal overhead there was a spot of white mist veiling the merciless sun. As they stared, it spread into a sheet of haze. On the horizon something like a dark shoulder lifted. It was a cloud. It advanced and blackened. Clouds followed it up the sky pell-mell on a rising wind, with the look of a rush of whales across the sea.

Behind the high temple of Kulkulcan there was a shimmering, a far-off growl of distant, oncoming storm. . . .

By mid-afternoon there was midnight in Chichen Itzá with knives of lightning ripping the gloom, and thunder thudding till it shook the earth. A furious wind rattled the dry leaves of the palms as if they were swords clashing in battle. Raindrops pattered, freckling the dust.

IN the home of the Chis, while his parents smiled on them, Tutul held Stactani in his arms, and was ungracious enough to say:

"I begin to believe there is a Rain God after all. As soon as Shaeel went to him he left his Well to escape her. Listen to him! Hear him roar!"

Rain came in volleys of arrows. Rain fell in floods turning the dust to good black mud, the streets to streams. It chuckled as it rose and clamored in the dry wells, filling them to the brim. In gardens and fields life returned to the earth from the sky to the blessed music of rain.

The

"Watch!" he said—and turned the minute-hand of the clock backward.

I GUESS I might as well warn you—you won't believe this. It's gospel truth, but you won't believe a word of it. It happened to you, but you don't remember it. Because. . . .

But I'll begin at the beginning.

They moved us to Philly, you know. The District was jammed like a juke-joint on payday, clogged with thousands of assorted war-workers, lobbyists, ambassadors, isalousionists, and just plain drones . . . everybody who *was* anybody and a bunch of drips who just wanted to become somebody.

The housing problem was terrific. You couldn't rent a hotel room, and office space was as rare as truth in a Nazi *communiqué*. So the Government said: "So long, boys! See you after Der Phooey's funeral." And we sorted out our files and scrammed to Sleepyville-on-the-Schuylkill.

"We" means, of course, the U. S. Patent Office. I'm Donald Mallory, Assistant Chief Clerk of that bureau. Or, if you must be petty about it, I assist the real Assistant Chief Clerk's assistant. So what? I do all the work, don't I?

Anyhow, it wasn't as bad as you might think. It was too bad we had to leave our museum of freak inventions behind us, on the banks of the Potomac, because I could always get a kick out of those gadgets—automatic hat-tippers, the perpetual-motion machines, and the like—when my spirits were low, but the new Philadelphia offices were roomy and bright, and aside from the occasional clamor created by two snails colliding at a busy intersection, life was sweet and placid.

Until the morning Pat Pending appeared. . . .

I was seated that morn at the typewriter, dreary and ill at ease, and my fingers wandered idly over the rusty keys . . . when suddenly my office door burst open and a figure raced in, howling to waken the dead.

"*I've got it!*" screamed said figure. "Oh, I've most certainaceously got it!"

I smoothed my goose-pimples back into place, glaring at my visitor irately. He was a big galoot, buck-toothed and red-headed, with a puss like the map of Eire. He had a small package under one arm.

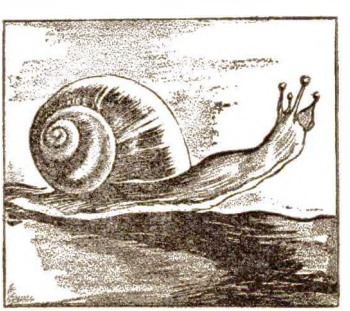
I snarled, "And if you aint got it, you're going to get it soon! What's the idea of busting in here like a—"

"You're the patent clerk?" he demanded. "Well, give me a form—quick! I've got it! I must legitilize it before the news is distribulated!"

"Don't talk like that!" I bellowed. "You're getting me all confusilated! Got *what*? Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm Pending," he said. "*Patrick* Pending, the great inventulator. Here, I'll show you—" Brushing me aside, he up-dumped my typewriter, pointed to a legend printed upon its base: "*Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.—Pat. Pending.*" Then he turned to my dictating-machine, metal file, lead-pencil sharpener, jabbing a finger at the inscription on each—"That's my name. Pat Pending, see? I inventulated all of these!"

I edged away from him cautiously. Discretion is the better part of Mal-



In Philadelphia . . . aside from the ing at a busy intersection,

BACULAR CLOCK

Father Time becomes a jitterbug in this fantasy by the author of "The Magic Staircase" and "Dr. Fuddle's Fingers."

by Nelson Bond

lory. I said, in as soothing a voice as my somewhat paralyzed larynx could manage, "But, of course! How stupid of me not to recognize you, Mr. Pending. How are you? And your friends? They're outside—I hope!"

"Friends?"

"The nice, strong young men in the white jackets," I explained. "Surely you're not roaming the streets loose—er—I mean, you didn't come here by yourself?"

"I," declared Patrick Pending, "always travel alone. I am individuous. Now, sir, time is precular! If you'll let me have an applicaceous form—"

Well, the guy seemed harmless enough, anyway. Which was the only reason I didn't dive then from my twelfth-story window and take my chances on the temporary repeal of the Law of Gravity. I reached for a patent-application blank, dunked my pen in the squid-juice our Government laughingly calls ink and said:

"Very well, Mr. Pending. Now, what is the nature of the invention on which you wish to file patent rights?"

Pat Pending smiled triumphantly.

"You may designate it, sir," he said, "as a 'bacular clock'!"

The pen leaped in my hand, splattering Stygian blobs from hither to yon. I stared at my visitor.

"How's that again? A which-ular what?"

"A bacular," he repeated, "clock." And he drew from under his arm the package he bore, laid it on the desk before me. "This is it. The most brainaceous inventulation ever to be conceivularized by man! A bacular clock."

"And just what," I asked him, "is a bacular clock?"

"Why, this is!" His smile was almost pitying. "You see, a bacular clock is one which runs in reverse. A regular clock runs forward, doesn't it? Well, a bacular clock is one which runs *backward!*"

There are limits. Even to tact in handling whackies there are limits. I stood up.

"Okay!" I said. "That does it; I quit! And I don't care if F.D.R. himself asks me to stay, I'm through. America is at war. There are millions of good jobs crying for good men. I don't *have* to sit here and decipher the mangled verbiage of every winging who ever bolixed an Elgin's gizzard—"

My redheaded guest looked grieved.

"But you don't understand," he demurred. "I haven't merely disassembulized an ordinary clock; this is a brand-new inventulation. You see, when the hands of this clock are set backward—all Time passes in reverse!"

"Furthermore," I said, "I don't have to—" Then the double-take struck me. "*What?*" I bleated. "Time passes—"

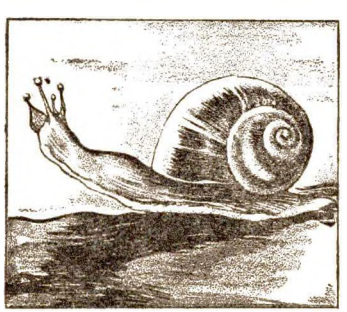
"—in reverse," nodded Pat Pending. "That's right. So you can write on the applicaceous form—"

"Not me!" I told him hastily. "I'm leaving. I just remembered I've got to see a guy about six hundred miles from here. So long, Mister!"

And I started for the door. But Pat Pending blocked my escape, and his ruddy thatch was abristle with petulance.

"You don't believe me!" he complained. "It's always the same old trouble . . . doubt and disbelief. Nobody will ever listen to me. It was that way when I inventulated the radio, and the automobile, and— Very well, then, I'll show you!"

He stripped the wrappings from his package, exposing something which looked like an ordinary alarm-clock. But for one difference. Where the bell should have been was placed a sighting-device similar to that in a



clamor created by two snails collid- life was sweet and placid.

candid camera. And upon the back of the clock were ranged a series of verniers, dials of indeterminable purpose.

With these he fidgeted briefly; then placing an eye to the range-finder, he stepped to an open window.

"Watch!" he said—and he turned the minute-hand of the clock backward a single notch.

And as he did so, I gasped. When I say "gasped," my friend, I don't mean one of your little, polite-society gasps of surprise. I came up with a heartfelt gulp of dismay which would have shamed the best efforts of a landed swordfish, for suddenly the street-scene below went absolutely haywire!

Automobiles which had been whizzing down the avenue, hell-bent for election, stopped dead in their tracks and with nary a grind of reversing gears slid into reverse. A running dog galloped wildly backward between the retreating legs of a pedestrian. A ragged urchin darted backward up the street to place an apple on a fruit-stand, and the store-owner lumbered back into the black depths of his shop. A scrap of newspaper which had been drifting listlessly groundward stayed its fall and billowed gracefully skyward.

All this for a frozen instant. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the fantastic moment ended. The traffic surged properly forward. . . . A hurrying pedestrian almost stumbled over a careless mongrel. . . . A ragamuffin fled with a stolen apple as an irate green-grocer burst from his shop in pursuit. . . .

And Pat Pending smiled at me triumphantly.

"See?" he said.

I stared at him for a long, silent moment. Then understanding of what had happened dawned on me, and I began to get sore.

"Yeah," I snorted. "I saw!"

"Well," burbled Pat Pending happily, "can I file the applicaceous blank now?"

"What you can file," I told him savagely, "is out of here—right now! Before I call the cops and have you thrown out on your air-cooled teeth! You're good, bud. I'm willing to admit that. Your little exhibition was the best job of mesmerism I've ever let myself be coaxed into. But you're in the wrong place. You'd better run down to see Major Bowes, or the Music Hall booking-agent. Your Uncle Sam doesn't issue patents on hypnotic—"

My brick-pated hoodoo frowned.

"But it wasn't a trick! It wasn't hypnotism!"

"Oh, no? Then explain this, buster. If Time turned backward for a minute when you diddled that clock, why didn't it turn backward for *us*, too?"

"Why, because we weren't within its range. Only the street below us—"

"Nuts!" I snorted. "And nonsense! Everyone with any sense knows you can't turn Time backward. Now, outside, bum! And quick about it, or—"

PAT PENDING fingered his verniers fretfully.

"Well," he sighed, "I guess I'll have to show you."

And he pointed the clock at me.

"Hey!" I yelled, taking a swift step forward. "What're you— Stop that!"

He repulsed the minute-hand a fraction of a notch.

"Taht pots!" I heard myself yelling as I took a step backward. *"—Uoy era tahw—yeh!"* Then, immediately, taking a swift step forward once more: "Hey—what are you—" I yelled. "Stop that!"

I stopped, dazed. My lower jaw played tag-you're-It with my upper weskit button. And I faltered weakly: "It—it worked!"

Pat Pending smiled companionably. "Of course it worked."

"I—I slipped backward through Time for an instant. And when I came forward again, I said the same thing, did the same thing. I couldn't stop myself—"

"No," nodded the "inventulator." "*You* couldn't stop yourself. Your period of exposure to the bacular Time was so brief you couldn't accustomate yourself. Someone *outside* the influence could have stopped you, alterized your actions—"

I SAID awedly, "Pending, I apologize. What you've got there is the greatest discovery any man ever made. Lord! What power you could wield with that instrument! How does it work?"

"It's really very simple," explained Pending modestly. "You see, Time is motion—a great stream plunging ever forward like a river trapped between the banks of Space. Man is a mote drifting with the current. He has memories of that terrain past which he has been borne; he is conscious of that past which he floats—but he cannot guess what lies ahead of him, downstream."

Bewilderedly I put in:

"And your clock?"

"My bacular clock is a rock anchored in the stream," continued Pending. "In all of rushing Time, only *it* is Time-less. Thus, as riverwaters eddy and flow backward when they meet a dam, so does Time flow backward when it thrusts itself against my clock."

I said: "I get the simile, pal. And it's all right, but it doesn't answer my question. How does it work? How do you harness its powers? What are the verniers for? Why does Time flow backward when you point the clock at something?"

"Oh—that? Why, the clock is electricaceous. When the verniers are set and the machinery set in movulation, the gravial tensilizing of dimensular contravensing estabulates a disruption. You see?"

I said, "Er—dimly. In words of one syllable—"

"The entropical disentrigulation of Space," asserted Pat Pending proudly. "It's as easy as that!"

So—there I was! Out on a limb, with no way to get back. On all subjects save his own inventulations my visitor could converse in the English language. But when it mattered, his double-talk was as scrambled as a malarial chef's morning eggs.

I groaned and gave up. I said, "Okay, Pending. You win. Pick up the marbles. Let's fill out this blank. Maybe *somebody* will understand what you're driving at— Hey! What was that?"

Pending had moved to the window. Now he said, wide-eyed, "It's a newsboy. He seems to be excitulated."

For once he was guilty of an understatement, because the kid screaming an extra in the street below was not merely excitulated, he was feveraceous! His shrill bleat reached us:

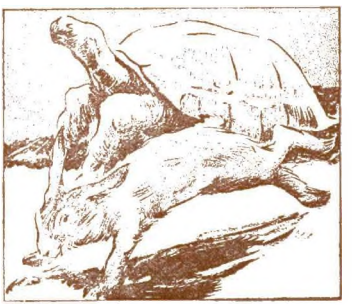
"Extry! Extry! Ree-dall-aboudit! Scores killed in train wreck. Troop trains crash head-on outside of city!"

I gulped, "Omigolly—sabotage!" and bolted down for a copy of the extra. A few moments later I was back, and Pat Pending and I were anxiously and horrifiedly reading the gory details.

And, what I mean, those details were really gory! A westbound troop-train, crammed to the Pullmans, had collided head-on with an equally overstuffed eastbound express train full of militiamen. It had happened just outside of the City of Brotherly Love, in a narrow defile carved out of a rocky hillside. The poor kids didn't have a chance; solid walls of stone trapped them in the gorge. Those few who escaped death in the collision had nowhere to flee when fire made a blazing pit of the cut.

There were civilian passengers, too, of course. Some of them Big Names. But somehow it was not of these I thought so much as of those youngsters so badly needed by our flag on foreign fields.

I said, with a sick sort of horror: "Pending, that's awful! To think of all those gay youngsters—"



But Pending was staring at the paper strangely.

"Eastbound train!" he said. "Why, that's the train from Chicago! This can't have just happened. That train was due in Philadelphia thirty-five minutes ago."

"Well, so what?"

"But that's the train *I*—"

"You what?" I prompted as he faltered into silence.

"Nothing," said Pending. "Nothing at all. I didn't realize it was *that* train, that's all."

"You may be smart about some things, Mister," I told him, "but you're dumb as hell about news. Did you expect the paper to pop up with this story the moment it happened? It's a wonder they put an extra on the streets in so short a time—in a half hour! It takes time to write stories, set them up, roll presses. Newspaper editors don't own bacular clocks—"

ABRUPTLY I stopped, my eyes widening. A sudden idea had struck me. An idea so wild . . . so fantastic . . . that it just *might* work.

"*Time!*" I repeated. "Pending—*your bacular clock!*"

"Yes? What about it?"

"It makes Time move in reverse, doesn't it?"

"Most certainaceously."

"Then can't we go to the scene of this collision and *prevent its happening?*"

He stared at me bewilderedly for a moment. Then:

"Oh, my goodness!" he gasped. "We could! Of course we could! I never thought of that!"

"Then let's get going!" I yelled.

He grabbed up his machine, and together we galloped for the street and a taxi.

When we got to the scene of the smash-up it was even worse than I had thought. I'm not going to describe it; I'll just tell you it was a nightmare wakened to stark reality.

Help had come belatedly, and both banks of the gully wherein smoldered twisted shards of metal which had been two proud trains were lined with doctors, rescue workers, repairmen, trying to bring some order out of chaos.

I turned to Pending, gripped his arm tensely.

"All right, bud—you wanted an opportunity to prove the greatness of your invention. You'll never find a better. Twist those dials—*and shoot!*"

Pat Pending had already adjusted the verniers of his incredible instrument. But now he shook his head

"I can't. Not yet."

"Why not?"

"Because of *them*—" He motioned toward the host of workers and watchers. "You see, they weren't anywhere around when the accident happened. Therefore they mustn't be within the clock's range when its hands are moved back. They had no existence in this scene a half hour ago. They upset the true equation. Their presenciousness would create a disintregulation—"

"Okay," I said hastily. "I'll take your word for it. I'll do what I can."

And I hurried forward and began wrangling the newcomers back from the rim of the defile by sheer weight of muscle and argument. It wasn't easy, but by flashing my identification-card so swiftly that only the words *United States Government* could be glimpsed, I succeeded in gaining a little authority. They took me for an F.B.I. man, and did what I told them—which was to get back out of range.

It was a nasty job. It wasn't made any easier by my knowledge that if Pending's invention failed to work, I'd get the works for interfering with rescue efforts. That, though, was a gamble I had to take. And having experienced the power of the bacular clock, I was willing to risk it.

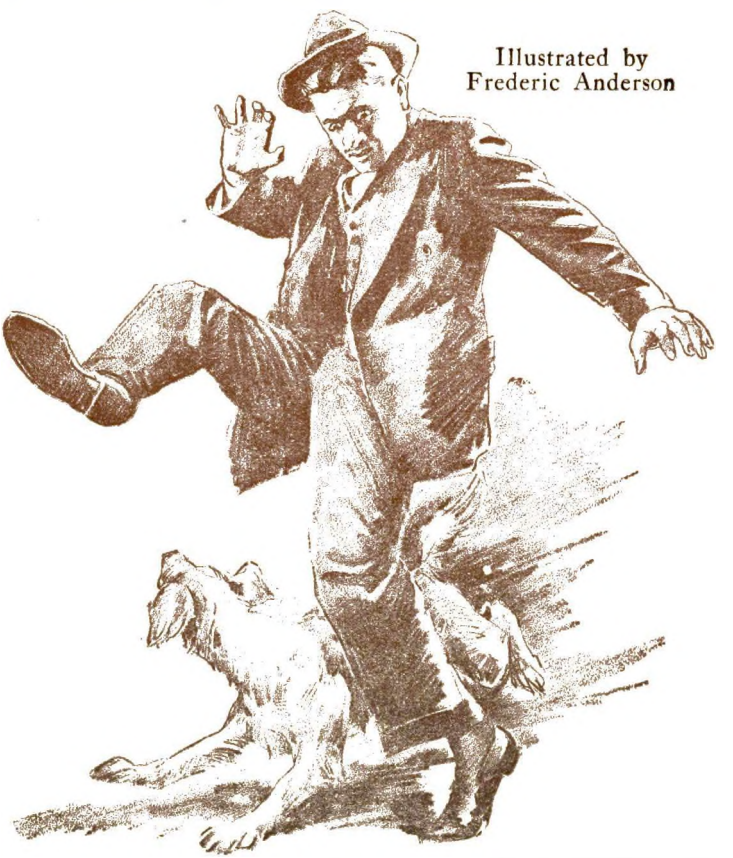
The sights and smells and sounds were—well, forget it! I'd like to, myself. But I'm the one guy alive who cannot. One tiny thing I remember: a white-haired old conductor clutching my arm and sobbing: "It wasn't the company's fault, Mister. It was the switch. Somebody threw the switch!"

But finally the job was done, and I went back to Pat Pending's side. I said, "All right, Pending. Let's go."

"Right! But mind," he warned, "you stay close to my side."

"Sure. But why?"

Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson



A running dog galloped wildly backward between the retreating legs of a pedestrian.

His smile was almost pitying. "A regular clock runs forward, doesn't it? Well, a bacular clock is one which runs backward!"

"Well, it has just occurred to me that merely moving Time bacular at this one spot is not enough. Too many people know about the accident. Newspapers have been printed, radio has carried the story to millions of homes.

"We've got to eliminize the story at its roots; turn Time backward throughout the entire world, so that everything will be as it was before the accident occurred. You see?"

"But, Pending, can your clock—"

"It can," nodded the red-thatched inventor. "Watch!"

And he pressed the minute-hand backward.

WHAT I saw then I shall never forget. It was partly funny, partly gruesome, and altogether fearsome.

For as Pat Pending pressed that magic finger back on its dial to an hour earlier, every act performed by those who people this dizzily whirling planet was reënacted in reverse!

We only saw, of course, that which took place before us. We saw it from the small island of security wherein only we two, of all mankind, escaped the "bacular" movement.

We saw doctors strip the bandages from patients, and watched those rolls of gauze wrap themselves into neat, tight cylinders. We saw the doctors rise, stretcher-bearers hasten backward to prostrate forms—and carry them to a smoldering chasm wherein flames were newly re-awakening.

One by one, we saw the doctors and nurses, repairmen and rescue workers, melt away from the ravine, climb backward into automobiles, and speed away in reverse.

All this in minutes fraught with astonishment, as in the sky above us, a blazing sun moved inexorably to the east!

And finally we stood alone in a deserted field. The ravine before us was a solid sheet of flame, out of which mad cries of torment rose. Screams the more horrible because the syllables which lent them meaning were reversed.

I do not know what happened elsewhere. Once, for an instant, I had a vision of a world gone starkly mad—of coal which flew from miners' picks to imbed itself in tunnel-walls, of bullets which fled from wounds, and flesh reformed. Of the print un-typing itself from paper—of fields which unplowed—a host of equally incredible negations.

But close at hand a once-enacted drama was speeding toward its initial act. The flames had died, not having yet been born, and the twisted frames of coaches were rising once more from the stacks. A frightful din shattered our eardrums—and when it had ended two trains, intact, were hurtling away from each other, propelled by steaming locomotives newly resurrected out of utter destruction.

And I turned to Pending, mad with joy.

"You've done it, Pending! The accident has un-happened. Start the clock moving forward again—"

"Not yet. The same things will happen again, don't you see? We must find out, first, what caused the wreck —*Aaah!*"

We saw the man at the same time. A furtive figure, hurrying across the opposite field. With his back to us, he approached a switch, tugged it, then smashed its lock. Then he scurried away, this time facing us, into the woods out of which he had come.

"The conductor was right!" I cried. "And so was I! It *was* sabotage. An enemy agent threw the switch that caused the collision. But—but, Pat! What can we do? We've got to push that switch back to normal before—"

I was talking to myself. For Pending had thrust the clock into my hands, and his final words were ringing in my ears.

"Keep it moving bacular till I shift the switch—then turn it forward—"

And he was gone, leaping across the field, down into a gully now deserted, up the opposite bank to the switch. I saw him throw his weight against it . . . saw it give. . . .

Then something like a burst of lightning seemed to explode before me. The clock leaped from my hands, and buried itself in the ground. From head to foot I tingled with a numb, hot burning. And suddenly everything again was—normal!

A bird in the sky flew *forward* over my head. I heard the keening wail of a train-whistle, looked up to see a train roaring eastward toward the ravine . . . another tearing westward toward that fateful rendezvous.

But even as I gasped and cried in vain warning—the two trains flashed past each other on adjacent tracks! And above the *wucka-wucka-wucka* of coaches roaring greeting, there came the sound of gay, young voices shouting to each other from the lowered windows of troop-trains. Young men once slain . . . who had somehow been miraculously raised from the dead by the necromancy of a genius. . . .

The trains were gone. I stood alone in an empty field. And Pat Pending—he too was gone!

SO—there you are. That's all. If this were a proper story, there'd be more. A happy ending, with Pat Pending receiving the plaudits of a grateful government . . . that sort of thing. But, you see—this isn't a story. It's gospel truth.

I warned you that you wouldn't believe it. It happened to you—and you—and you. . . But you won't believe it. Because that hour, and whatever you did during that hour, has been lifted from your life. I'm the only man alive who remembers that once two troop-trains crashed head-on in a ravine outside Philadelphia—and that hundreds of brave men died. . . .

And the man who called himself Pat Pending?

Your guess is as good as mine. And I have none to offer. All I know is that Pat Pending disappeared. Perhaps into the Never-Never world which exists where Time does not take measure of man's activities.

But wherever he is—I hope he can inventulate some way of getting back to the world which needs him.

And brother, I *do* mean needs him! Because there's something screwy going on around Philadelphia. The savants are puzzled green about it. The engineers who have been called into consultation are worried, too, because its a problem they cannot solve.

You see, on a field overlooking a railway cut, there lies, half-buried in the earth, a broken clock. It can't be lifted. It weighs—or so the scientists claim—millions of tons. Either that or, as one of them put it, it has "passed into a state of infinite entrophy"—which means it is beyond the confines of Earthly space and time.

Anyhow, it can't be moved. It can't be jiggled, or fixed, or set. Worse yet, it can't be stopped. Not even with high explosives. So it ticks merrily on . . . and on . . . and on. . . .

And here's the worst part! That field outside of Philly—*is moving backward through Time!* Already it is rank with jungle growth which science identifies as the vegetation of the Cenozoic Age. Pretty soon it will pass in reverse into the Mesozoic. Which means—dinosaurs, volcanoes, mighty armored reptiles, gigantic spore-plants of unguessed horror.

So if anybody meets a buck-toothed redhead who calls himself Pat Pending, grab him and send for me, quick. It's importulant—vitically importulant!

Readers' Forum*

(Continued from page 1)

ONE MAN'S MEAT

I started BLUE BOOK *with "When Worlds Collide," by Balmer and Wylie. Some of your steady readers will remember it, as well as its sequel "After Worlds Collide." Both were fine reading and certainly were not a strain on my intelligence, as the usual run of this type of yarn is. They gave me considerable pleasure and I have been a steady reader ever since.*

You have a fine magazine. I have liked most the Bedford-Jones and Robert Mill stories. "Soldier Stuff" in your last issue (Tracy Richardson) isn't to be sneezed at.

Some of your stories do not appeal to me, but I am reminded of the magazine editor who asked a total stranger how he liked his magazine. The stranger replied he liked everything in it; there was nothing that didn't appeal to him. The editor returned to his office and revamped his entire set-up, so as to have something in the magazine to appeal to all types. In other words, one man's meat is another man's poison.

You undoubtedly heard the story and can only say I get enough out of yours to keep me interested.

H. A. Munn,
Bellingham, Wash.

A ROSE AND A BRICKBAT

A rose. After being disillusioned about so many "wonders" of this and that, it's a pleasure to be able to find something that satisfies; to be able to enjoy the works of contemporary immortals. I have no doubt that one day I'll be able to purchase "Selected Short Stories" by H. Bedford-Jones, Jacland Marmur and others from within your covers. The superiority to the pulps and slicks for wholesome active entertainment offered by BLUE BOOK *is too great for them to compete with effectively.*

A brickbat. Would you mind awfully much tossing the book reviews in the W.F. (wastebasket file)?

A suggestion. Replace the above with a family crest and a story about the family; a bit of genealogy.

A request. Please, let's have more of Jim Hardesty. *Don't let him get portly, even though he's wealthy.*

Thanks for BLUE BOOK.

Robert A. Snyder,
Chicago, Ill.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; for the ones 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 will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

IF YOU had the opportunity and the alternative, which would you choose—to permit Hitler to be shot, or to listen in at his war council? In this remarkable story, "Within the Kaiser's Council-Chamber" (reprinted as a Twice-Told Tale from our October, 1917, issue) the Free Lance had to make a similar decision. Did he do the right thing?

GENERAL VON BREMMER ranked as division commander—was known by sight to practically every staff officer in upper Bavaria and the neighboring parts of Austria. It was also known that, after being wounded in Alsace, he had been transferred by Crown Prince Rupprecht to depot-detail in Munich while he was recuperating. Consequently his high-powered touring-car—in which three officers with hand-luggage accompanied him—was nowhere stopped by any of the military patrols along the mountain roads as it raced eastward through the foothills of the Tyrolean Alps. They had started from Munich just before sunrise, when the streets were practically deserted. At six that evening the car stopped before a handsome villa in the Hietzing suburb of Vienna, near the Schönbrunn—having covered the two hundred and fifty miles without being once held up for examination. After introducing the supposed officers to his friend the Graf von Racoczy, and seeing them installed as his guests for an indefinite stay, Von Bremmer returned to Munich next morning. Hence the disappearance from the Bavarian capital of the Honorable Aloysius McMurtagh (a wealthy Irish-American), Major Michael Brady (formerly of the Boer army) and Selim Abdullah Pasha (a Turkish colonel of engineers), remained a mystery which repeated inquiries from Berlin failed to solve.

The three men had come from Russia, where it was known that they had been doing valuable work for the Camarilla as German propagandists, and had been given *carte blanche* by the Wilhemstrasse to gain the confidence of Bavarian Socialists with the view of using their influence with the Socialists of Russia when they returned. Apparently their activities in Munich had been more or less effective, and in six weeks they had made themselves very popular with the Bavarians. But it seemed to some of the Prussian officers that they were meddling considerably more in German politics than their credentials warranted, creating an influence that was threatening to get out of hand; letters had gone down to Berlin concerning them. Explanations had been demanded of the Wilhelmstrasse, where Herr Zimmermann gave a detailed account of their services in Russia and expressed the utmost confidence that their influence in Bavaria would prove valuable to the imperial government. But Zimmermann himself was no longer in favor with the dominant party in the Reichstag. The Honorable Aloysius instinctively sensed an early arrest upon one charge or another—with almost inevitable consequences. So they apparently vanished into the atmosphere—with the connivance of Von Bremmer, who had become a revolutionist like thousands of his fellow Bavarians.

When appearing as their own actual selves, they were George Llangolen Trevor,—Earl of Dyvnaint,—Baron Lammerford of St. Ives and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, G. C. S. I.—British peers, holding army and navy commissions. But for more than ten years their secret diplomatic activities had gone further toward preserving the British Empire and averting political catastrophes than any other influence at the disposal of that government.

It had been over a year since any of them had been in the Austrian capital. During a walk about the city, the morning after their arrival, they were conscious of subtle changes—there were more sleeves with mourning-bands upon them; but the life of the concert gardens and the Ring appeared to be in full swing. Always a gay city under normal conditions, Vienna seemed to be making a rather successful effort to shake off the depression of her losses and short rations, with a perceptible diminution of the German army element. Where, a year before, there had been a large number of German troops in evidence, there were now fewer of them about the city—and a larger percentage of Austrians and Hungarians, with an occasional showing of Turks or Bulgars. In the earlier months of the war, for reasons of state, more than half the Austro-Hungarian forces had been sent to the Alsatian and Galician fronts, with an exchange force of Germans in eastern Hungary and Serbia. But the Italian offensive had drawn more of the Austrian troops back inside their own borders; and upon one pretext or another the young emperor had managed to have a number of his brigades on foreign service replaced with Prussians and Brandenburgers.

Count Racoczy had been described to the English diplomats (whose identity, of course, was entirely unknown to him or anyone in Vienna) as a Nationalist devoted to the establishment of an independent Hungary at the end of the war—preferring a monarchy, because he was used to that sort of government, but since the Russian revolution, willing to consider the advantages of a democracy. Formerly an intimate of the young Emperor and an admirer of his Bourbon Parmese Empress, he nevertheless considered it impossible for so inexperienced a ruler successfully to harmonize the many conflicting interests of the dual monarchy. Liking Charles personally, he was quite willing to see him ruler of a much curtailed Austria alone—or dethroned if necessary. During the last few months, however, Charles had shown so much inclination to struggle against the German yoke that the Count was beginning to revise his estimate of the younger man, and wonder if he were really big enough to prove a leader who could hold Austro-Hungary together as tactfully as had his great-uncle Francis Joseph.

McMurtagh and his companions found the Count a most interesting personality; his household was marked by a total absence of that stiff-necked egoism which has made Austrian aristocracy the laughingstock of an enlightened civilization; and they had a sameness of secret interests which made them feel perfectly secure under his roof. General von Bremmer's introductions had convinced

FREE LANCES in DIPLOMACY

by Clarence Herbert New

each of them that the others were heart and soul devoted to the same political objects in spite of any attitude they might be compelled to assume before others.

The Graf's villa in the extreme southwestern corner of the city—upon ground sufficiently higher to overlook a good part of it—was almost pure Spanish in its architecture, built around a central court, and with flat roofs which were used by the family as a lounging place during the warm season. In the evening they went up to one of these roofs for coffee and cigars. The place was so far removed from any possibility of their being overheard that they began to discuss the Austrian situation with their host.

"You think, then, Herr Graf, that Charles is really determined to pull out of the German entanglement if he can?"

"He would make peace with Russia and Italy in a week if it were not for the German regiments in the country and the certainty of Bulgarian and Turkish troops backing them up. You see, the withdrawal of Austria would mean cutting the Oriental Railway—severing communication between Germany, the Balkans and Turkey; and Germany will not consider that for a moment. Other complications are Serbia, Bosnia and the Trentino. A peace at the expense of partial dismemberment would cost Charles his throne, and it would be impossible to arrange terms with the Allies, at present, which didn't include something of the sort."

"What would be the probable effect if Charles were assassinated?" McMurtagh asked.

THE Count looked at him with a startled expression. "Why do you ask that question, *mein Herr?* Have you heard anything which makes such a catastrophe at all likely?"

"Francis Ferdinand and his duchess were shot. It would have meant a revolution if Francis Joseph hadn't been alive at the time. What happened once, at the instigation of certain men in Berlin, can happen again. With its consequences, it was the most momentous *coup* ever recorded in history. So I'm asking your opinion as to what this other one would be?"

"Chaos! There would be no strong leader in sight, no man of sufficient force to hold the Empire together. It would probably split into Hungary, Bohemia and Dalmatia, in a chaotic state of reorganization. With an army like Falkenhayn's, Germany would stamp out all resistance and establish a sort of protectorate for the duration of the war. With all of the conflicting elements here, I doubt very much if successful resistance could be made—though of course, Germany has her hands more than full without that. But it would be an opportunity for Turkey and Bulgaria to acquire territory that would spur them on to renewed cooperation with her. It's really impossible to say just what the final outcome would be. From the German viewpoint, however, anything of that sort would be better than having us conclude a separate peace. They are sending out news-reports to the Entente that the bare suggestion of such a thing is being laughed at even in Vienna—but it isn't altogether a joke in Berlin. They know it is at least a possibility."

"And you may be quite sure that ultimate possibility has been dealt with—measures already taken to block it! There are probably Wilhelmstrasse agents now in Vienna with instructions to—er—eliminate Charles if the break between the two countries appears imminent."

"If I thought—"

"Assume it to be a certainty. Have you noticed any men or women about the city, of late, for whom your Hungarian secret service is unable to account?"

"There are two men who arrived a few weeks ago—on affairs of the Imperial Reichsbank, as we suppose. They're rather dissolute for men of responsibility—*might* be Wilhelmstrasse agents, though they've been conferring with our bankers every day."

"Staying at one of the hotels, I suppose?"

"No—they're not. They're guests of Herr Untermeyer, a wealthy German who exports Bohemian glass and porcelains to the United States. Now that you've directed my attention to them, I recall that I've seen them in restaurants, once or twice, with Socialist members of parliament who are known to hold extreme views—almost anarchistic."

"Hmph! If you had them watched, you'd probably trace 'em to a secret rendezvous somewhere about the city where they meet other men who are out-and-out anarchists. The supposed banking connection is an excellent blind. Would it be possible, Herr Graf, to have those two men shadowed for a while?"

"Easily! We have a pretty capable organization. We Hungarians, you know, have been preparing ourselves for almost anything which is likely to happen,—national independence or civil war,—though we've lost much of our military strength in the last two years of fighting."

Racoczy got out of his chair and strolled over to the parapet which ran around the roof, waist-high—looking across the housetops at the imperial château and its French park, softly beautiful in the moonlight. Then he turned and said: "This city has seen many changes, gentlemen; its history has been strangely interwoven with the destinies of Europe. It was here that the Turk was finally turned back from his conquest of the Continent. Austrian emperors have ruled half the world from Vienna. In the Schönbrunn, over there, Napoleon lived for several months with his Austrian Empress. In 1832 his son—the Duke of Reichstadt—died in one of the imperial chambers. And the Congress of Vienna settled for half a century the international adjustments of Europe. It is here that the future destiny of Hungary will be settled, not in Budapest—which reminds me, by the way, that there is to be a conference here between Charles and the Prussian. As

a matter of policy, he is to pay our young Emperor the compliment of a journey to his capital; the Empress will probably accompany him."

"Hmph! A conference at which the Prussian will do the dictating! If Charles doesn't agree with him fully, promise continued coöperation—well, it may be bad for Charles. But I say, Racoczy—have you any idea where this conference will be held?"

"Probably over there in the Schönbrunn. It is the Emperor's private residence, where an imperial visitor might arrive quietly after dark without attracting attention."

"It would be worth a good deal to the Socialists and reform party—to the chances for an early peace—if we could overhear what is actually said at that conference!"

"You may be quite sure anything of that sort will be most carefully guarded against! Still—"

"Exactly! The men who *try* impossible things often succeed when every chance is apparently against them. Er—how well do you know the lay-out of that château—the way the various rooms and passages are arranged?"

"So well that I could go through them blindfolded. I held a minor court-office during the old Emperor's lifetime—and two of our organization have official berths there now."

"Then it seems to me that the proposition is worth spending considerable thought over. Of course, there'll be no question as to the personal risk involved—but we three are entirely willing to assume that risk."

Next morning, in the Volksgarten, the Gral pointed out Schufeldt and Heimwasser—the two bankers who might not be altogether what they seemed. After covertly watching them for a while, Baron Lammerford (as the pseudo Major Brady) leaned across the table and whispered:

"Don't look their way again—pay no further attention to them! Their profiles are quite familiar to me; I shall place them presently—at a time when they wore no beards. I'll leave you as if I had an appointment elsewhere, and see if I can't track them to some rendezvous."

WALKING off toward the Amalienhof, he loitered until he saw the two men coming in the same direction—as some instinct had told him they would. Without being noticed, he followed them until they entered a small café halfway up the Kohlmarkt—and was close enough upon their heels to notice through the open doorway the look of interrogation upon Heimwasser's face as he glanced at the woman in the *bureau* and motioned toward a door at the rear of the room. At a slight negative shake of the head they sat down at one of the little tables and called for bocks.

Lammerford did some rapid calculating as he stopped outside to light a cigarette. If the place were a Wilhelmstrasse rendezvous, as he inferred from the little byplay and the appearance of the woman in charge, the commonest of the recognition-signs would enable him to pass through that door at the rear without question—and probably establish his footing without much difficulty in whatever situation he found himself on the other side. But if the place were a resort of the various breeds of anarchists who swarmed in the underworld of Vienna,—Russian, Hungarian, Serbian, Polish,—he stood an excellent chance of losing his life. Among his varied experiences, however, Lammerford had once concealed himself in a Belgrade cellar, worming his way down a chimney when the house was unoccupied; and during the forty hours in which he had lain concealed there, he had managed to pick up a good many of the anarchist signs and passwords. Before he tossed his match-end into the gutter, he had decided that his chances were something more than even for coming through the adventure alive.

In a leisurely manner he stepped into the café with a smiling nod toward the woman in the *bureau*. Removing the cigarette from his lips, the little finger of his right hand rested for an instant on the cleft in his chin—after which he stopped just long enough to pick a piece of lint from the knee of his trousers. Then proceeding across the room to the little door, he opened it without the slightest hesitation and gently closed it behind him.

For a second, the thought occurred to Lammerford that he would cut a ridiculous figure if he found himself in the busy little kitchen of the place—but one always has a plausible explanation for that sort of mistake. The region beyond the door, however, proved to be a dark, narrow passage at the end of which a turn at right angles brought him to a flight of steps leading downward. Instead of the twenty steps that would have indicated a cellar under the café, he counted forty-two—at the bottom of which there started another passage two hundred paces long.

As nearly as he could judge from the turns he had made, this tunnel led under the Kohlmarkt to the rear of a building on the other side; and a heavy oak door, upon which he rapped with one of the commoner anarchist signals, swung open apparently without human agency, admitting him to a large and none too clean sub-cellar which seemed to have no connection with the one over it or with the building to which it belonged. There was at one end, however, an oubliette which doubtless communicated with one of the sewers leading into the Wiener Kanal. A number of tables stood about the cellar, and it was evident that whatever refreshments were served there must come down from the café he had passed through.

As there was nobody in sight when he came in, he touched a push-button on the wall—ordering coffee and cakes when a waiter appeared from the passage. For nearly an hour he waited, imperturbably sipping his coffee and reading his newspaper, though he had little doubt that he was watched from some unseen peephole. Then Schufeldt and Heimwasser appeared, selecting a table near him. As they sat down, their profiles sharpened in his mental picture of them without beards—and the recognition almost took his breath away. Unless he were entirely mistaken, they had been two of the most notorious young men in Berlin ten years before—well-born but dissolute fellows who, after having been dismissed from their regiment for cheating at cards, had undertaken Wilhelmstrasse work that other agents were squeamish about attempting. Both were supposed to have been killed before the war began—sent on a service where they were sure to be killed, as most of their acquaintances thought. Waiting until he was sure they had observed his recognition-sign, Lammerford decided upon taking a rather high hand with them, as probably his most successful course.

"*Herren*, this is quite a surprise!" he exclaimed. "I had supposed Karl von Lohr and Heinrich von Gratz were no longer living. If the Wilhelmstrasse is aware of the fact, I hadn't heard of it!"

As they had reëntered the service entirely changed in appearance, after six years' exile in South America, the Wilhelmstrasse had not recognized them. It sent a shiver of cold fear down their backs to stumble upon a man who did. There was murder in the first glance they exchanged, but they instantly saw that this stranger was presumably some one high in authority whom the waiters had seen and for whom there would have to be an accounting if he were last seen alive in their company; so they decided to brazen it out.

"Some mistake, Excellency! I am Schufeldt; my friend is Heimwasser, of the Imperial Reichsbank in Berlin!"

"Exactly! Two bankers who have come to Wien for the purpose of eliminating a certain exalted personage if orders are received to that effect—an ordinary occurrence in the banking business, but one which many of those connected with the Wilhelmstrasse might refuse to undertake!" (The sarcasm wasn't lost upon them.) "Of course Herr

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Zimmermann doesn't know who you really are, but he could scarcely have picked better men for the job, if you permit me to flatter you. And as this particular affair is in no way connected with my own work, you need have no fear of my repeating the names of two ghosts from the long ago. Only—if you *don't* happen to be the agents picked for it, you'd better give me a hint as to what you *are* working on—so that our plans may not conflict."

It nauseated Lammerford to see that they took his compliment seriously, as a tribute to their former reputation for brutal outrage. Both were Prussians. And his statement that he had no intention of betraying them was apparently convincing; there was no reason why he should, they argued, inasmuch as the proposed job was not one for men troubled with mawkish sentiment on their make-up. So, quite easily and with some braggadocio, they outlined the details of a foul assassination—as they had perfected them. There were three Hungarian anarchists whose eager offers to assist them had been accepted. Altogether it looked as though the plan had been too carefully thought out to fail.

Before they left the big cellar, two of the anarchists came in and were introduced to Lammerford as one of the inner circle of the imperial secret service who might have further use for them at some future time.

Meanwhile, Earl Trevor (as the wealthy American politician Aloysius McMurtagh) had strolled with Racoczy through the Hofburg to the Graben. (Sir Abdool, as the Turkish colonel of engineers, had disappeared into that part of the city where fellow Asiatics were to be found and bits of Mohammedan political gossip picked up over a cup or two of *mastic*.) Stopping to look in a shop window, they noticed two men inside with some ladies—in one of whom His Lordship recognized the Gräfin von Kessel, a young and fascinating agent of the Wilhelmstrasse who had started to arrest him as a spy in Munich, but had become converted to revolutionary ideas as their acquaintance progressed, without being able to decide whether he was really the patriotic German of high rank she suspected, or an American working to bring about an end to the war. In either case her interest and confidence had reached a point where she would have acted upon a hint from him even if it appeared squarely against the Berlin government. Knowing nothing of their former acquaintance or her connection with the Wilhelmstrasse, Racoczy nudged the Earl's arm and directed his attention to the group inside.

"There are some people I think you had better know, my friend. The short man, Prince Kesterzechy, is one of us and will go to any lengths necessary. The lively brunette is Baroness von Zernwitz—devoted heart and soul to liberating Hungary, very wealthy, willing to give her entire fortune if necessary. The other man and woman I don't know, but a glance from the Prince will tell whether they are to be trusted. Come! Let us go in!"

INTRODUCTIONS were made, but Racoczy understood from the Prince's manner that all reference to revolutionary subjects were better avoided, and a warning pressure of the elbow passed along the hint to McMurtagh. The Gräfin was introduced as merely the Fräulein von Kessel, who had arrived from Munich that morning with letters from prominent Bavarians to the Baroness.

As the party strolled along the Graben to other shops, Trevor paired off with the Fräulein, and she asked:

"Am I supposed to have met you in Munich as the Herr McMurtagh, my friend? Or were we strangers up to this morning?"

"Depends upon where or to whom you admit the acquaintance, Gräfin. With the Prince and Count Racoczy, do so by all means. Somebody will very likely turn up from Munich who knows of our acquaintance there. But you would better not mention our names to anyone who is corresponding with people in Berlin. Zimmermann understands what we are trying to accomplish down here—or thinks he does, which amounts to the same thing in the matter of backing. But Zimmermann himself is suddenly in disfavor with the General Staff and will be forced out with the Chancellor. The next man will be disposed entirely to misconstrue some of the things we were obliged to do in Munich, and will undoubtedly order our arrest the moment he locates us. Of course, we should have little difficulty in avoiding arrest here in Vienna, because there are more people working for the same objects—stronger influences to protect us. But there are too serious matters brewing for us to waste time looking out for our own heads. As soon as I'm quite sure as to just where *you* stand, Gräfin, I'll give you a chance to play the game."

She gave him a peculiar glance, in which personal admiration was mixed with doubt as to just where her previous convictions must give way to something dimly sensed as better.

"Listen—bend your ear down!" she said. "Do you know that His Imperial Majesty is to be here tomorrow?" (He nodded.) "Do you also know that a certain anarchist is now practicing in the shooting-galleries with the intention of killing him—and that he has perfected a plan for getting so near that he may actually do it?"

"No! That's news to me! What action are you taking?"

"Personally, I shall do nothing, beyond giving you facts enough to put the situation entirely in your hands—after which I'm going to stand aside and watch you do exactly as you think best."

"Even to permitting the assassination?"

"If you think the future welfare of the Empire demands it!"

"H-m-m! Are you quite certain your anarchist isn't after Charles?"

"Positive. Three different places were described to me as being available—depending upon His Majesty's movements after reaching Vienna. You may invite me to motor with you this afternoon, if you wish; the Baroness has another engagement which leaves me free. I'll point them out to you."

"What sort of looking bounder is your anarchist? Where is he doing his practicing?"

"You know the section around the Prater Stern is a popular resort for the masses on public holidays—particularly, the amusement place known as 'Venice in Vienna'? Well, there are numerous rifle-galleries in that locality, but one of them is fitted up for weapons of regular army caliber. It is frequented by noncommissioned officers and men who have occasion to go armed. My informant didn't dare give me the man's name, but described him minutely, and said he was usually in that gallery about half-past eleven, when practically all the other men had left for the night."

"Hmph! I'll drop in this evening and look him over. Should be able to recognize him instantly, you know."

After lunching in one of the Graben cafés, the party separated. Late that afternoon Baron Lammerford returned to the Racoczy villa in the Hietzing suburb, taking the Count and Earl Trevor up to the awning-covered roof for a private talk concerning what he had discovered. Upon comparing notes they became convinced that the plot to assassinate the Prussian was being worked out by an entirely different set and nationality of anarchists from those assisting Schufeldt and Heimwasser—and that neither group knew anything whatever of the others' intentions.

At eleven that evening they found the shooting-gallery near the Prater Stern occupied only by the attendant and a consumptive black-haired man of medium height, with feverish eyes and a restless, nervous manner. The man in charge addressed him as Herr Polba. Apparently he had not been showing very good form; the shooting was dis-

tinctly erratic—so much so, that the supposed McMurtagh was moved to offer a suggestion or two.

"You take too careful an aim, *mein Herr;* the nerves of the hand and wrist become tired, so that it is impossible to hold the weapon steady. In battle one doesn't shoot that way—the trigger is pulled the instant the 'drop' covers its object. Permit me! —Will you start one of those little glass balls on the jet of water, sir? Ah! . . . . Watch!"

McMurtagh's arm swept up from his side with a heavy-calibered automatic as he spoke. There was an explosion —and the pistol was lying on the counter again before his arm had apparently ceased moving. The glass ball had disappeared. Seven more balls were shattered into misty fragments as rapidly as the attendant could pull the string which released them—and the balls were little more than an inch in diameter. Even the attendant looked at the well-dressed stranger in wonder; he had seen plenty of good shooting, but nothing in that class. As for Polba, he doggedly attempted to profit by the instruction, but he was not an intuitive marksman and never could become one, though he placed his bullets near enough the bull's-eye to make it unhealthy for anyone he happened to be firing at.

NEXT day, it was known about the city that imperial visitors from the north would arrive in the afternoon for a stay of at least a week, for a general discussion of the war situation, between the two monarchs. It was known that Charles, with the kings of Württemberg and Bavaria, favored a peace without annexations or indemnities—that they were all strongly opposed to the submarine warfare because of its future effect upon other nations, to say nothing of its brutal inhumanity. Ferdinand of Bulgaria and the Sultan were also greatly desirous of peace. It was beginning to dawn upon them that possible ruin and disintegration lay ahead if they kept on. On the other hand, the Crown Prince of Germany and the General Staff were confident of winning the war with submarines—and were beginning to speculate upon what might be in store for German autocracy if they didn't.

When the imperial train rolled into the Franz Josef Bahnhof, Trevor, the Count and Lammerford were standing in the Lichtensteinstrasse just below the Prince's gardens, at a point where a large second-floor bay window jutted out over the sidewalk. Its position was such that a carriage approaching down the street must pass within twenty-five feet of it, and mounted guards riding at either side would not obstruct the view of those inside the vehicle. Apparently that particular building was unoccupied.

They had been there but a few moments when a squadron of cavalry came galloping down the street, followed by regiments of infantry which were strung out along the curbs. Then another squadron of cavalry came trotting along in double column, with four motor-cars between. Just as the head of this escort reached the corner below the building with the bay-window, an army-car with four officers turned in from a side-street and was proceeding ahead of the troops when its motor suddenly balked—slowing down the cavalry and escorted machines behind it until they were forced to stop, with the leading car almost abreast of the window. In less than a minute the frantically working officers in the stalled car had managed to get their motor going again, permitting the procession to resume its progress. But in that moment the cadaverous anarchist Polba had thrown up one of the bay-window sashes and leveled an automatic pistol straight at the autocratic personage in glittering helmet and gray cloak who sat in the tonneau of the first car twenty feet away.

McMurtagh, behind the infantrymen on the sidewalk, had watched the man closely as he opened the window. Polba was apparently almost beside himself with excitement and nervous terror. His hands were noticeably trembling as he shoved out his pistol and took aim.

With a motion so quick that those near him couldn't have sworn to it, McMurtagh's hand came up to the level of his shoulders—and dropped again. There was a spit of flame. Two reports came so near together that they almost blended; but one was a second ahead of the other. As a scream of pain came from the window and a shattered hand dropped a pistol upon the sidewalk underneath, the personage in the car involuntarily ducked from a bullet which sang within a foot of his head. His face turned a pasty white. Like some other imperial murderers who have preferred not to lead their troops in battle, the idea of personal sudden death was frightful—paralyzing to him. As it happened, McMurtagh's face among those on the sidewalk had caught the autocrat's glance a second before the shots were fired—it seemed vaguely familiar. Then had come the quick gesture and the amazing shot which presumably saved His Majesty's life—clearly photographed upon the imperial mind.

In the sudden confusion one of the infantrymen whirled on his heel and was about to lay violent hands upon McMurtagh when a sharp command from the car stopped him. "That is the gentleman who shot the assassin, fool! Ask him if he will call at the Hofburg within the next hour or two?"

McMurtagh's action had been the result of considerable study that afternoon, and had been as carefully worked out in detail as had that of the anarchists with their purposely stalled car. He had concentrated upon drawing the imperial glance toward him while the autocrat was still half a block away, because it was essential for the plan he had formed that his crippling of the assassin should be seen and remembered. He nodded a brief acceptance of the imperial request and walked away down a side-street with Racoczy, while Polba was being taken off and the cars of the visitors were rapidly progressing toward the Burg.

The Count's motor was awaiting them a few blocks away. Knowing that he would scarcely be expected at the palace for two hours at least, McMurtagh suggested running out to the villa in order that he might change into another suit. When he had done this, he joined his friends on the roof, where they were awaiting with intense curiosity his explanation of what he had done.

"Why the devil didn't you let that fellow complete his work, my friend? A better opportunity will never occur!"

"For a number of reasons, Herr Graf—some of which I thought over pretty carefully this morning, though I didn't make a final decision until I saw the condition he was in. He was so nervous that it is doubtful if even his second shot would have reached the mark! Before he could have fired a third,—with that silly habit of deliberate aiming,—the cavalrymen would have shot *him*, and there would have been no possibility of my obtaining this interview—which I mean to use, somehow, to insure overhearing that conference in case our other arrangements are discovered and you gentlemen have to disappear suddenly if you wish to live. The chance to know what is passing through that man's brain, just at this time, is worth immeasurably more to the civilized world than his death!"

As McMurtagh had foreseen and intended, he was received at the palace with marked respect. The autocrat was too busy with other matters, at the moment, to grant him a personal interview, even if such a thing had been in his mind; but he conferred, through one of his aides, the Iron Cross upon his preserver and wished to know if it would be possible for him to so arrange his affairs that he could join the imperial suite during their stay in Vienna and be constantly within a few feet of His Majesty. No detail of that phenomenal marksmanship and instant readiness had been lost upon the prematurely aging monarch, whose nervous system was fast getting to be a thing of shreds and patches.

After a few moments' consideration, McMurtagh told the aide that he could return by nine o'clock and would place himself at the autocrat's disposal for the duration of his stay in Vienna, but that it would be impossible for him to serve for a longer time. As he was leaving, the aide suggested that he had better report at the Schönbrunn.

During the day the four gentlemen of the household at the Schönbrunn who were members of Count Racoczy's revolutionary organization, had managed to have wires installed in some of the walls while a gang of electricians were repairing the lighting circuits—it had been an opportunity promptly recognized by Earl Trevor when the Count had told him that such work was being done under the supervision of a gentleman-in-waiting who was one of them, and it had been a simple matter to have two other men of their organization report to him disguised as electricians.

It was almost certain that any serious discussion of affairs between the two monarchs would take place in a room known as the Metternich Chamber, in which there was a large, flat-topped desk which Charles used in the mornings while transacting his routine work. A topographic map of Europe covered the entire wall back of his chair, and there were five desk-telephones—connected, through the château switchboard, with every long-distance wire on the Continent.

Another room, the Rudolfkammer, was also provided with telephones and adjoined a suite being made ready for the imperial visitor, but it had more of the ceremonious and less of the efficient business atmosphere. So, to make their preparations more complete, Count Racoczy's men had installed wire connections on the under side of the desk in the one, and under a massive table which corresponded in use, in the other. There was also a loose connection behind a picture in the bedchamber that was being prepared.

At two in the afternoon Lammerford had called upon the manager of the Deutsches Reichspressbund in the Kärntnerstrasse—a news-syndicate secretly connected with a greater one in London and used as a diplomatic information-feeder quite as much as for the gathering of news items. From this gentleman he obtained four of the latest model dictaphone transmitters and receivers, which he stowed in a leather suit-case and turned over to one of Racoczy's electricians when he returned to the villa. So, by the time McMurtagh reported to the imperial aide for duty at the Schönbrunn,—and he made a point of being in the château before the autocrat's arrival from the Burg,—the dictaphones had been installed without discovery or even suspicion upon the part of the Emperor's household, and the receiver concealed in a little anteroom closet used for the storage of stationery, office supplies, etc.—a closet invariably kept locked, but a natural enough place for the secret-service officers in attendance to conceal one of their number if the idea happened to occur to them.

THE first banquet to the visiting monarchs had been given at the Hofburg; consequently, it was nearly ten o'clock when they arrived at the Schönbrunn.

Upon arriving, the visiting autocrat retired for half an hour to the private suite which had been prepared for him, and sent his personal aide in search of McMurtagh. When that gentleman had been fetched before His Majesty, he seemed to be a man thoroughly accustomed to aristocratic society in spite of his claim to being merely a wealthy Irish-American. A few curt questions brought out as brief admissions of his work for the Camarilla in Petrograd and his mission from the Russian Socialists to those in Germany and Austria. The autocrat obtained exactly the same impression as had been given Herr Zimmermann in the Wilhelmstrasse six weeks before: that the three men who had been given credentials to proceed through the Teutonic empires were really of much higher rank than they appeared, and that they had been doing work of the greatest possible value to the German government in spite of any action or incident which might give a contrary appearance to their activities.

McMurtagh's prompt interference with the anarchist, that afternoon, seemed to clinch the matter beyond any possible doubt. And there was, it seemed, a haunting familiarity about the man's face—a suggestion of some other service in bygone years. It obsessed the autocrat to the point of annoyance. In a moment he asked with his habitual curtness:

"Have you been presented to me before, *mein Herr?*"

"More than once, Majestät. We also met upon another occasion—in another country. But that had better remain forgotten."

"Hmph!" The autocrat was intrigued by the mystery; he was positive that he had talked with the man several times before, but there was no hint which set his mind upon the right track. It was possible, of course, to arrest him,—have the mustache shaved off, have his body searched for marks and his clothes for evidence,—but he had sense enough to see that he would be the loser by any such action. So he dismissed McMurtagh with the request that he remain somewhere in sight until morning and keep as close as possible during alternate four-hour watches until the imperial visitors left Vienna—other confidential men relieving him during the off watches.

Until the autocrat retired, about half-past two in the morning, McMurtagh was constantly in sight of him from one vantage-point or another—sometimes from an anteroom, at others from a hallway, but always from a spot where he could probably intercept anyone who attempted to open the closet in which he knew Lammerford and Sir Abdool were concealed. (Racoczy and one of his brother Hungarians were listening at another receiver in one of the attic rooms of the château, not caring to risk discovery in the nearer location.)

In the morning, however, while the two monarchs were breakfasting, came an insistent telephone communication from Berlin concerning the crisis in the Reichstag—the return of the Crown Prince, his frequent conferences with the military clique, the demand for the Chancellor's resignation. Instead of remaining a week or more as they had planned, a special train was at once prepared, and the visitors left for the north before they had been in Vienna much over twenty-four hours. Racoczy's electricians—with the determination to make a thorough job of it—had also tapped the Schönbrunn telephone-wires, so that he and Sir Abdool overheard from the attic room the entire communication.

When the imperial guests had left the city, McMurtagh obtained permission from the young Austrian Emperor—who had personally thanked him for his prompt action with the anarchist—to be excused from further service at the château.

That evening Racoczy, Prince Kesterzechy and the three English diplomats adjourned to the roof after dinner for a discussion of the conference of the Emperors and its far-reaching significance. The Prince, who had only seen the Prussian at the Hofburg banquet, was inclined to sympathize with him as a man whose intentions were of the best, but who had been harassed beyond his strength by the mad determination of the Crown Prince and the military caste.

"The impression one gets from recent Berlin rumors, gentlemen, is that His Majesty may not be as entirely responsible as we've supposed. It is said that he was suddenly called home from a yachting trip in the Baltic to a war already launched by the Crown Prince and the General Staff. A year ago he was opposed to using the submarine but was overruled—asked to abdicate if he persisted in his opposition to it. In May his family again suggested his abdicating—"

"Trying to whitewash Lucifer, eh?" commented Mr. McMurtagh. "Apologies to Lucifer! I think, Your Highness, it would be better if you left that job to God Almighty. Of course, I can readily see how you have drawn certain deductions from our disconnected comments on that conference; but had you been actually listening to it as we were, with fairly complete knowledge of what he expected to accomplish by this visit to Vienna, you could scarcely have missed the grisly facts under the surface."

"Still, you say he has the appearance of a sick man—keeping up on the last vestige of his strength, forced to settle bickerings among his family and military chiefs at a time when Germany is defending her very existence."

"He had much the same appearance years ago, at the time of the Moroccan affair. Any opposition to his will makes him temporarily insane—and seems to leave him limp. Your Highness, at the very time when he was making just that same impression upon Charles, two Wilhelmstrasse men and three anarchists were perfecting their arrangements to assassinate your Emperor if he did not entirely agree to this man's suggestions—which really amount to orders! Even supposing that plot to have been instigated by the military clique, the fact that it appears to be made dependent upon the result of this interview implies rather pointedly that your 'sick man' must know of it—must have it in the back of his mind as an alternative! Just imagine the point of view, the sort of human brain, which can make a bid for personal sympathy with that kind of knowledge in reserve!"

"Do I understand, *mein Herr,* that you actually accuse him of treachery as black as that?"

"I make no accusations whatever! I merely state the fact that five men were shot an hour ago, at the Heumarkt Barracks, for conspiring to assassinate your Emperor. Four of them admitted the details to Major Brady here—at a secret rendezvous frequented by anarchists in the subcellar of a building on the Kohlmarkt—and said they were to act upon receipt of orders from Berlin which would not reach them until after this visit of the Kaiser. We didn't consider it safe to wait until we found out whether they actually received those orders or not, so we turned them over to your secret service with the evidence, and they made 'good Indians' of them. Now, if you choose to doubt any knowledge of that plot, you'll be merely taking the view that thousands of other people would take. Very good! We'll merely leave the inference without any accusation whatever. But the proceedings blocked out during that conference as a possible line of action in the immediate future are of the utmost seriousness to the Entente—to the entire civilized world—to Austria, Bavaria, Hungary and Württemberg."

"I don't think you made that clear in your somewhat brief account of that interview, *mein Herr.* I grasped the fact that you didn't believe the internal dissensions in the imperial family and German government quite as serious as the outside reports imply, but I didn't get the conclusions you drew from that fact."

"Possibly," rejoined Mr. McMurtagh, "we forgot to state some of the things actually said, Your Highness. The idea—the crux of the Kaiser's visit to Vienna—is this: The Entente has plainly stated, in reply to Germany's demand for peace terms, that the Allies will consider no terms whatever with the present dynasty—that until a representative democratic government is established in Germany, there will be no discussion of peace. This was naturally blasphemous to the war lord: he didn't take any stock in it. The Entente would see! It would sue for peace on its knees! Well, a good bit of water has run under the bridge since then. Practically the whole civilized world has united to keep the Allies on their feet and increasingly effective. The man is at last beginning to fear that it may not be possible to retain Belgium, northern France, Poland, Serbia and Turkey. He doesn't admit it to himself, even yet, but he's beginning to see visions at night—visions of exile, a dismembered empire, failure, oblivion. And he is determined with every ounce of his will that such an outcome shall be impossible—that while apparently yielding, Germany shall come out of the struggle a little stronger than when she went in. This still seems feasible to him—under certain reorganized conditions.

"The Allies will make no peace with him or any of his family? Very well! The Allies—poor stupid fools—must be outwitted by his superior intelligence: that's all. German *Kultur* cannot fail in the end, even though the means employed seem very distasteful to a stiff-necked anointed one. Reports must be spread of dissensions in the German government. The thing must be well done, with German efficiency, so that the outside fools cannot doubt what they see and hear—for months, a year if necessary. There must be rumor of abdications in favor of a younger, more popular, prince—crises in the Reichstag. Then is to come the abdication of the young prince in favor of a popular demand for representative government. Next will come a general election—a president and cabinet, who would prove to be of the aristocracy, on a majority vote. But—*underlying all this—the secret pledge of the Bundesrat, already given, to support another reorganization of the Government one year after the declaration of peace—a reorganization which should restore the monarchy and succession to practically the identical position it now occupies.*

"By means of this scheme, it was certain that the demands of the Allies would be much less severe—on the supposition that they were dealing with a democracy anxious to rehabilitate itself, a people who, for reasons of world politics, must not be crushed. There would be no talk of dismembering Germany, no demands for impossible indemnities—considerable bartering of conquered territory, with Germany emerging in possession of more Continental area than she had in 1914 and probably some of her colonial possessions restored."

"BUT," asked Racoczy, "how does that sort of scheme affect Austria? What does she gain by it? What is her position throughout?"

"That of the cat's-paw! Just that! And while Charles appeared to be momentarily hypnotized by the statement that he would be territorially a gainer in remaining as Germany's ally to the end, but giving the world an impression that he was really withdrawing Austrian troops from the German fronts, I fancy he saw through the whole scheme—saw that Austria had everything to gain by a separate peace, even with loss of territory—saw increasing disaster if he continues to fight. Gentlemen, our job for the next few weeks is right here in Vienna, even if Charles goes up to the Galician front in a little while as he intends! The underground battles of the war will be fought in this city—and in Munich and in Washington—during the coming months!"

"Then, if his abdication were an accomplished fact, if the Reichstag actually declares for a democracy or a more constitutional monarchy, you would not place full reliance upon the existing conditions, *mein Herr?*"

"Not while the man or his brood remain anywhere out of exile! For three long and bloody years we have seen the autocratic domination of Germany as the most indisputable fact of the whole world. And when the Entente finally makes peace, it must be on terms which make the future existence of military autocracy impossible! If the Allies are hoodwinked, bluffed into dangerous leniency, by the snares of this man and his military clique, there will be many more bloody years ahead of us—world-wide annihilation! Does anyone suppose for one moment that the Allies will consent to a draw with Germany? It would mean German domination of the world inside of ten years,—every other nation a vassal state, administered from Berlin,—with the crushing out of individual liberty and humanity. We have been shown the character of those who started this thing. God knows we've been warned!"

The Gentleman and the Tigress

A very short story

by BOB DAVIS

"AND I'm tellin' you, young feller," said Big-foot, slapping his sombrero at the tenuous cloud of greasewood smoke curling from the camp-fire, "this here readin' of books aint no fit pastime for cow-punchers."

"Not if they can't read," answered the lad who was bending over a tattered volume resting before him on his saddle blanket.

Big-foot, ignoring the barb from the kid, picked his teeth in dignified silence, then rolled a cigarette and returned to contemplation of the stars.

A coyote yelped in the distance.

"What's the story about?" inquired Big-foot, after a spell of silence. "It shore has took hold of you."

"The Lady and the Tiger," responded the youth, without taking his eyes from the grimy text. "By—lemme see—" He turned to the battered cover "By Frank R. Stockton."

This information, being twice as much as Big-foot sought, resulted in a long period of quiet, broken only by intermittent notes from the slinking night-raider in the remote darkness.

"I didn't ax you who writ it," resumed Big-foot. "I axed you what it's about?"

"Just a minute, and I'll tell you," was the breathless response of the reader, turning the last page eagerly. "I can see that hell—is—going—to—pop. Gee—whiz!"

Under the vast blanket of sidereal fire that spanned the sky, the juvenile, his eyes sparkling, his whole being animated by the recital, thereupon revealed to the illiterate Big-foot how the hero of the Stockton tale approached the portal behind which was concealed either his lady-love or—the tiger. "And damned if the author tells what the guy met up with when he opened the door," concluded the boy, throwing his hands aloft in complete surrender to consummate art.

"W-e-ll," said the gentleman of the large feet, after rolling and licking another cigarette. "I kin tell a better story'n that, and not leave you up in the air." Leisurely he lit the cigarette. "You aint never been anywhere to speak of, yet. Anyhow, when the railroad throwed a branch into a new minin' district, a bird shows up from Omaha and horns in on the quick money. That's before you was born—when men was males. The Omaha bucko says as how he was a gentleman, which he proves by wearin' clean shirts, writin' letters and keepin' books. Like as not you've heard about high-born parties a-fallin' in love with low-born females—"

"THAT'S what they all say," answered the boy irreverently.

"Which Omaha done," said Big-foot. "The gal's name was Lola and she throwed hash in a chow factory down by the depot. Omaha assessed his supply of clean shirts, got hisself a shave regular and starts a campaign for to win Lola; which he done, without no outside interference on the part of a preacher."

"And how long did that last?" asked the bookworm, becoming interested in the plot of Big-foot's tale.

"Oh, about two months. And then Lola—one of these here now, what you might call a wildcat—says to her gentleman friend, 'You lead me to a minister,' which same he also done, bein' as how parties quick on the draw hinted was the right idear. Lola moves into Omaha's es-tate and retires from the hash-factory. Fair enough. Fair—enough."

"After that he beat her up," interrupted the boy, familiar with these conventions of human relationship. "Which, as her legal man, he had a right to do."

"Nawsir," said Big-foot. "He was a gentleman and took his medicine. I aint sayin' how long he took it. But I will say that Omaha-ha wasn't cut out for a home-lovin' career. I'll say *that*."

"Why are you stringing this story out so long?' said the boy impatiently.

"Listen, kid," retorted Big-foot, emitting twin shafts of smoke from his nostrils. "You been readin' this here 'Lady or the Tiger' for half an hour. Did I say 'Hurry up, Mr. Stockton, and spill it?' I did not. Remember that, and I'll git on with the drammer of Omaha and his bride. I calls it, 'The Gentleman and the Tigress,' which don't interfere none with Frank's yarn.

"Now, get this: One day, Lola's lawful wedded husband says to her in strict confidence, swearin' her to secrecy: 'My dear, there is somethin' in my life about which I aint ever told you.' 'Whut is it?' asks Lola. 'I'm wanted by the police,' says Omaha. 'The only evidence upon which I could be convicted is in this letter-file, which I am now placin' in yore hands.'

"With that, he slips Lola a flat package all wrapped up in brown paper and tied with a string. Lola asks what is she to do with it, and Omaha tells her that he is goin' downtown to see if a certain man who blowed in from Nebraska that mornin' was on his trail. 'If he is,' says Lola's husband, 'and I'm not back here by ten o'clock, put this letter-file in the stove and watch it till it burns up. They can't convict me with no ashes!'

"And Lola says, 'What's the matter with burnin' it up now?' to which Omaha says, 'No. Among these here papers is documents that put two other men in my power, and I don't want to dee-stroy the evidence unless I am in danger myself. . . . And another thing, Lola, I may git mixed up in a gun play. I may be shot. You can't never tell. If I die with my boots on, and these here papers is found, my es-tate will be con-fiscated and you won't get a red cent. You can see how it is, Lola.' Omaha takes her in his arms and tells her to be brave and hope for the best, and to do what he says at ten o'clock if he don't come home. She begs him to burn the papers then and there and not to go to what might be his doom. 'I aint no coward,' says he, 'and must face the danger. Do as I say, Lola, and trust to yore guidin star.' With that he gits his gun, kisses the wife good-by and goes out for to meet his fate."

BIG-FOOT, who was a born dramatist, heaved more greasewood on the fire, rolled his third cigarette, and eyed his impatient auditor, whose anxiety was now at fever-pitch, accentuated by another yelp from the marauding coyote.

"By the time Omaha was well on his way," continued the historian, "Lola, bein' a female and inquisitive like 'em all, went to work, untied the letter file and took a squint at the contents. She got the surprise of her life."

"Whatwasinit?" cried the boy, merging the query into one word.

Big-foot was not to be hurried. "Keep your shirt on, kid," he replied. "Me and Mr. Stockton believes in makin' 'em wait. You'll get it fast enough when the kick comes. All I got to tell you now is that Omaha had the right idear when he told Lola he might git mixed up in a gun-play, and be shot up. He was."

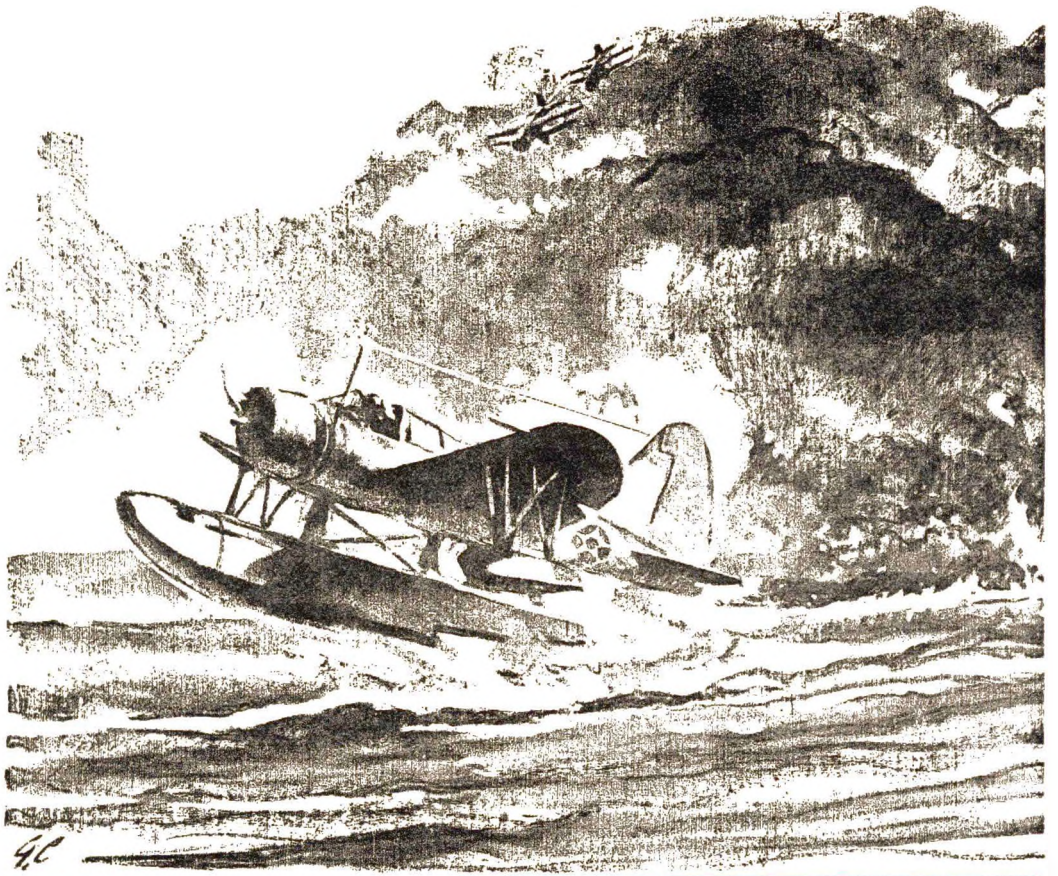
"Who shot him?" asked the boy in a trembling, strained voice.

"Lola."

"What—for?"

"Be-cause," answered Big-foot, his eyes bent on Frank Stockton's patron, "be-cause in that letter-file wrapped up in newspaper, Lola found a cap and fuse stuck into a stick of dynamite."

"Gee whiz, Big-foot!" husked the boy. "Oh, gee—*whiz!*"



Catapult Ready, Sir!

THE Two-ringer crossed over from the starboard wing of the bridge and nodded to Newsome, who had come up to relieve him. He wondered how Newsome's steward could get his whites so scrupulously clean and have them still retain that unwashed look.

The harbor was beginning to compound its stew of tropical tabasco. The spicy odor of the water, the gaseous by-product of the honey barge, and the stench of commercial offal came over the rail and swirled off into pungent currents of nostril-twitching aroma through the big rifles jutting from the upper turret. Above was the harsh discordant quarreling of gulls and the clank of semaphore-blades. Below, the throb of service motors provided a tuneless accompaniment for the hoarse bellowing of the Master-at-Arms, giving a new contingent of X Division "boots" a taste of fo'castle discipline.

Through the ventilators was piped the clatter of seamen in bag alley below, and the metallic musketry of bunks being triced up. A supply-craft chugged up with a flourish of her stern, swished up to the boom and swung there awaiting the loading-net.

The Skipper warped out of the chart-room, his eyes searching for all the troublesome perspectives of a bridge. He was short and wide and carried his hands with the gestures of a man who had been familiar with hawsers. His razor-annealed chin seemed to have been hacked out in the same general design that had been used to mold the No. 1 turret.

"Good morning, sir!" the Two-ringer greeted with a dry cough. He wanted to get to quarters and sluice some of the early morning canker from his mouth with a cup of *jamoke*. He hoped the Old Man wasn't in a chummy mood this morning.

"Morning, Powell. Have a good night?"

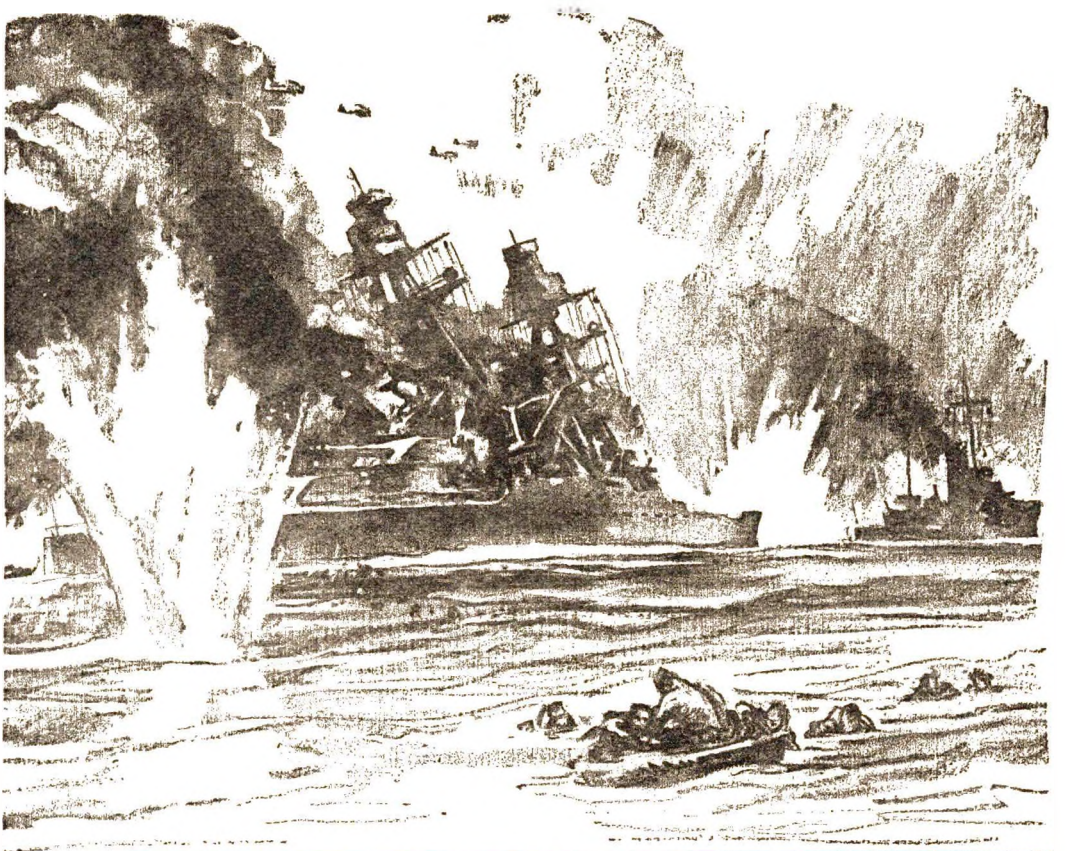
"Quiet watch, sir. Turret-drill again today, sir?"

The Skipper peered about like a man puzzling over a verse of Shakespeare. "I'm afraid so. The Fleet sheet is none too reassuring. Yes, turret-drill again, Powell. You'll have to check that No. 2 shell-hoist."

Powell wanted to say something about these damned treaty tin-clads, but settled for a lame explanation concerning a loose pinion gear.

"Get anything more on Baldwin?"

"Baldwin, sir?" said Powell, moving across the bridge to be well on the port side and away from the Executive Officer, who had slipped out to give Newsome some instructions. "He's



A story of the air war in the Pacific, by the author of "Duty Flight, Stand By!"

by Arch Whitehouse

another good Annapolis man spoiled by football. Football and headlines. Still giving trouble, sir?"

"Wants his release, apparently," the Old Man muttered, squinting at a signal flicker that snapped across the harbor from a destroyer. "Can't stay out of the air. It's the new job this morning."

"Saw him at the Colony Club two days ago," Powell said. "He was talking to a Jap business man in one of the bar booths. Quite cozy and chummy, too."

"I don't like it." The Skipper frowned until he looked like the cross-section of a rusty breechblock. "Tells me he wants to transfer into the R.A.F."

"The R.A.F. is getting all the glory just now. They can have it," Powell muttered. "I can wait until our turn comes."

The Skipper rested his elbows on the rail and reflected that Powell would be satisfied to sit back and wait. Still, someone had to wait. He could understand young Baldwin—when the blood runs young, you have to obey its impulses.

It wasn't pleasant, this waiting. He wondered how much longer they had to wait—how much longer before he could open the sealed envelope that nuzzled in his cabin safe.

The Old Man turned slightly and allowed his eyes to pick out the salient features of Ford Island, a nubbin of rock being kicked across the harbor by the club-footed promontory that washed its thick ankles in East Loch.

A chugging freight-engine came around the bend of the harbor at Aiea and flaunted a sooty streamer of energy.

The Skipper said slowly:

"He's a worker, of course, and I don't like losing him. I want you to keep me posted, Powell."

"Well, sir, I don't like playing the snoop—" began Powell, wondering where his *sub-rosa* duty as a member of Naval Intelligence ended, and where his chart as Gunnery Officer began.

"I simply asked for information that might be of value to me as commander of this vessel, sir. Remember, Mr. Powell, I am speaking to you on my bridge. That's all, sir!"

AN hour later Powell found Mike Baldwin at the base of the No. 3 catapult. The aviation lieutenant was going over a new Vought-Sikorsky manual with Skip Lassiter, his machinist's mate. Above them on the projection cradle nestled the single float of Baldwin's new V-S OS2U-1. This new Vought-Sikorsky was the first

to be allotted to the *Kansas* and several changes were necessary in the cradle to accommodate the longer and racier lines of the main central float.

Aviation machinists in dungarees were carrying out the alterations under the subjugating eye of a C.P.O. when Powell came along the deck. He stared up at the Vought-Sikorsky and then glanced down at the older Corsair mounted on the stern slingshot.

"Get that flight-test permit?" Powell ventured.

"Why not?" boomed Baldwin with taffrail enthusiasm. He was a slim-hipped man who moved like a left-hook boxer. He had a squarish face jeweled with two sapphire-tinted eyes. His neat slim mustache was trimmed to an arrogant slant at the ends. He spoke gayly: "You know, Powell, you ought to take a flip in this baby. Take some of the kinks out of your neck!"

"I'll stay in the turret. You get the targets," grinned Powell.

Baldwin flashed a taunting glance at Lassiter. "We can't get these water-logged gunners off a deck, can we, Lassiter? They do beeno squawking about coöperation, but you can't get them into the air where they might get some idea of our job."

The gunner guy knew he'd only be sandpapering the anchor if he entered the argument. He smiled until he looked like a Y-gun.

"We've got another turret-drill. Plenty turret-drill while this situation is on the books," explained Powell.

"Quit reading that stuff! We're so damned far from a war it aint funny. We're in the wrong outfit, Powell!"

The Two-ringer wagged his head and smirked. "I hear you put in for a release. Going Limey on us?"

"Who can tell?" Baldwin said with a grimace. "Those guys are having all the fun. All we do is stand by. We'll be standing by when the British are back in Dunkerque!"

"They can have it. How about a round of golf this afternoon? I got a bid for the Mid-Pacific Country Club. We can get ashore by noon."

"Not me! That's not my game. Besides, I've got business in town this afternoon."

"Business? You've only been out here a few weeks!" Powell said for a feeler.

"So what? Maybe I'll open a bowling-alley. A guy has to do something. We'll sit out here so long they'll be swinging pontoon bridges out from the battle-wagons to the pier so that the gold braid won't get sprayed going ashore."

"It's your war," agreed Powell, heading for Ship's Stores.

IT was a travel-folder forenoon in Oahu when Mike Baldwin and Skip Lassiter climbed the catapult and started the Pratt and Whitney engine. Activity exploded with all the musical clatter of a Chauvez concerto.

Baldwin opened the booming radial and let her pound her revs. He cut her down, and she idled for some minutes until the temperature needles had warmed their way up the dials. He snapped in his headset and made a test call to the Air Operations Officer.

"Test flight authorized. Plane 1. . . . Kansas given clearance. Flight restricted to immediate anchorage area," the Air Operations Officer stated in metallic cadence. *"All clear. Plane 1, Division A.O., take over!"*

"Thank you. Plane 1. . . . Kansas. Ready for routine test flight. May we have permission for target practice off Ahua Reef?"

There was a pause from the F.A.O. Then it came in again: *"Routine test flight restricted to plane test. Gunnery program forbidden. Repeat, please!"*

Baldwin muffled a growl and repeated the order: *"Routine test flight only . . . restricted to Fleet anchorage area. Thank you!"*

"You're just ballast, Skip," he called over his shoulder. "Put the corn-poppers away."

The mate aft responded with a horsy grimace and peered over the side to where the Deck Officer was standing. A beefy C.P.O. grinned up from the impeller cartridge cylinder and superintended the loading of the propulsion charge.

"Plane ready! Crew ready!" called Mike Baldwin, holding up two fingers.

The Deck Officer repeated the advice with a bored tone and glanced at the cradle-release mechanism.

The C.P.O. barked his clearance response and took a belligerent grip on the trigger-cord.

"'Pult ready, sir!"

"Catapult ready!"

"Pilot ready! . . . Crew ready!" yelled Baldwin, easing the throttle up the gate. He rammed his feet forward against the heel-plates, braced his head against the crash-pad and raised his hand. He glanced sidewise and watched the Deck Officer's upraised arm and stiffened.

The bare sunburned arm of the D.O. flashed down like a varnished club. A convulsed explosion below the catapult tracks was detonated and punched at the piston head. There was a titanic hiss, as if a hot cleaver had been drawn through a suety carcass. The Navy plane stiffened and suddenly shot along the guides like a bolt from a crossbow. The cradle bashed against the buffers with impetuous violence, and the plane plummeted into the nothingness at the discharge end. She seemed to hold her breath, incredulous at the sting of some unseen knout that had lashed her cruelly across the belly. She went up with a gasp like a gaffed salmon, then hovered uncertainly a few feet clear of the guides. She shivered and sought the security of air pressure as she floundered into a gentle arc toward the water.

Instinct and training snapped Baldwin's reflexes into taking over. His right hand sought elevator-control pressure, and his left eased the throttle a few notches farther up the curve.

There was a period of gagging uncertainty, a slobbery slackness about the stick until at last the flailing blades of the propeller bit in again and dragged the big two-seater into the cushion of fluid support. She drew away from the seduction of the greasy water that for a second reflected in sharp detail her plan outline. Mike Baldwin curled her away and sought the encouragement of a head-wind.

The two Navy airmen eased forward and swallowed hard. They twisted their heads experimentally to make certain the base pivots of their skulls were still intact. Baldwin headed her straight out for Diamond Head; and then, once he had caught the feel of the stick and sensed the delicacy of response to the rudder, he swung her back for Ford Island and made a routine report to the Fleet Air Officer.

BEHIND, Skip Lassiter was fingering with his gunner's equipment and breaking out his key-panel. This was a routine test flight, and Skip was making the most of it.

He pecked at his key after checking the aerial, called his Chief Gunnery Officer, conducted a short practice "shoot" routine, then folded the panel back. He glanced over again and studied the anchorage and positions of the various craft. The panorama below produced a glorious throat-filling spectacle, but it also presented a fearsome possibility.

"How do you like her?" bellowed Baldwin over his shoulder.

"I wish we were at sea," Skip muttered to himself. "I don't like the way them babies down there are chained up for a killing."

Baldwin was putting the ship through a series of simple primary maneuvers and had worked her into a position over the air-field. A flight of Army pea-shooters was beetling along the runway below for a practice formation flight.

"You know," smirked the pilot, closing his hatch, "we got a dumb berth sitting out here doing practically nothing; but those Army guys sure picked a safety-first job! We at least can sneak out to sea and make a mistake in navigation."

"I don't get it, sir," Skip answered, blinking his batrachian eyelids.

"They get more wound-stripes trying to ride surf-boards out at Waikiki than they'll ever get playing soldier."

"You don't think—"

"I don't know. I'm getting out of this flossy mob. We're so far from a war now that if someone let off a rocket on New Year's Eve, half the brass hats out here would put in applications for Congressional Medals."

"Things don't look so hot for furloughs," protested Lassiter.

"Stop listening to the radio! Those war-commentators just want to get out here and see if the Wahini really wear grass skirts."

"You really figgerin' on gettin' out, sir?"

"I got it all set. In two weeks I'll be plunking lead into Jappo crates along the Burma Road, and scribbling in some real flying-time. I'm not waiting for—"

"You going much farther, sir?" the gunner mate inquired, looking back at Barber's Point.

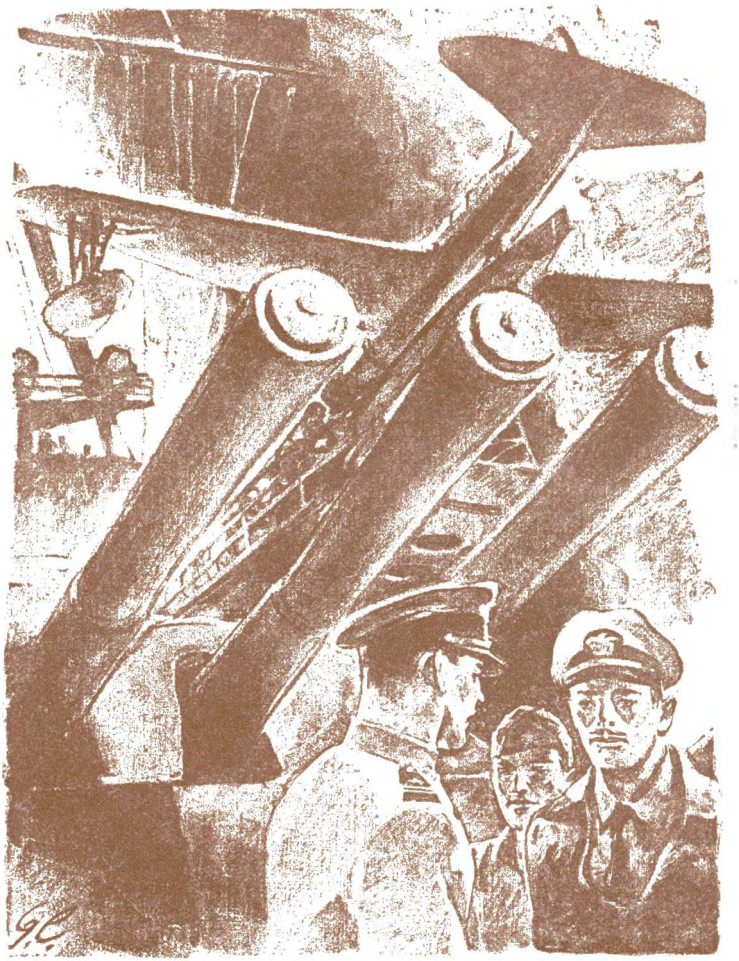
The bite of rising revolt had been tapped, flooding Baldwin's ego with new energy. So far, his desires had been thwarted at every turn. These new juices of confidence charged him with illogical vigor which he chose to interpret as initiative.

"Ah, we might as well give this baby a workout," he muttered. "We conk out and splash it around? So what? The Jappos probably had a set of blueprints on this tub two weeks before a mock-up was built!"

Lassiter rammed his buttocks back into his saddle and accepted the situation with below-decks resignation.

The plane responded with normal stiffness on the lateral control, but appeared to have been especially tuned to Baldwin's requirements fore and aft. He looked around, studying the surface below, seeking a slab of debris on which he might try his front guns. Baldwin was a shooting fool, once he squatted behind a gun-sight.

Lassiter risked it again. "I don't think we ought to go out too far, sir."



"I hear you put in for a release. Going Limey on us?" Powell asked.

AS an answer, Baldwin sent the Vought-Sikorsky through a wing-wrenching program of dives and climbing-turns while he ghost-gunned for an imaginary enemy. Below him now was a scraggy strip of the Burma Road, pulsating unevenly with sluggish supply-lorries heading northeast for Kunming. In his mind's eye, V-formations of Nakajima biplane fighters, manned by toothy Japs, were being broken up by his short infighting blows of Browning lead. He'd read that somewhere in a story, and it tasted good. The Jappos were scattering now, and he whanged her over on one wing-tip, the pound of the slipstream drumming back in victory off the big single float as the Nakajima guys scattered and fled. The seaplane cleared the carnage of wreckage and shot up with a scream of prop-lash, and cleared.

Lassiter watched him with patronizing interest through the tunnel of dural that separated the glassed-in cockpits. He sensed what prep-school drama was flickering through Baldwin's mind. He studied the natural exuberant spirit, and wondered what the mug would do under actual combat conditions.

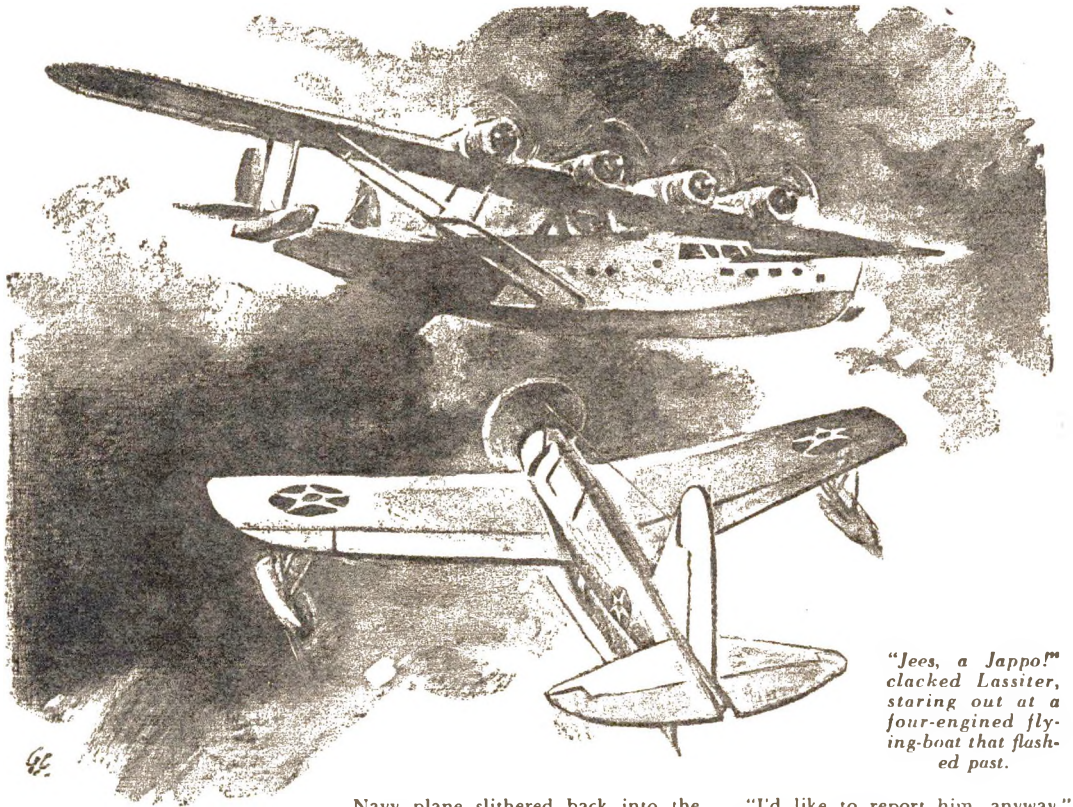
Skip had absorbed punishment in the service ring, and his experience and training quickly diagnosed these swinging haymaker guys. He saw Baldwin as a fighting airman, not an Eyes-of-the-Navy flyer. Lassiter's years as a seaman had sobered him and drilled his mind to the disciplined duties of Fleet cooperation. . . . That was the difference between the two cockpits. Enthroned in one, you enjoy the pomp and circumstance of control and command, where you work off steam by wielding a control-stick and pressing a gun-button. In the other you fought when you found time between spotting for enemy ships, maintaining a flight chart, and pounding brass with a staccato code that trained sixteen-inchers or laced a widespread Fleet together with lines of unscissored communication.

He sniffed with disdain at the system which automatically lavished all the glory and romance, the pay and rank, the medals and national prominence on the man who sat in the front seat.

"*'Oh, the ladies have babies, who live down our way,'*" he sang quietly with discord and disgust.

Baldwin twisted his head and grinned over his 'chute traces at the gunner guy. He trumpeted a high-pitched peal of triumph.

"That's the way they do it in a real war, Lassiter! You get medals and



"Jees, a Jappo!" clacked Lassiter, staring out at a four-engined flying-boat that flashed past.

blood-money for that, if you're in the right outfit!"

The stick was back, and the two-seater swept on up into a layer of cirrus. There was an indefinable roar somewhere up there, and then a black pike-winged shadow swept into the panels of the hatch-covers and subdued the light in the cockpit.

Skip Lassiter reacted like a mongoose. He shot forward from a sitting position, his massive palms rammed Baldwin forward with all the energy of a set of freight-yard buffers.

"Jees!" he yelled. "Gosh A'mighty! You nearly crashed him!"

The gunner's thrust had caught the pilot bluntly behind the right shoulder. Baldwin was rammed across the cockpit and the Vought-Sikorsky switch-backed up and through the cloud-layer like a porpoise.

"Jees, a Jappo!" clacked Lassiter, staring out at the shot-welded hull of a four-engined flying-boat that flashed past them.

Baldwin sucked in his breath with the strained features of a man who has been stabbed. He caught the gleam that filtered off the twin fins and rudders for a second before the Navy plane slithered back into the vapor.

"Hell-a'mighty!" Lassiter bawled, his eyes flaming with accusation. "We almost plowed into that baby!"

His face was as pale as his sun-baked features would tolerate. One hand was still on the escape-latch. Baldwin returned the stare wide-eyed.

"What—what did you say that was?" the pilot finally quaked, pulling the Vought-Sikorsky around into the clear space below.

"Jappo! Four-engined flying-boat. You saw it!"

Baldwin tried to wag his head negatively. "Jappo, my eye!" he argued weakly. "That was a Pan-American commercial. I saw the twin rudders!"

"She had insignia. Jappo insignia. Big red circles on the wings," Lassiter rattled back.

"That *couldn't* be! You must have caught the sunlight off an aileron. That was a Pan-American Martin boat. What the hell would a Jappo be doing out here?"

"She was coming in from the southeast, sir! If she had been heading in from Manila, she'd be coming through Guam, Wake and Midway. They come in from the northeast, sir!"

"He *could* have been off course," Baldwin suggested weakly.

"I'd like to report him, anyway," Lassiter muttered.

"Nothing doin'!" ranted Baldwin.

"I'm telling you, sir, they got a long-range patrol-boat that looks exactly like the Martin!" He reached down into the log-slot for his Aircraft Identification book. "See here, sir! The Japs have a patrol-boat based on the French Potez design. It has two wing-support struts. The Pan-American outer panels are cantilever!"

"You're telling me? I know Martins. That *had* to be a Martin, Skip! What are you trying to do, start a war?" Baldwin raged, shoving Lassiter's silhouette-book away.

"I'd like your permission to report it, sir."

"Listen! We'll go back upstairs and make sure. I'll slap this baby clean up against her hull so you can read the manifest. Will that satisfy you?"

"Aye-aye, sir."

THE silent quarrel broiled a widening gap between them as Baldwin, uncertain and stubborn, wondered whether he'd missed something. He riffled the details in his mind and realized that if Lassiter had sent a report through, he'd have the whole Fleet in an uproar. They'd be skewered on a

general Alert, and he'd never get that release. He tried to garble Lassiter's arguments, but the gong inside him continued to tonk and drown out his unreasoning.

He gave the throttle a jab, and he allowed her a notch or two of flap. She went up like a taut-stringed kite through the cloud-layer above and zoomed into the blue.

Lassiter was stewing around in the aft cockpit like a turnip in a caldron. He had his glasses out, and his eyes were sweeping the sky in every direction.

"You can bet all the tea in China that tub is in now, and they're trooping up the ramp to get their *leis*. That was a Pan-American boat, I tell you," the pilot mumbled with doubtful assurance.

"Yes? Well, what's she doing heading back out to sea again? There she goes—due southwest," Skip Lassiter said without lowering his glasses.

"Okay! I'll handle it when we get in," Baldwin said after a minute's study and reflection. "Leave it to me."

Baldwin knew full well that the Marshall Islands were not much more than two thousand miles away, and that there were plenty of Jap surface luggers on the route where a flying-boat could refuel—if necessary.

The Navy pilot reported through to the F.A.O. and made a routine request for a landing-permit. He circled the harbor twice and glanced at the panorama of Naval might swinging at the ten-ton anchors below. He wondered if Lassiter actually believed by now that he had seen a Japanese patrol-boat. Wishful thinking produced a lusterless resolve that in all probability the gunner guy had simmered back to a somnolent reflection that if his pilot was satisfied, the incident was not important, and there was nothing he could do about it.

ON the contrary, Skip was sitting back, strangely cold and racked with the realization that something had slipped. It was a simple matter to fear the worst. He'd heard strange stories in the town. He struggled now with several reasons why Baldwin had ignored the basic facts of the situation, but he couldn't muster an excuse or sympathetic understanding of his pilot's attitude.

Half an hour later Baldwin was in the Skipper's quarters, having left Lassiter to stand by while the Vought-Sikorsky was being hoisted back on the catapult cradle.

"Hello, Baldwin! Anything to report?" the Old Man greeted.

"She's a very nice job, sir. I'll fill out a report on her flight characteristics at once. But there was another matter I wanted to talk to you about."

The Skipper straightened his tie and frowned: "Still want to cut loose, eh? I think you're making a grave mistake, Baldwin."

The young lieutenant snatched at this chance of evading the subject he had intended to bring up.

"I'd like to explain that in further detail, sir," he replied, standing a little straighter. "It isn't that I'm trying to get out of the service, sir. I'm Navy through and through. I appreciate all the Navy has done for me and the opportunities it has afforded me." He knew he sounded like something written on a wall at Bancroft Hall.

The Skipper listened with the grimaces of a man who is trying to think up answers to questions that are answering themselves.

"I think, sir," Baldwin plunged on, "I think I shall be doing a service by transferring and joining the American volunteers in China. They need men, that mob. They're actually doing something about this war. The Burma Road is important, isn't it, sir?"

"But I thought it was the R.A.F. you were interested in."

"I was, at first, but they tell me there's a lot of red tape to cut through, and you're months getting the required time in on their types. I can get into action—almost tomorrow, if I can get through to Chungking or Kunming. I could catch a Clipper, sir."

"I don't like this sort of thing, Baldwin," the Skipper decided peakishly. "It puts you into a cheap soldier-of-fortune class. This professional-killer business, with bonus bags tied to it, isn't in my creed. Still, I can see *your* point!"

"It isn't the money, sir!" protested Baldwin. "I hadn't even thought about the money. I want to do something more effectual than sitting out here in this Pacific paradise, where we are apparently doing nothing more than provide a novelty background for the tourist trade. I'm sick of the social teas, dress uniform dances and escorting Senators' daughters through the Mess. I'm sick of the thin tinsel of society. What are we, service men or musical comedy escorts for dizzy débutantes?"

"Mr. Baldwin!" the Skipper admonished, his face clouding into purple. "You are speaking of the Service, sir!"

Baldwin backed up and steadied himself against the chart table. "I'm sorry, sir. I beg your pardon. It's this war, sir. I'm very sorry, sir."

"That will be all!" The Skipper nodded determinedly. "I'll see about a form on which I can recommend your application for a resignation. Your record is good, but your attitude toward the service is contrary to good order and discipline. That will be all."

The Old Man seemed to have aged suddenly. He had been pacing the cabin with a sturdy stride. He halted near the bookcase, put out a blue-veined hand to steady himself.

"Thank you, sir!" Baldwin answered swallowing the acidulous purge of conscience that washed through his reasoning and stiffened him to his duty. "I should have advised you, sir, that we had a very close shave with a Pan-American flying-boat a few miles southwest of Ahua Point. I don't know what he was doing in that area if he had come out of Midway. I came up through a layer of cirrus and almost took his bottom out. He was well off his approach area, sir."

"I'll look into it. I believe they're expecting a plane through today. We must insist on their respecting our operations area. Thank you, Baldwin," the Skipper answered with a weary gesture.

"I'm pretty sure it was a Pan-American boat, sir. I didn't see much of it, trying to clear."

"I'll call their pier and check it. Send Quills in when you go out, will you, please?"

BALDWIN changed into shore whites and checked out with the D.O. He moved aft in the omnibus boat and squatted down near Powell, who greeted him with a knowing smirk. The bo'sun eased the boat clear of the collision mats, and swept her out into the channel.

"Can't kid you into a round of golf, eh?" Powell asked, back-heeling a small gear-bag under the polished seat.

"Not me! I'm seeing a guy about a transfer. If I contact my man today, I'll see beeno action within a week. One-place fighters, too! No more headaches off a catapult, with a dumb gunner beating his gums and seeing Jappos in every cloud. I'll be seeing the real thing!"

"You sure will. You'll probably wind up in the old wire city—looking out. Don't sell the Yellow Kid short, Baldwin. He might be very tough," warned Powell.

"He's not so tough. He's been a long time getting nowhere in China. If I can get a release, I'm going out with the Burma Road crowd and get me some fighting time. I'm seeing a guy—one of Chiang Kai-shek's men—this afternoon at the Colony Club. I get a bonus in American jack, too!"

"How do you know he's one of Chiang Kai-shek's men?"

Baldwin huffed that off: "How do I know? He told me. He has papers! Don't you think I know who I was talking to?"

"Can you tell a Chinaman from a Jap, Baldwin?"

"Who can't? That's easy. The Chinks are taller, and shy on whiskers. I can tell them a mile away!"

"I wish I could," moaned Powell. "I took a course on Asiatic racial char-

acteristics at Manila two years ago, but I'll be slugged if I can tell them apart."

"No wonder they keep you guys cooped up in a gun-turret," observed Baldwin caustically.

The liberty boat ran up to the dock, and the Navy men fluttered across the wharf like a covy of gray gulls and headed for the various means of transportation into the city. . . .

It was a tired and foot-weary lot that stumbled down the companionway little knowing that this was to be their last Saturday night's liberty for months. For many it was the last time they would ever chug past Ford Island and clamber over the thwarts at a broken-striper's order.

At the top of the gangway Powell hurried out from the shadows of the fore-turret, selected Baldwin from the mob and dragged him clear.

"Hey!" he began with a crude attempt to be friendly. "What about that Chiang Kai-shek man you were with at the Colony Club? You still sure he's a Chinaman?"

Baldwin peered uncertainly into Powell's face. "What are you doing, Powell? Following me around?"

"Don't get sore. I just happened to blow in. I saw you there with that guy, and I'm certain he's a Jappo. I'd check on that baby, if I were you."

"Listen! I tell you that guy has papers. They don't hang around Hawaii without papers, do they?"

"I don't know—do they?" returned Powell with a stare that had fishhooks in it. "You better check on that guy with the Chinese authorities here. He looks like a gilligan hitch to me."

"He looked good enough to me," snarled Baldwin. "I'm getting one grand when my release is cleared. That's the kind of paper I like to see. I got to blow. Plenty of arrangements to make!"

"Do yourself a favor," the Two-striper advised. "Check on that guy before you hit the beach for good."

BELOW, in his quarters, Baldwin wondered why Powell had shown such undercover interest. He'd never even spoken to him in the wardroom before today.

He stripped down to his undershirt and stared into the mirror above his basin. "So what?" he argued with himself. "I didn't say anything off the record. All he wanted to know was how long we'd be at Pearl Harbor. Queer, him thinking we'd be shooting out tomorrow. More screwy scuttlebutt rumors ashore than you get in a boot-camp!"

He completed his undressing.

"Just suppose he was a Jappo? The Fleet's not moving out. If it is, I don't know anything about it, so I couldn't have given him any dope. Why do all these things happen to me?"

He slipped into his bunk and snapped off his light.

"I'll be glad to step out of this man's Navy," he muttered. "A guy don't get enough action to warrant a logbook out here."

That reflection satisfied him, and he tried to remember the geography of Burma—until sleep took over.

A BEAUT—that first crash was! Baldwin was finishing up his breakfast and studying the message the Exec's writer had placed beside his coffee-cup. The Executive Officer wanted to see him about that Pan-American Clipper. It seemed the Pan-American authorities had no tape on it. It was not expected until later that day.

Baldwin glanced at his wrist-watch. In five minutes it would be eight bells. Time to muck up in his quarters and be on the bridge before Colors. He wondered again whether that guy really had papers, and whether Lassiter had really seen a red ball on the wing of that flying-boat.

He got the answers with a smack that sent him spinning out of his chair.

The first crash was a beaut! It came in from fourteen thousand feet and clipped the clinker-cap of the stack and went off with a confined roar somewhere below. A bugle started to peal over the loud-speaker and blipped off without finishing. A blast of splintered flame tore the door off the paymaster's office and slammed it down the companionway. A steward balancing a tray of coffee-pots went skithering across the warming-table on his belly and disappeared. Another roar, and the wardroom was blacked out with a cloud of oil-smoke pumped into the room on a bolster of steam.

"I wonder if that guy really had papers!" Baldwin said to himself.

Other officers scrambled past, wiping cantaloupe pulp from their whites. The speaker ranted: *"Action Stations! Action Stations!"*

"Someone's taking a crack at us. . . . Air raid!"

The vessel belched somewhere as the pressure of the explosion below rammed through the companionways and sent the acrid stench of her breath into the ventilators.

Baldwin sensed she was tilting already, and he made for the companionway that led up to the quarterdeck. He listened to the sudden clatter of the pom-poms and the criss-crossing scream of aircraft that were weaving a tarpaulin of terror overhead.

The vessel recoiled again as another bash went off somewhere outside. She spun hard against her chain. A man staggered to the top of the ladder, holding the lower half of his face together with his splayed fingers. Baldwin put out a hand to assist, but the scarlet-stained figure shoved at him with its clean hand and toppled headlong down the rubber-plated steps.

"Jees! That was Powell!"

Alongside the whaleboat, three figures were crisscrossed over a boathook; and a medical orderly, ruddy to his biceps, was trying to drag them apart. The guns on the other side opened up, and the clatter of empty shell-cases clanged across the deck with a chorus of toneless gongings. A gray biplane with scarlet insignia swept across the forebridge, spitting M.G. It caught a wing-tip on the yard, spun flat and tried to recover. There was a splash off to starboard, and the Nakajima blossomed into a flower of flame and wrenched metal.

A bomb exploded after a corkscrew whine and blew something to bits near the aft turrets.

"That's our catapult, sir!"

"That you, Lassiter? Jees, your face!"

"We'd better get aboard, eh, sir? You said you'd soon be seein' action, eh?"

Together they groped through the smoke and cordite stench for the rungs of the turret ladder and made their way to the base of the catapult.

SOMEONE was screaming in a snarling voice from the derrick arm: "Get that damn' plane off! She's fueled, isn't she?"

Halfway up the catapult, Baldwin saw the derrick-arm swinging around. The ball and hook seemed to be reaching out to snatch him from the chance he'd been praying for.

"No! Get that blasted tackle clear. We'll take her off. Come on, Skip!"

"You can't get her off, sir. The track's tilted too much. You'll hit the drink doin' eighty!"

Baldwin was on the wing-root now, and he saw for the first time how much the deck was tilted. Almost forty-five degrees. Judas! The starboard rail was *up there!*

"They want to jettison her, sir! Maybe if we let them swing us over—"

"Get that plane off that catapult! Her tanks are full!"

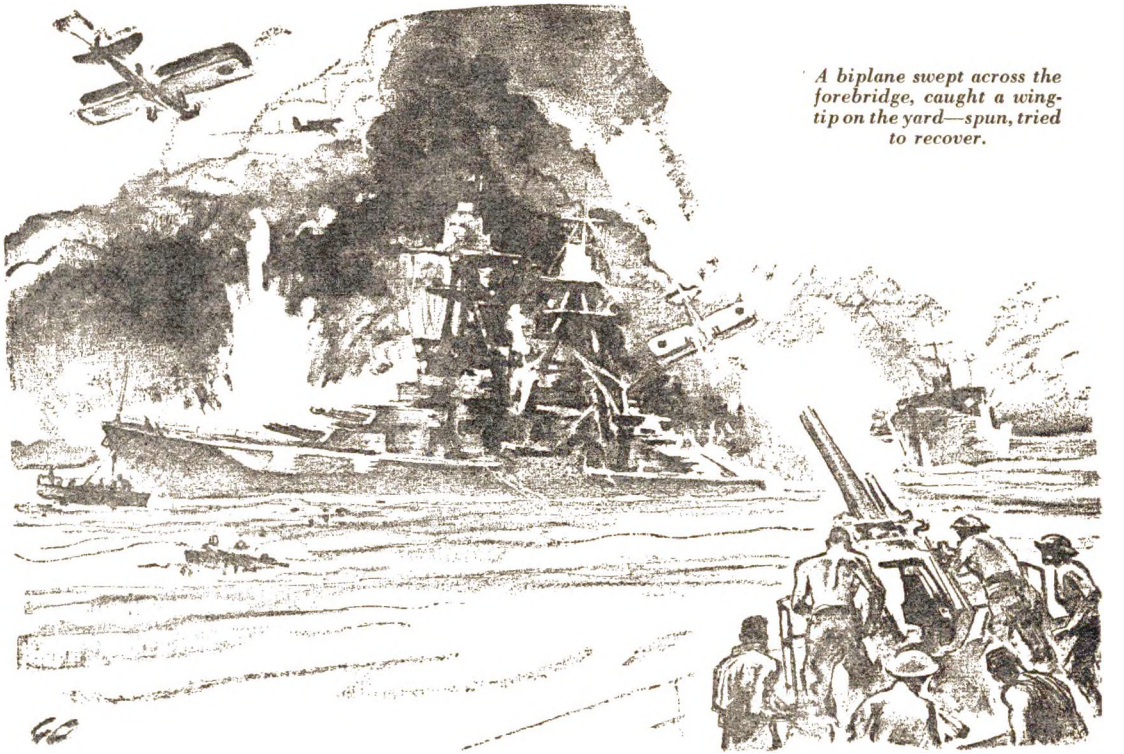
The old Corsair on the stern catapult was aflame and spewing her juice all over the quarterdeck. The burning liquid was draping itself over the stern and sizzling across the greasy rollers toward the men bobbing about out there.

"Man the catapult!" yelled Baldwin, high-legging into the cockpit.

Lassiter crawled across the heat-blistered platform and stared down the angle of the catapult tracks. She was tilted like a shoot-the-chute, straight at the patch of billowing flame that cascaded off the stern from the machine-gunned Corsair.

"Man the catapult!"

Skip was flat on his belly now, bellowing at the white-eyed group of



A biplane swept across the forebridge, caught a wing-tip on the yard—spun, tried to recover.

black-gang seamen who had been huddling near the aft shelter-deck. A C.P.O., an arm supported in the full of his shirt, kicked at a Marine bugler and herded them to the ladder.

"You can't take her off down there, sir!" pleaded Skip at the top of his voice.

"Load that catapult cylinder!" Baldwin yelled. "We're taking her off!"

Lassiter peered down the tracks again.

"Smacko into the fire—at eighty!"

The black-gang took over and crawled through the lattice-work of the mounting. Metal clanked, and a ratchet squealed above the scream of the dive-bombers.

"Git the lead outer yer leggins, you guys!" Lassiter raged. He clambered on up the catapult ladder and made the wing-root by the time Baldwin had the engine bellowing. Another bomb blasted a chunk out of the tripod mast, and a section of the gaff smashed down and knocked a seaman off the turret. The three-inchers on the high side were punching out shells with ear-splitting regularity. The vessel was tilting even more now.

"She won't stay on the cradle, sir. She'll slip off!" Lassiter bellowed into Baldwin's cockpit. "Besides, that's burning gas down there!"

"An' those guys in China think *they're* in a war!" yelled Baldwin back at him. "Cripes, they can't even tie this. Get aboard!"

"Aye-aye, sir!"

"Plane ready! Crew ready!" bellowed Baldwin.

The Exec below in tin hat and life-jacket was bawling through his cupped hands: "You'll pile her up, Baldwin. You'll never make it!"

"Catapult ready, sir!" the C.P.O. reported, holding the trigger lanyard.

"Let's have it!"

There was a fraction of a second when Baldwin had a chance to see where he was going. The guide-rails of the catapult were directed straight at the widening lake of flaming gasoline. The plane hung precariously on the tilted cradle, hanging on with sheer weight alone. Once she started down—anything could happen.

THERE was a thump behind as Lassiter piled in head-first.

"Plane ready! Crew ready!"

"Abandon ship!" the loud-speaker was blatting. "Abandon—"

A high-level devil nosed into the searchlight platform and snapped the derrick-boom around with a thud of fabricated metal. The C.P.O. ducked, and yanked the lanyard.

Whom!

The propulsion cartridge went off with a choked crash. The valves wheezed and snubbed her. With a metal-wrenching wail, the cradle shot down the guides, and the lower wing came up as Baldwin rammed down the aileron; the Vought-Sikorsky plunged off, and Baldwin held her dead on, his left hand braced against the instrument-board for the shock.

The catapult crew stood open-mouthed, like seamen awaiting the concussion of a sixteen-incher. They watched her plow off the cradle notches and plunge headlong at the pond of flame that flickered with hungry anticipation.

With a cruel metallic bash the main float hit the water. A giant hammer smacked at a mammoth metal drum, and the boom drowned out the insane blast of an armor-piercing bomb that fanged into the flag deck.

They saw the seaplane recoil and leap with the startled amazement of a quirted mustang. She came up, fanning the blaze of the fuel back at the rollers, and plunged on drunkenly into the clear.

"Jee-sus Prudence!" gasped the Exec.

"Get them corn-poppers out, Lassiter!" said Baldwin. "We're going to work!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"You gotta be in a man's Navy if you want to see action, Skip. Let's show these yellow boys how it's done!"

But Lassiter was already pouring Browning stuff into a Jappo fighter.

Move It, Al!

It's not often a freight-handler can kick the boss and get away with it.

By SAMUEL W. TAYLOR

FOR three days Alfred Trout brooded. Men on roller skates scooted around among the bins and shelves filling orders, which were wrapped or crated, hauled on electric platform-trucks down the ramp to the waiting railroad cars and vans which rushed the goods to the Company's million customers. But the beehive efficiency of all this, and his tiny part in it, no longer thrilled and awed Alfred Trout as he brooded. He even lost his zeal to be the best platform-truckman of the squad, and best in the history of the Company. On the fourth day he stepped off his truck and marched doggedly to the end of the 85B section, where Mr. Reed the foreman was making out a form in his tiny office.

"Truck haywire?" asked Mr. Reed.

Alfred Trout took three trembling breaths. "It aint right," he announced; and then, remembering his night-school English: "It isn't."

"Let's have a look at it," Mr. Reed said, arising.

"Not the truck. I mean Jim Stillton."

Mr. Reed sat down. "A straw boss aint much, Al."

"Isn't," Alfred Trout corrected him. "But I was in line for that job. I've worked almost five years for the Company. I started out shagging orders on roller skates. I worked up to a platform-truck. I made a record on every job I ever was put on. I aint never been late—I mean, I haven't. I've studied nights, and prepared myself for the next job above. I've never made trouble. I've kept my eyes open to promote efficiency and eliminate waste." Alfred Trout took three more great breaths. "If that aint—isn't—the way to get ahead," he said, and he spoke as a man clutching at a lifelong creed, "what *is?*"

"I'm sorry, Al," Mr. Reed said. "Jim Stillton's dad and the Old Man used to go to school together. But—hell, Al, the straw-boss job aint much. Only two bucks a week more."

"You mean—Jim Stillton was promoted over my head just because his father and the Old Man— Why, you don't mean that *just because—*"

Mr. Reed shrugged. "You know how such things go, Al. A little pull never hurt nobody. Now Johnson, who's got Hardware—he's a cousin of the Old Man's wife. Good man, but still— Sales manager, Harrover, he's the Old Man's nephew. Wilton of

Men's Furnishings has got relations in the bank that pulled the Company out of the depression. The office manager, Gilpin, is head of the Old Man's lodge. The first vice-president—what's his name?—anyhow, he's married to the Old Man's niece—brother's daughter. Then—let's see—there's Gleason and Quinn and Bohner and Lorin and Hunter and—yes, and Schmidt and Tracy— Just about all the big nuts. Why—hell, Al, you know how such things are."

Alfred Trout hadn't known how such things are. He was a young man of medium height, with sandy hair and an average face. At the monthly pep meetings he had quaffed deeply of the Old Man's speeches about, "Push—not pull—puts you ahead in the Company! Pluck—not luck!" Alfred Trout was a fellow of great faith and ideals. His sole ambition had been the burning desire to advance through worth and merit. He hadn't known at all how such things are. Now he stood bewildered and sorely wounded amid the ruins of his ideals.

"But—it aint right!" he croaked. "It aint fair—I mean isn't! It's—it's *dirty!*"

"Want to make a written complaint?"

"I won't stand for it!"

"Go on back to that truck," advised Mr. Reed. "And you'd better change your attitude around here. We only want men who'll pull for the Company, and not against it. And maybe you don't know who you're talking to. My sister married a cousin of the Old Man's wife's favorite nephew!"

Alfred Trout went back to his platform-truck, to brood. Time might have healed the deep wound; but Fate sent the Old Man himself into the shipping department that very afternoon. Some say love and hate are closely related; and so possibly are hate and adulation.

"GOOD afternoon, Alfred," the Old Man said benignly. He prided himself on calling every man of his 9,217 employees by his first name. The Old Man was a large gray man with a large kind face, and he was fond of relating how he had by sheer pluck and push built the Company from a twelve-dollar investment in shoelaces. "And some man pushing a broom," he was fond of saying at the pep meetings, "may some day fill my shoes—if he has the push to push me onto the shelf!"

"'Lo," answered Alfred Trout curtly to the greeting, and he passed without slowing his loaded truck. The Old Man's kindly face was now but the mask of a hypocrite, and Alfred did not even swerve the truck, but made the Old Man's daughter Sylvia step aside nimbly to avoid getting her dress snagged by a crate. Sylvia gave Alfred Trout an intent look that a week past would have turned his heart to stony fear. But now he didn't care. He didn't give a damn. *Push! Merit! Pluck—not luck!* . . . . All was ashes.

He drove the truck down the ramp to the freight platform, and brought it back empty. Loaded again, he drove to the edge of the ramp and stopped. The sloping ramp was wide enough for the truck, but with little to spare, and the Old Man was now upon the ramp, peering at the rear end of the abutting stock-shelves. Previously the Old Man's interest in tiny details had been an inspiration to Alfred Trout; now his lips curled in a sneer. Sylvia was not in sight.

"Move it, Al," No. 6 trucker said, coming up from behind with his loaded vehicle. He would not be able to see the Old Man on the sloping ramp. "Take it away."

"Go to hell," muttered Alfred Trout.

No. 6 trucker said: "You want to get tough?" He motioned back over his shoulder to a third loaded truck coming. "Take it away, Al!"

The split-second efficiency of the Company was becoming snarled. The Old Man was blocking traffic on the ramp. And then Alfred Trout noticed the Old Man was talking through the stock-shelves to somebody, and chuckling—and there came a phrase in Jim Stillton's voice; the words came clearly: "Then with the bases loaded and two out—" Jim Stillton's father had gone to school with the Old Man; and now Jim Stillton was talking himself ahead—getting ahead the way men *do* get ahead—and the trucks were piling up.

"Move it, Al," said No. 6 trucker, and bumped Trout's truck from behind.

At that instant something snapped in the brain of Alfred Trout. He got off his truck and walked down the ramp. The Old Man was stooping, peering through the shelves at Jim Stillton and chuckling. As he stooped, the Old Man's ample posterior made a tight gray bulge of his trousers seat. "Just holler at me if I'm in the way," the Old Man was fond of telling his wage-slaves in his pseudo-democratic way. "Just yell, 'Gangway!' "

Alfred Trout lifted his foot and shoved with the sole—and not gently. "Gangway!" he yelled. And then he stepped nimbly aside, for his loaded truck was coming down the ramp, nudged over the lip of the incline by the bump of No. 6. The truck came without great speed, and he stepped on it as it passed, and stopped it out on the loading platform. Then he stepped off it and walked toward the big gates. And somehow as he remembered the Old Man sprawling headlong into the stock-shelves, he felt better. A load was off his chest.

"Get that man!" It was the Old Man's voice. Hands seized Alfred Trout and dragged him back. He did not struggle. The Old Man was sitting on a box beside the lower end of the ramp, and a dozen men, including Jim Stillton and Mr. Reed, were trying to suggest something he might possibly desire in the way of aid.

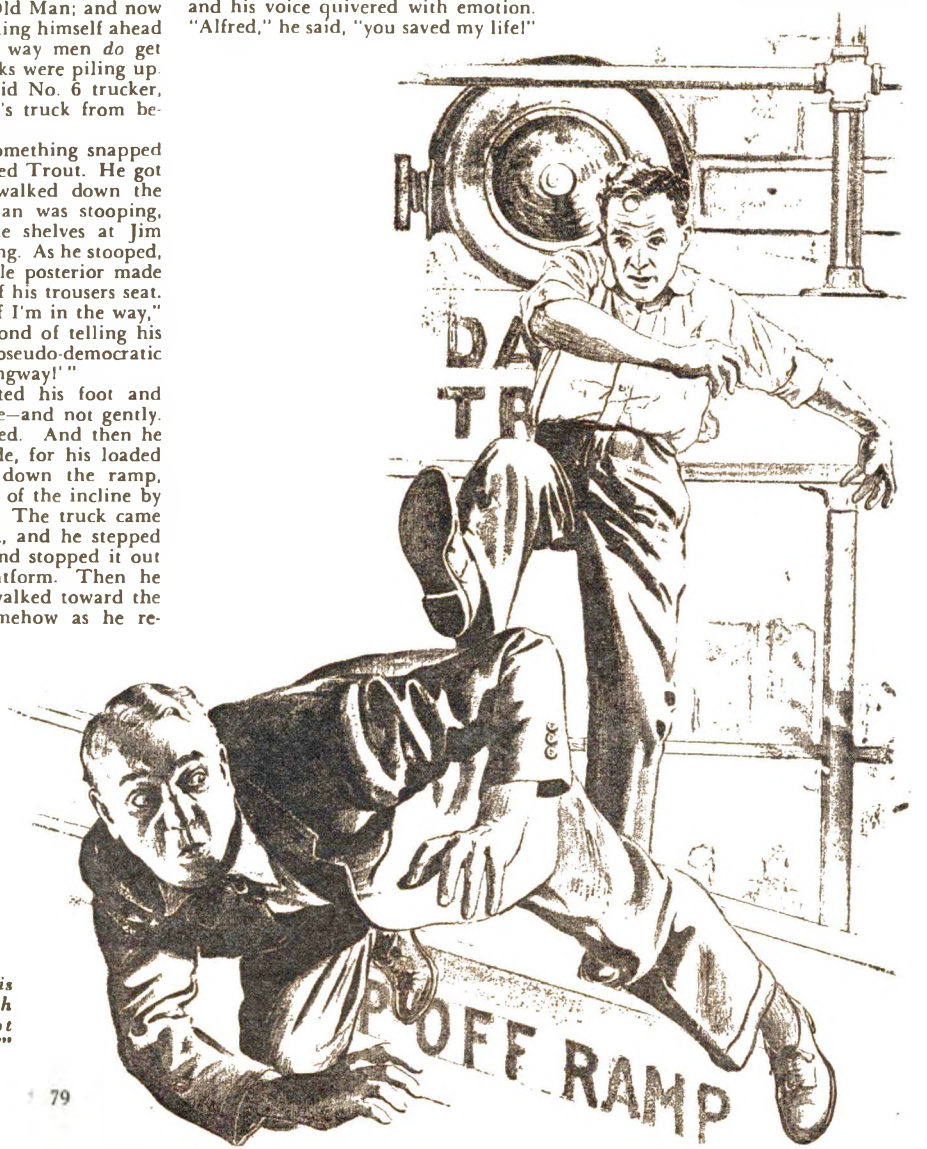
"Get away," the Old Man told them, and heaved to his feet as Alfred Trout was dragged before him. "Let him go," the Old Man directed. And Alfred Trout stood stiffly, in hopeless defiance, as an anarchist facing the despot at whom he has just tossed a homemade bomb.

The Old Man's ample face was pale, and his voice quivered with emotion. "Alfred," he said, "you saved my life!"

"We can never thank you!" Sylvia's voice was saying as the world whirled. "I saw it. You walked down to ask Father to move aside, and then when you saw the truck coming—"

AND now at the monthly pep meetings Mr. Trout thrills the dewy-eyed youngsters of the great Company with his inspirational messages. "Push!" he says. "Pluck—not luck! I started out on a pair of roller skates shagging orders in the shipping-room. And some one of you pushing a broom may some day push me onto the shelf!"

Some of the case-hardened veterans can control their enthusiasm. The Trout family has many branches, they have discovered, not to mention Alfred Trout, Jr.; and it never hurt anybody to marry the Old Man's daughter.



Alfred Trout lifted his foot and shoved with the sole—and not gently. "Gangway!" he yelled.

The

Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson

A WOMAN stopped at Tim Jackson's filling-station and asked him to take her down Bayou Gris. Tim knew who she was—a city girl who had married a friend of his down in the Great Marsh. She was dressed pretty well, even to wearing silk stockings, and her hands were white with tinted nails.

"How did you get way up here?" he asked.

"Why, I just came up on one of the oyster-luggers to do some shopping, but I don't know how to get home. You see my husband went to New Orleans for the day, and I've got to be home before he gets back."

Tim saw the point. And it was probably much more serious than the girl wanted to tell him. People like this were always imposing on him. They would phone him to bring gas way down as far as the salt-water bayous for some stranded lugger. They would wake him up in the middle of the night to fix a dory's engine or a gun. The younger crowd would take him from his work to the dances so he could play his accordion for them. He never had any fun at the *bailes*—no dancing with the girls, or drinking and fighting with the boys. They just made him stick to the accordion until sunup.

He always went, because of a slim dark-haired girl, Charline Dover, whom he worshiped even though she never noticed him. He was thinking of her now when Dick Cartell's wife asked him to leave his work and take her far down into the marsh.

"All right—get into that dory yonder," he directed.

He padlocked his gas drum at the end of the pier, then went to his shack to lock his workshop. But when he got there, the phone rang.

It was Clem Hale, the Sheriff, who was calling.

"Listen, Tim," Hale shouted over the phone. "That bank-robber Bo Blake's heading down your bayou. He's got a stolen boat which didn't have much gas. Now get what I'm saying: He knows your place, and he'll stop there for gas. He'll hold you up and shoot you. So you shoot him first. You got that Johnny gun I left for you to fix—"

"Haven't figured how to fix it yet," Tim said.

"Well, shoot him with anything. Hide somewhere till he comes up to your pier, then let him have it. He's a killer. I can't head him off with a car, so I'm trailing in a boat, but it'll take me forever to get to your place. I'm leaving it to you, Tim. If you work it right, you get that reward."

Tim went out to his pier. "Sorry, but I can't go," he said to the girl. "I got an appointment with somebody."

She stared at him.

"You don't understand!" she said. "I've got to get home. I've simply got to! It means everything to Dick, and to me too."

"You don't understand either," he said. "Look! I've got a chance to catch this Bo Blake. He was in a gang in New Orleans that robbed a bank. The others were regular gangsters and got away in underworld hide-outs in the city, but Bo Blake knows the swamps and came down here. Read all about it in the papers. I catch him and get a thousand dollars."

"But if you'll only listen!" The girl was wringing her hands. "I left a note for Dick. I've got to get it before he reads it!"

"With a thousand dollars, I build a new pier for my gas-pump instead of this old shack, and I'd get ahead in the world." He wanted to explain that he would also build a gallery around his cabin so it would be a home—a place he could ask a wife to live in. But he

GRIS-GRIS

An unusual story of strange events in the bayou country

by KENNETH PERKINS

noticed the girl was starting to cry. "What d'you mean, you left a note?"

"I wrote I was leaving him, that I couldn't stand it down in that marsh. But I got as far as here and changed my mind. I forgot that I loved him, and that a marsh doesn't count. I want to get back and tear the note up."

For the first time Tim Jackson looked at her without talking. He was thinking of Dick Cartell, and how they had hunted in the swamps for muscadines when they were kids. He thought of Dick, lonely and unhappy and always soaked with molasses rum—until he found this girl. Then he was born again. He was converted. He was "sanctified." He'd told Tim his hunting-camp was on a bayou in heaven, his eyes glittering. And he talked of his pretty wife as if she were one of the more human saints.

"I'll take you down after I trap this guy Blake," Tim offered.

"It'll be too late! Poor Dick—what have I done!"

"Listen. I'll lend you a boat."

"I'd get lost. I've only been in the marsh three months."

Of course she would get lost. He had to admit it. And he also reflected that he could not have much fun with that thousand dollars if he saw Dick with that glitter forever gone from his eyes.

"All right—sit down on that thwart. I'll take you home."

HE got back four hours later. He steered as he usually did with a knee hooked over the tiller; this left his hands free to play his accordion in the moonlight. He was like many of the Cajun fishermen who play *tristes* on their banjos when they put down for salt water and the reefs.

He had not played on the way down, however. He went silently, taking side-trails for fear that men on the shrimp platforms and oyster camps would see him taking Dick Cartell's wife home. When they got to the hunting-camp, the girl found the good-by note where she had left it. She tore it up, threw her arms around Tim Jackson and kissed him. Then she burst into song and sat about cooking jambalaya for her husband's return.

It got Tim to thinking of Charline Dover. Love was a grand harmony—this love between a man and his wife which Tim had saved. Charline and he would be like that! He wanted to sing out to the world how grand he felt about what he had done. But of course that would not do at all. The secret must be unsung.

He saw a crowd on the shell beach by his pier as he rounded a towhead. Besides the moonlight sifting through Spanish moss, he saw them by lantern and torches. When he stopped playing and steered for his float, he saw their faces very clearly. There was Sheriff Clem Hale, and a dozen oystermen and trappers and their wives. And there was old man Dover and his daughter Charline.

Tim Jackson's motor stopped chugging, but his heart chugged faster. They must have caught Bo Blake and there was Charline herself to witness the capture! Tim had certainly lost a chance of a lifetime. He should have been the hero of that scene there. A lot of the younger men had rifles and shotguns slung over their shoulders, and Charline was looking at them, and Clem Hale was talking to them. But Clem turned when Tim Jackson stepped ashore.

Everyone was silent all of a sudden until the Sheriff said: "I see you left your place just long enough, Tim Jackson, so you wouldn't be here when Blake passed."

Tim gulped, stammered: "You—you mean Blake's been here and left?"

"Kind of looks that way. He busted into your drum and stocked up with gas, then went over to Pops Martin's camp for rum. He shot old Pops. The old fellow's badly hurt."

Under the flaring gasoline torch, Tim's face paled. It was all his fault. "Poor old Pops!" He blamed himself, and he knew by the circle of grim faces that everybody blamed him.

"Look here, Clem," he gasped, "I can't get this all at once. What happened?"

"He got enough gas to take him down to the sea marsh, where God knows how I'll ever find him. If you'd stuck to your post like I phoned, if you hadn't run away and hid in the tules—"

"I didn't hide! What the hell are you talking about?"

He saw Charline looking at him hard. He saw himself as in her eyes, big, scrawny and chicken-livered. His forehead turned wet. He scarcely heard Charline's father saying: "Maybe you can tell us, Tim Jackson, where you been. Maybe Clem Hale's accusing you without right."

One of the Cajun trappers shouted: "I saw him sneaking through a side trail, and I thought it was funny he wasn't playing his accordeen. After the shooting, he shows up in the open bayou, playing like Gabriel!"

Tim stammered helplessly: "I had to leave, because I—I had to go down to Bayou Zin-Zin where Polti was stuck in his lugger."

"Polti's been home all day," someone laughed. "He's over helping Pops, fixing his wounds."

TIM JACKSON swallowed hard. Caught in the first lie, there was no use making up any more. He blurted helplessly: "Listen, you—all of you! I'm not afraid of Bo Blake!"

"Don't make us laugh!" an oysterman hooted. "You're yellow. You are afraid of Blake—ever since he beat you up at that *baile* dance!"

This happened to be the truth. Everybody was afraid of the bully Bo Blake, who had knifed or mauled or shot more than one man when drunk. And Tim Jackson, perhaps, was no braver than the average man.

"Get out of my way, Jackson," the Sheriff grunted. He turned to the crowd. "I called you folks to meet here so I could pick six men to go down to the marsh with me. Volunteers, get up here on the pier."

Trappers and hunting-guides lined up. Tim Jackson stood a moment wiping his wet lips, his eyes turning to Charline, who was not looking at him any more. He wanted to yell at them all and call them liars and explain. But since he could not do that, he stepped up into the line of volunteers himself.

He was the only one without a gun slung over his shoulder. Over his own shoulder hung an accordion.

There were catcalls from the crowd on the shell beach. "Going to catch Blake with an accordeen, Tim?" someone yowled.

"Maybe he'll toll to him with it, like you toll to a duck!" another jeered. They all roared at this.

The Sheriff, choosing his recruits, passed Tim by without so much as looking at him. He picked six young men who would not leave wives and babies behind. And being young, they also loved Charline. She watched them piling into the lugger, and Tim watched her dancing eyes.

He found himself standing on the pier alone like a gangling scarecrow, stooped as if that accordion were an albatross hanging to his neck. Even the crowd ignored him. They waved and cheered the heroes good-by, then scattered for their boats and put off through the moss-hung trails. Pierre Dover and his daughter Charline came out on the pier, for their boat was larger and moored in deep water. The old man passed Tim without speaking. So did Charline.

But Tim stopped her. "Say, wait a minute, please, will you?"

She turned. "Wait for what?"

"I got something to tell you."

"Why didn't you tell them all? Why tell me anything?"

"Let them all think I'm scared of Blake. I'm scared stiff, let them think. But I'm going down to the marsh in my dory and get him."

She nodded, and the moonlight lit a strange smile on her mouth. "All right. A brave way to talk."

"Talk, you call it? Clem Hale and his deputies won't catch him in a lugger that you can see across these prairies a mile away. Blake will leave the boat he stole and get a pirogue so he can go through alligator trails and hide in the reef-grass. What they said about me tolling to him like to ducks, gave me the idea."

Her father looked up as he hauled in his bow line. "What's he talking to you for?"

The girl stood looking at Tim before she answered. "I don't know. Maybe he does." She stared hard at Tim's cavernous eyes. "And maybe he knows more than he's saying, too." She said, as if wishing him luck: "Go ahead, Tim Jackson."

She got into her father's boat, and Tim watched them till they passed behind a curtain of hanging moss, and he heard only the throb of their motor, the call of the other fishermen going home, and the weird everlasting song of the frogs.

He went into his shack for a jug of taffia rum and canned food which he packed aboard his cabined dory. He took a box of tools so he could work on his guns while he was on the way down to the sea-marsh. After he cast off and stood down the bayou, he sawed off the shotgun's barrel and removed the trigger from the revolver so that he could work the hammer with his thumb. This would give him six shots in three seconds, according to what a Texan had told him. He was good at this sort of tinkering. He never did any hunting himself, but he liked fixing guns. It was in line with his hobby of inventing muskrat-traps or carving crucifixes inside bottles.

Knowing that the Sheriff was going down Bayou Penchant, Tim Jackson guessed that the fugitive would see the big lugger and head into the sea marsh toward the Gulf. He would stay west for fear of the oyster-boats going down to the reefs. Jackson believed that by cruising around Lost Lake he would find the killer somewhere in the stretches of scrub palmettoes and moss-tangled 'taniers. The Sheriff would not find him because Bo Blake would not come out of hiding. He would not come out if any boat or man were in sight. Most of them, Blake knew, would be guides or duck-hunters, hence armed. Any other boat cruising down there might hold deputies hunting for him. He would hide from every boat save one: Tim Jackson's cabined dory.

Blake knew that Tim delivered gas far down in the marsh, and that he never did any duck-shooting himself. His presence there would not be suspicious. When Blake decided to rob somebody for rum, he could pick out no one so obliging as Tim Jackson, who rarely carried a gun. . . .

It took four days.

TIM saw a swamp rabbit heading fast for the east. Steering westward across the prairie, Tim found a mile of deep water, then shallows and drifting lilies, then ooze sucking at the keel. Near a bay of cypress and wild rice he noticed some mallards mounting, then flushing off downwind. For some reason the ducks did not want that rice.

Tim stood closer, nosed his boat into the reef-grass, threw a small hook into the mud, then lit his kerosene stove. When he had a pot of coffee, he brought it out in the cockpit. He could be seen from every direction.

Leisurely he munched at a hunk of bread and a handful of dried shrimps. He brought out his jug and tipped it. Then he smoked his pipe and played the accordion. It was good duck-hunting: the accordion was the wingbone yelper; the rum was the decoy.

To have an obvious excuse for killing more time, he washed the coffee-pot and tin cup. That was what he was doing when Bo Blake crawled through the pyfeen grass to the tow-head where the dory lay.

A head lifted over a weed-slimed tangle of cane, and Tim Jackson casually turned—as if he had not been warned already by a muskrat slipping into the muddy water. Being much closer than Tim had expected, Blake seemed huge. He was an enormous fellow, anyway—a mixture of Indian, Negro and French, which is called "redbone." He had crawled so near that Tim saw the tiny eyes, the ears flattened back over a big skull. Although his ears were always like that, it looked as if he had just flattened them back like a frightened dog. Wet and smeared, crawling out of an alligator trail, Bo Blake was not human, but a monstrous Caliban.

"Hi there, Tim!" he said in a shaking, husky voice.

Pretending to be caught off guard, Tim dropped the coffee-pot and held the dishcloth in front of him with a jerk of surprise. "By garl It's Bo Blake!" he gulped.

"Sure, it's me. Let me come aboard, Tim. I'm hungry."

"Can't see how I can help your coming aboard, Bo."

This was apparently true, for when Bo Blake stepped up to his full six feet three, he showed a shotgun in the crook of his arm.

"Don't point that at me, Bo. Come aboard and take what you want. There's rum. But then let me go. I won't tell anyone I saw you."

The redbone's narrow eyes drew together, focusing on the dishcloth. "What you got in your hand?" he said suspiciously. His lips trembled badly, for besides hunger shaking his big frame, his nerves were gone.

"It's only a dishcloth, Bo. I was washing my coffee-pot, see?"

"Well, put it down and let me see your hands."

Tim Jackson had never tried shooting from the hip. Nor had he ever aimed a gun at a human body. He had planned a much less shocking and ruthless act. He wanted to hold Blake up and take him prisoner. Too bad, but this was the next best thing—to pump six shots into him from the gun he had hidden in the dishcloth. Then he could go home and tell them all: "I decoyed him with a tune on my old accordion, just like y'all laughed about! Who's laughing now?"

The fact is, Tim's long, gloomy face was radiant with a sly grin. The whole trick had worked perfectly. He had thought it out as carefully as when he planned a new triplet bait.

But there was a slight flaw. A shot cracked, not from Bo Blake's gun—Tim was watching for that—but from the pyfeen grass a good way off.

A slug ripped through the top of Tim's hat, parting his hair and dazing him. He found himself on his face in the cockpit's bottom, trying to figure out how a shotgun could have knocked him on the top of the head without spattering shot all through him. The report, besides, was a crack and not a close roar. He rolled groggily, groping for his dropped gun. But all he could reach was that part of his shotgun which he had sawed off. It lay there useless, half covered with fishnet and gear. He searched on the o er side, and looking up, saw three faces peering at him over the gunwale.

One of these faces was Bo Blake's, the only man he had expected to encounter. It struck Tim as perfectly natural that the bank-robbers had stuck together following the lead of the redbone who knew the marsh country. He wondered stupidly why he had not thought of the possibility before, why the law-men from Houma and New Orleans had not thought of it.

All three men scrambled dripping into the cockpit. Blake's two partners were city men. One was very young with a pasty face and trembling mouth. The other was squat, thick-necked, with eyeballs that showed fat. It was the former with the recklessness of youth and also of fear, who had fired that shot from the pyfeen grass.

Tim knew this because the other two were snarling at him: "What'd you crack that cap for?"

"He made a jerk with his hand," the trembling one whimpered. "What was the sense getting on his boat without shooting him first?"

Blake said: "I told you they can hear a shot all over this damned swamp."

"Who can hear it? A lot of pelicans, that's all can hear it." The youth had his gun pointing at Tim on the cockpit deck.

"Don't shoot, we're telling you!" the squat man said quietly. "There's other ways."

Tim saw them all look at each other, and he saw their eyes. Clearly, they were going to kill him, but not yet.

"Hunt around and see if he's got any guns," the squat one who seemed to be the leader, said. "He'll be reaching for something."

"He never totes guns," Bo Blake said. "He only tinkers with 'em, fixing new gadgets. Kind of a nut." His tiny bloodshot eyes squinted down at

He worshiped Charline, though she never noticed him.

the prisoner. "I told 'em you'd take us to the Gulf in your boat, see, Tim? Get up. We aint going to kill you."

One of the gangsters said: "Thought you knew the way out, Blake."

"Sure, but we'll be meeting oyster-luggers. We'll have to have this bird at the tiller, so they'll see him and not us."

Tim got up dizzily, then sank to the bench at the tiller. The nervous one came out with a sawed-off shotgun. "What'd you have this on board for?"

"Hunting ducks."

"With a sawed-off shotgun?"

"The mug came down here after us," the leader said. He went to Tim and slammed him in the face.

"He's got a lot of tools here," the one in the cabin said. "What's he got so much stuff in a fishing-boat for?" He came to the door. "Look at this. Looks like a cartridge belt. 'Taint a belt. It's a drum for a machine-gun."

All three looked at Tim as he sat groggy from that last blow in the face. "What the hell! The mug's got a machine-gun somewhere!"

"You're crazy," Tim mumbled. "I was fixing one for a guy, back at my camp."

The leader's fat eyes fixed on him. "Better not lie, feller."

"Maybe he aint lying," Bo Blake reasoned. "A flatfoot from Houma had him fix one awhile back, I remember. And maybe he's got it on this boat."

"Tie him up," the leader said. "We'll search some more, after we get going."

They found wire in the cabin which Tim Jackson had brought along for a definite purpose—the very purpose to which it was now being put, to tie up a prisoner. They tied two strands around his ankles and twisted them with pliers. They twisted the other ends to a cleat. Then they drew up the kedge and poled out to deeper water.

Two of them went in and cut open a lot of cans, scooping the food out with their hands like 'possums. Bo Blake stayed out in the cockpit steering, watching the horizon of *chénières* and mudlumps. He could see no boat anywhere, but he knew that that one high spot on the horizon was a shrimp-drying platform far off across the prairie, and near it the shack camp of some Chinese shrimpers.

FROM the cabin door a pair of fat eyes studied the accordion. "Is that what we heard him playing?"

"Sure, it's an accordion," Bo Blake said. "That's how I knew who he was. I figured right away he's down here bringing gas to somebody. He's harmless."

"But what's underneath it?" The squat man reached for the dishcloth. "Look—a gun wrapped in this cloth!"

Bo Blake's eyes screwed on it with a fascinated stare, then darted to Tim. "I thought so! You were going to kill me, you long-nosed rat!" He grabbed Tim by the collar and pulled him up to his feet. He had to hold him there, because with feet bound, Tim could not stand. Bo held him with one hand and knocked him down with the other. "You said I could come aboard and had a gun ready to kill me, did you! 'Oh, yes, come aboard, Bo!'" He dropped Tim to the deck and jumped on him with his feet.

The younger gunman looked out of the cabin, frightened. At each blow he took a swig from the jug to bolster his nerve. The squat man was more interested in the gun. "He's got it fixed so's he could fan it. Pretty dangerous guy, considering."

The redbone loosed Tim's feet and pulled him to the tiller. "Get up here and steer. Make for that shell island."

Tim saw the horizon wheeling about him, then tipping crazily. His swollen eyes could make out the island only by inference. A line of white fluffy balls glittered in the sunlight like a field of cotton, but he knew the white dots were fledgling pelicans on a beach. He said thickly through loosened teeth: "You figure on getting through the Pass at Oyster Bayou without someone stops you?"

"That's your look-out. You signal anyone, and you get shot. How we get through without anyone hailing us is up to you."

"I may as well be shot," Tim said. "If I get you to the Gulf, you'll throw me overboard."

"You can swim."

"Sure, he can swim and get the Coast Guard," the youth in the cabin, who was getting drunk, laughed out.

"Listen, Blake," Tim said miserably. "I got nothing to lose. You're going to drown me. But I'll bargain with you. You birds want a Johnny-gun. The guy in there even wanted to kid himself I had one on board account of that drum. Maybe I can get you one—if you let me live."

The drunk one sniggled at this hilariously funny idea. But the squat leader cocked a hairy ear. He stared tensely, and Bo Blake stared, at the prisoner's pulpy face.

"That flatfoot who had me fix his gun a long time back, remember, well he brought it back again and I dismantled it. The drum just happened to be in my tool-box. But the Johnny-gun's home at my camp. You can have it."

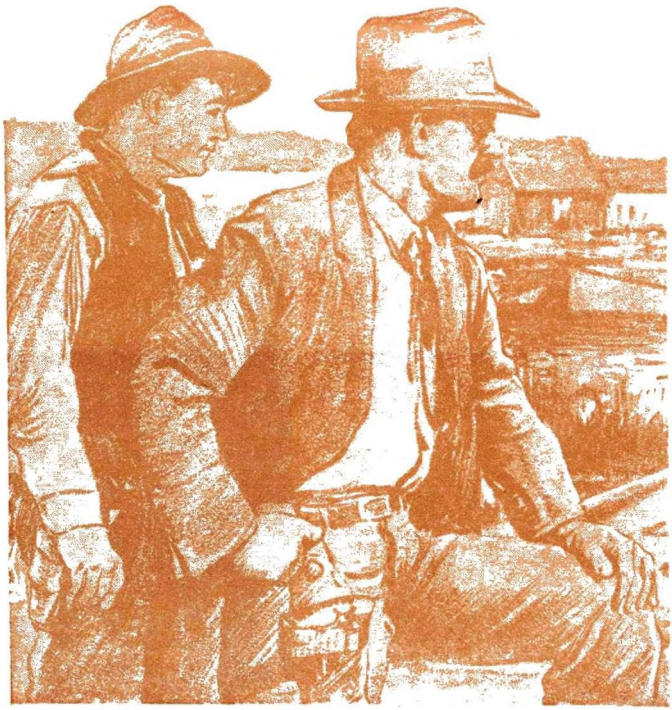
Bo Blake snorted. "How we going to get it? Take you up there and let you trap us? A swell idea. Oh, no!"

The leader's head shook slowly. He could not accept this judgment of Bo Blake's. Tim watched his face and saw a conflict working there. It was a young but terribly hard face, beaten into the lines of an incorrigible, harder actually than the brutal, pinch-eyed Bo Blake. His whole career as a criminal and killer had developed the dominant faith: a machine-gun solved all problems. Tim saw that.

FEWER ducks, more geese, meant they were well in the sea marsh. To the south they saw gulls. And over a stretch of sea cane, Bo Blake, always on watch, saw the cabin of a lugger. He crouched in the cockpit so that there seemed to be only the one man aboard—Tim Jackson, a groggy, half blind, drooping figure at the tiller.

The lugger stood off for a fresh-water bayou to the north. Satisfied for the time, Blake crawled into the cabin and opened a can of beef.

The youngest fugitive lay sprawled on the bunk, his pale frightened face now red and senseless. The older one was still trying to recapture that lost



"Listen," said Tim, "all of you! I'm not afraid of Bo Blake!"

dream. "If the mug's really got a machine-gun—"

Blake washed his meal down with rum which he could take, Tim knew, in great steady gulps without stupefying himself. The liquor merely cramped his thinking into a groove, making him stubborn, quarrelsome, suspicious, imagining petty affronts.

Tim waited just long enough. He could not wait too long—for in the deepwater bayous the fugitives would be on the alert for boats. Right now their rifles were heaped on the bunk, their automatics tucked in holsters under their armpits. If they saw a boat in any quarter, they would have these weapons in their hands.

The Gulf wind blew the spray across the dory's nose and Tim smelled the salt. The Gulf where he was to die, was close. Without leaving his tiller he reached for his accordion and tucked it against his feet.

"What you doing with that!" a voice from the cabin snarled.

"Keeping it out of this spray."

There was nothing suspicious about this move; but Bo Blake, if he had not been swigging rum, might have noticed Tim scraping the accordion with his feet and reaching down between his knees to fumble with it.

As for the chief gangster, he had forgotten the accordion. His inbred underworld faith focused on one idea alone—a machine-gun. And Bo Blake, truculent and mulish now, picked on the same idea and stuck there: "Sure he's got one—at home. Always tinkering with guns and traps. But if he's got one that works, why didn't he bring it along?" Blake's eyes snapped with this bit of pat logic. "Didn't think of that, did you? Lay off talking about it. You make me sick all the time talking about what you'd do with a machine-gun."

That was the way Bo Blake's mind got into the same track as the other gangster's. Both men were thinking of one thing. And Tim knew it and banked on it.

Blake lifted the jug, facing the prow, naturally enough, so that he could see where they were going. And this put his back to the cabin door and the man at the tiller.

"Don't turn around, Bo Blake," Jackson said calmly. "Just hold that jug up in the air."

Blake stiffened. The other man snapped up his eyes under black brows, staring aghast at Tim out there in the cockpit. He saw a gun-muzzle at one end of the accordion. Tim had his hand on something just below the keyboard.

"It's a submachine-gun I got here, Blake. One pull at this lever, and I rake all three of you."

"He's lying!" the squat one said.

"Don't make us laugh!" an oysterman hooted. "You're yellow. You are afraid of Blake!"

"Maybe he aint," Blake gibbered, holding his hands high.

"Take the gun from that redbone," Tim said, "and throw it at my feet."

"There aint room in that damned—" The squat man was reaching slowly under his armpit for his own gun.

"Want me to show you?" Tim said steadily. "Plenty of room with the bellows divided the way I fixed it."

"He could of fixed it!" Bo Blake cried earnestly.

The drunk boy had struggled up, his glassy eyes trying to understand what the picture meant. He could not see any stick-up, but there was Blake towering above the bunk, his hands touching the top deck, his mouth twisting frantically as he said: "Lay still or he'll cut you in half!"

The drunk one flopped back. And at the same moment the squat leader obeyed Tim Jackson's order. . . .

At sunset the dory stood in past the towhead at the mouth of Bayou St. Crome and rubbed her keel on the shell beach. Tim Jackson might have stayed at a shrimp camp much closer, but there would only be a lot of Chinese to explain to. He wanted an ovation. Not a big one, but at least one with a certain musical refrain—the tinkling laughter of a slim black-haired girl.

The Sheriff and his picked men had given up the hunt a day or so ago, as Tim learned from a Portuguese oysterman. But some of those picked young men would be at the frog-hatchery which Charline Dover's father owned. They always stopped there after work for the bayou frontage they leased for their traps was close by.

Tim arrived while Charline was cooking the supper bisque. Frog-hunters were fixing spears and Jack lights. Old Papa Dover was on his pier above the low-tide mud, at cards with two Basque shrimpers.

They all gaped when they saw Tim Jackson's face, which was purple and pulpy.

"*Cré bon sang!*" they cried. "You found Bo Blake!"

Charline Dover was at the pier end before Tim knew it. He only knew that every bruise and kick and raw spot on his body was a thrill.

"But there are three of them," said a shrimper, "all wired up like radio sets!"

They crowded down into the dory. Tim, broken and weary and trembling for a drink, sat on the float practically at Charline's feet. She put her brown thin hand on his forehead, her eyes enormous with that same inscrutable pity he had seen once before.

But the pity ebbed away and her eyes laughed. Then her mouth began to laugh. It was not Tim's lopsided comical face that amused her, but the faces of all the other young men who loved her, when they saw the prisoners hauled out. Her laugh was short for her instant concern was to doctor Tim's wounds. She ran for rum.

As they dragged Bo Blake out, he looked at the accordion as if it were a *gris-gris*, a thing of the devil invented not for shooting but for the casting of a spell. The spell was over now, for he stepped on the thing with all his weight as if stamping out the life of a moccasin. His boot went through the bellows and a piece of pipe fell out. There was no gun inside, nothing but that sawed-off end of a shotgun barrel. Although it could shoot nothing, it was a very adequate *gris-gris*.

AS the others stood about the three prisoners, Charline began swabbing Tim's face.

"Thanks, I'm all right now," he said. "Let me talk to you now."

"Go ahead, talk."

"I been thinking a lot of Dick Cartell and that city girl he married. I know how Dick feels. It must be great." He looked up anxiously. "Have you seen anything of 'em since I went down to the marsh?"

She said she had, but they did not see her. They were too much in love to see anyone else in the world.

"That's swell," Tim said. "That's the way it is!"

The Man Responsible

A drama of the 1941 East Indies

IT began at Balikan, the oil-field port in Dutch Celebes where ten years back everything had been wild jungle. Lee Carter thought it was the end of things for him: in reality, it was the beginning.

He saw her come off the island boat, the one he had expected to take out. She was escorted up the wharf, through the customs and on to the hotel compound by the Dutch first officer, two lanky oil-machinery men, and Verbeck, the liquor salesman from Macassar. The hotel was on a par with those of any new oil-town in these parts. It was full of cracks and holes and noises and lizards; and being on low ground by the river, it was built on piles, and pigs and fowl could disport beneath the flooring of ironwood poles.

Of course Carter had not the least suspicion of her identity. He could guess that she was either English or American, which was a miracle in Balikan. She did not have the married look; she must have come to wed some lucky man among the hundred-odd Americans working in the oil-field area. So thinking, Carter shrugged and forgot her.

He wandered down to the Red Hot and had a drink, chatting across the bar with the Dutch sepoy officer, then sauntered back to the *bureau des postes*, waiting until the steamer mail was distributed, and got his own. He glanced over the letters as he returned to the hotel; and then, casually, he remembered the young woman. Curiosity wakened, and he asked about her. The proprietor showed him her registration: *Beth Hurd, San Francisco.*

Carter was dumfounded, incredulous. He swallowed hard and went to his own room, where he bathed, shaved and changed into fresh whites. He was not in the oil business himself. He had a tobacco plantation upriver, or had recently had one, with Jim Hurd for partner.

"Well, this looks to be my job." He sat looking through the window-slats at the river and scowling. Except for the white forehead shielded by his sun-helmet, his features were baked brown, hard and bony features, with steady eyes. "Yes, she'll learn the truth quick enough; out of decency, I must take on the job. Can she be his sister? Jim seldom mentioned his family, damn him! Anyway, I must find out. Must, must, *must*—I hate the word! To think he never once spoke of such a girl in the two years we've been together!"

With a glance at his watch, he came to decision and rose. His movements were springy, lithe, flowing, like those of a carabao-hide whip.

When he walked into the dining-room, she was there. Here were Dutch, Aussies, English, Americans, hard-voiced men with eyes aglitter on the one woman from another world. They were a tough lot; but with most of them, she would have been quite safe. She did not know this. She sat afraid and awkward, at a table to herself, conscious of the eyes and voices, ill at ease with the Chinese waiter, whose English was a joke.

Carter came straight to her table. She looked up with startled eyes.

"I'm Lee Carter, Miss Hurd. Am I mistaken in thinking that you must be some relation of my partner, Jim Hurd?"

"Oh, I'm so glad!" She drew a quick breath; her face lit up, and her hand came out to him. "Please sit down! I had no idea you were here. Jim mentioned you when he wrote me and sent the money; I should have known someone would meet me. Where is he?"

Carter drew out a chair and sat facing her.

"Oh, he's upriver. I usually come down every month for mail and supplies; it's a stroke of good luck that I happened to be here now."

Instantly he saw how he had slipped up—but too late to rectify it.

"You mean that you didn't come to meet me?" she demanded, catching at his words. "And Jim didn't come?"

"We didn't expect you until the next boat." Carter covered up rather neatly, he thought. "I'll send word up to the plantation in the morning. Once Jim learns that you're here, he can be down in three or four days—"

"Oh, no! No!" she broke in. A little laugh came into her eyes. "I'll go back with you. I've come to stay, you see, to make a home here for him, for you both. That's why he sent for me. So there's no point in sending for him."

Not a muscle of Carter's face showed his horrified comprehension. As he smiled, his eyes wrinkled at the corners with a whimsical, kindly expression.

"As you like, of course. It's odd that we didn't look for you so soon. Do you recall just when he wrote you? The date of his letter?"

She remembered quite well, and told him. Carter nodded, calmly.

That was the time Jim Hurd had gone on a terrific bender and got cleaned out down here at the Red Hot. He must have been blind drunk and maudlinly sentimental; apparently he wrote the letter and got the money off to her, and never remembered a thing about it afterward. Well, there was hell to pay now, and no mistake!

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Hanson Booth

Carter ordered wine and held her in talk, in his easy, quiet way that won swift confidence. He wanted to learn what kind of woman she was; and the more he learned, the more alarmed he became. If she had only been a bold, brassy, hard-boiled type, he could have shrugged and gone his way. But she did not even play a part; she was just herself: a wondering, innocent creature who looked at everything with clear eyes—a rare gift.

Clear eyes and clear thoughts; this impressed Lee Carter as her chief attribute. She was direct, simple; and while she might shrink at life, was unafraid. She didn't know enough to be afraid, he reflected angrily to himself. Or perhaps she did know enough, and simply wasn't afraid. Confound the woman! She was getting under his skin! Even her simple little questions had a laconic driving power, although without intent on her part. Nor did she suspect the least thing wrong about Jim Hurd.

"But why?" she asked, when Carter said that he had not seen Jim for two weeks. The two words bemused and bedeviled him. Instead of telling her the truth, he lied in order not to hurt her.

"Well, he's been off on a hunt in the hills." This was true enough in its way, and Carter gathered courage. "I think you'd better stop here, Miss Hurd, until I can reach Jim. There's been sickness upriver, even in camp. I've heard rumors of smallpox, also of bubonic. If you were to remain here—"

"I couldn't think of it; all the more reason to go, in fact," she broke in. A smile stole out upon her gentle, lovely woman's face. When she smiled, her eyes became brown stars like Brazil diamonds, and suddenly one saw her; but in repose she revealed little of herself.

"I'm a trained nurse, you see," she went on easily. "That's my business, or was till I left home. So I may be able to help."

CARTER gave no sign of the panic that smote him. She had him cornered, sure enough. He knew only too well what he must do; there was no way out for him. Balikan might be tough enough, but upriver at Fort Rynsdam and beyond—well, she would find it just plain hell. And he could not argue her out of going, as he had learned.

"Well, that's quite splendid," he said, beaming at her. "We'll get off in the morning. Not too early, though. Must load up the supplies and so forth, and the boys will be drunk. By the way, there's a dance at the Red Hot tonight. It's a pretty gosh-awful place, but if you'd find it amusing—"

She dimpled. "Thank you, I'd like to! I've half promised Mynheer Verbeck; I'm to let him know about it after dinner. He's a polite and charming man, isn't he?"

The liquor salesman from Macassar? Yes, Carter knew him, and knew more about him.

"I'll tell him you're going to the dance with me, if I may," he offered.

"I'd love to," she said simply. "He doesn't talk very good English, but I didn't want to offend him, he was so polite."

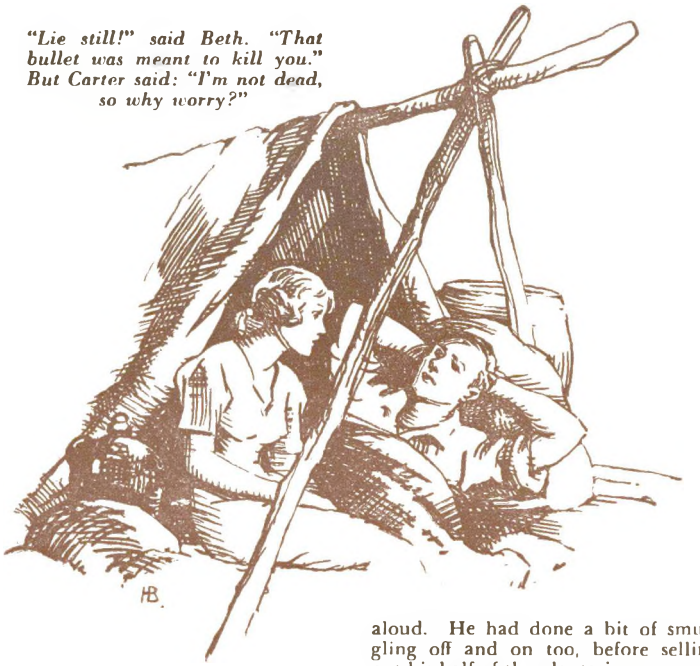
"Let me worry about that," said Carter amiably.

This cheered him up; it was going to be good, he told himself, as he went down to the Red Hot, after dinner, to see his man. Verbeck had taken chances in thrusting himself on this girl, for he was branded, as a man can be branded in the islands; though the brand be invisible, all men know it.

Verbeck was taking down a liquor order when Carter approached. He was dark and sleek and English tailored; behind this exterior, he was dangerous. He did much upcountry trading here and there; he was hard as nails, and he had an influential family in Batavia to back him. Carter came along and nodded to him and spoke bluntly.

"You're not taking Miss Hurd to the dance tonight, Verbeck. You're neither dancing with her nor speaking to her. Understand?"

Verbeck came out of his chair like a shot. First he went red as fire, and then his face darkened.



"Lie still!" said Beth. "That bullet was meant to kill you." But Carter said: "I'm not dead, so why worry?"

"Would you insult me, Mynheer Carter?"

"Impossible!" said Carter sardonically.

It was unfortunate for Verbeck, who had doubtless been drinking a bit, that he reached under his coat. Carter hit him twice and then slugged him with the squareface bottle. When the military police burst in, Verbeck was sprawled across the broken table, still holding the unfired gun he had drawn. The sepoy officer shrugged and accepted a glass of Hollands with Carter, and shook his head over the drink.

"It's hard enough to keep these oil-workers under control, mynheer," he complained sadly, "without having you planters come downriver to do your fighting! I am glad he did not shoot you."

"Thanks," said Carter. "I hear that the *controleur* has gone with his barge and most of the sepoys. Upriver, no doubt?"

"Oh, somewhere; God knows where," rejoined the officer vaguely. "They say traders have been dealing again in prohibited goods, and that some planters have been buying hard camphor from the natives, to sell again."

"Breaking the law, eh?"

"Assuredly," said the other solemnly. "It destroys the trees and deprives the Government of much money. But mynheer, I have been in this accursed colony four years, and have never seen any hard camphor."

"I've been here two years and have seen plenty," said Carter—though not aloud. He had done a bit of smuggling off and on too, before selling out his half of the plantation. . . .

He took Beth Hurd to the dance that night. It was rough and tough, for the native and half-caste girls from down the line were a bad lot; but it was a healthy sort of roughness. Beth Hurd seemed unaware of how close hell lay to the surface, and the oil men helped to disguise it for her—and she had a perfectly grand time, because she did not understand Dutch or Chinese or Malay jokes.

Verbeck did not make his appearance, but three different men warned Carter against him. The man was bound upriver, to Fort Rynsdam and beyond; he was a bad enemy. Carter had other things to think about, however.

After he said good night to Beth Hurd, he went to his own room and held his head in his hands, trying to think. He was in for it now, and could see no way out. When she learned the whole truth, it would be a bad business.

"And I'm the damned fool responsible!" he told himself, with a subdued groan. "At least, I'm responsible for taking her upriver! And what the devil will I do up there?"

He might well ask. He had not intended going back at all. He had sold out his share in the tobacco plantation to the Van Leuven brothers before coming down to Balikan, and had split up forever with Jim Hurd. He had not told Beth this; he was afraid to tell her. In consequence, he must go back upriver with her and stand by, for her sake. Six days against the current would be required.

His cowardice, which he admitted as such, found no loophole. Jim Hurd was no better than a homicidal maniac, but he dared not tell her this. He went to bed and slept miserably. Early in the morning he got some breakfast, kicked his boys together and went over to Tan Tock's bazaar.

This emporium had grown prosperous with the oil boom, but Tan Tock was the same old scarred, halfbreed Straits Chinese who spoke half a dozen languages fluently. There was nothing subtle about Tan Tock. He received Carter in his back room, and scowled. His words were blunt.

"I am not sending the order that you gave me, Tuan Carter, because I hear that you have sold out. I will not give credit to Tuan Hurd."

"Why not?" snapped Carter. "We've always paid up on the nail."

"You have, yes; I will give you credit to any amount, but not Tuan Hurd. He is an inferior man."

"That's putting it mildly," Carter said bitterly.

Tan Tock assented.

"It is. You have carried him on your shoulders. He drinks hard. He keeps native girls. He does illicit trading. He has cheated you; therefore he hates you. He has a rotten heart; the worms of injustice crawl in his liver. Further, he has dealings with Tuan Verbeck, who is also an inferior man."

The indictment was made terrible by the passionless, singsong voice. Carter nodded.

"All right. Make up the order and send it down to my boat. I'll assume the debt. And don't forget the batteries for Tuan Hurd's wireless set."

Tan Tock assented with a bow.

AT noon they were on their way upstream. The boat was a wide, flat river-craft with seven natives to pole. It had a thatched cabin-shelter amidships, where Carter and Beth Hurd could stretch out comfortably. At night it would draw in to the bank, traveling by day.

She was looking ahead to journey's end. How did they live? What kind of a house? Who did the cooking? Homely, simple questions, hard to evade. Carter was forced to tell her that he and Jim Hurd had lived apart of late, at opposite ends of the plantation. Why? The better to handle the work, he explained rather lamely, shrinking from the truth. When she frowned over this, he distracted her thoughts to the present environment, to the mangrove roots and muggers, the birds and jungle, the Dyak trails and the hotly intolerant sun and steaming water. He even did some noble lying in regard to Jim Hurd's fine qualities.

With night he left the boat-shelter to her, rolling up ashore with the natives. Not to sleep easily, however;

now he was seeing this young woman with new eyes. She had become imprinted on his consciousness in these twenty-four hours.

Now he continually saw in her face the gentleness, the loveliness, which had at first appeared only by flashes; it had by this time become a part of her, inseparable. And she was not innocent at all. She was just so good that evil things did not touch her. Carter lay in the darkness marveling, and shrinking again at the idea of what she must find. How could he prepare her for it? He did not know.

Next day was like paradise. Her presence made all things different. It transmuted the muddy river to gold, the hot sun to shimmering fairy rain of glorious hues. They were well away from the coast now, and getting upcountry. With afternoon they reached the rapids; here came a three-mile walk roundabout, while the men worked up the lightened boat and portaged the loads. For them, a short way; for Carter, three miles that he could have wished thirty.

It was about here that she showed him, by little ways, by looks and shy frankness and hints of dream and star-dust, that she gave him entry to her things of the spirit, holding him as friend and not as stranger. Carter did not realize that he himself had been talking like a boy again.

His gospel of efficiency, his armor of sardonic poise, was good enough for this country, but not for her. He spoke to her as he was, not as he wanted to seem, and she welcomed him without pretense. Always her clear gaze, her direct simplicity, her little laconic queries, drew at him; he liked them all, and herself most of all. She grew, upon acquaintance. . . .

He had really forgotten about the sort of place Jans Pretorius kept, and how it must seem to her, until they turned in there for the night and were tying up at the wharf. Carter had always liked Jans, who was nothing worse than one of the queer fixtures of this country, a gusty old ruffian steeped in iniquity, but with a heart of gold.

It was Jans who had once taken a famous scientist among the Dyaks to collect dried human heads. Later the scientist reached the coast full of bird-shot, with a wild tale of Jans having shot and robbed him; he did not know that the prize head they obtained had belonged to a brother of Jans; and at the time, Jans had been too drunk to explain.

Jans was drunk now. He stamped out to welcome them to his house, which was as shaggy and dirty and disreputable as himself, with an unkempt compound, and flowers everywhere. He embraced Carter warmly, blinked from his gray-red beard at Beth Hurd, and swept them both in with a delighted roar. Here were women and brats without benefit of clergy; lashings of food and liquor, pet snakes and birds in cages, orchids and green Dyak jars. It was a disgusting but perfectly gorgeous disorder, for Jans had a queer eye for beauty of all kinds.

He wanted to bed his visitors in his dead wife's big Dutch four-poster, which had been unused these many years. Carter took him aside and explained. Jans shrugged, then frowned.

"Her name, you say—Hurd? No! Not his wife? His sister—this little partridge his sister? *Ach!* It is impossible! What a crime it is!" Jans tore at his matted hair as evidence of his sympathy. "Well, give her the bed. One of my girls? No? You always had queer notions. Well, it's your loss; let's have another drink. By the way, Verbeck was here today and went on. I don't think he likes you. If you meet the rat upcountry, put a bullet in him; I advise you."

Carter laughed and promised. They had a roaring, glorious dinner, with the native women and offspring everywhere, and radio programs from all over the Orient; Jans had a big wireless that worked well. The feast was Gargantuan, and in some aspects Rabelaisian; it was no wonder if Beth Hurd was a trifle lost and wondering.

BUT later she saw Jans rock one of the sick brats, crooning to it and stroking its hair, which was reddish like his own. She watched him with soft starry brown eyes, and then departed for the boat, to get some simple medicine from her locked bag there. Carter went with her, and when they gained the starlit wharf by the boat, he screwed up his courage.

"Try and imagine a place like this, only far worse, with little or no comfort," he said. "And a man like Jans, but lacking his big warm heart; a man soggy with liquor, reverting to the brutish condition—"

"It's not nice to imagine such things, Lee," she broke in quickly. "Why should I?"

"Damn it, I'm trying to tell you something! Some men fall so low that they're all bad, without a single redeeming quality!"

Her warm fingers went to his lips and softly stopped them. She was laughing.

"And I thought you were so wise! Don't you know that such a statement is silly? Long ago I found out that nobody's really bad, except perhaps in the movies. And don't think you need make any excuses for Jans; I think he's an old dear. So come along. I have the medicine-case, and we'll take the child's fever down in no time. It's nothing dangerous."

Carter quit cold. He had been trying to tell her about Jim Hurd, of course; now he gave up the attempt. In the morning they said good-by to Jans Pretorius and went on upriver, and Carter got a new idea, wondering why it had not come to him before.

Beth Hurd had her brother much in mind. She spoke of him glowingly and questioned Carter about him, her brown eyes alight and tender; little intimate questions about daily life and work. Carter, despising the idea of damning with faint praise, must tell the truth outright or else lie. He could not bear to hurt her, for it was clear that she worshiped the memory of this brother she had not seen in years. Jim Hurd had really been a good sort, too, before the liquor dragged him down. He had served a hitch in the Marines, which fact spoke for itself.

So Carter lied, in desperation, and made a good job of it. Somehow, at journey's end, he determined to reach Jim first, warning him, sprucing him up in his rôle. They might get Beth away before she learned too much. All that could take care of itself. The main thing now was to keep this girl from disillusion and heartsick reality. So Carter lied, with tales of hill and jungle and river. He made Jim Hurd out as a very paladin of unselfish heroism and high endeavor; and since Beth knew nothing about the country, Carter did not stick at plausibility.

By the middle of the afternoon they were going through the narrows. Here the river made a great elbow-bend, looping itself about a black naked hill named Swartzkopf. From here one might cut across to Fort Rynsdam afoot, much quicker than by river, but it was a rough and rocky trail. The hill-country really began here, and the rich uplands with their clearings and plantations; all this region was just beginning to open up.

They came to the loop of the river. Carter was standing beside the sun-shelter, under which Beth Hurd lay, and was watching the men at work poling, when something jerked at him. He lost balance and fell. The heavy *spang-g-g!* of a rifle reverberated from the dark flanks of the Swartzkopf.

Carter lay quiet, a spreading seepage of blood reddening his shirt.

In a flash, Beth Hurd was out of the shelter. Her voice and gestures stirred the gaping brown men into life and action. They sent the boat ashore on a sandspit and made camp, then assisted Beth to take care of Carter. The bullet had struck glancingly—had plowed a gash, broken a rib, and gone its way. This was pure luck and a low powder-charge. More velocity would have left Carter dead.

When he came around, he was aburn with iodine, but neatly and efficiently bandaged. The wild landscape was empty. The boatmen, who were not hunters, knew no more than he of what this bullet meant. Not as

much, indeed, for he could guess at Verbeck.

"Lie still!" Beth's voice was sharp, her hand pressed him back, as he moved. "If no fever comes on, you're all right. You can be up and around tomorrow. Who did it?"

"Wish I knew," said Carter. "Some native trying out a rifle, maybe. Such things do happen, but we're rather close to the fort for such action. We'd better go on, as I'd like to make Munck's place tonight—"

"We're staying right here tonight," broke in Beth.

"Oh, all right! We can make the fort by tomorrow night!"

"You seem very calm about this. Is attempted murder a common thing here?"

"More or less," said Carter casually. "Somebody strayed off the reservation, that's all. If I complained to the fort, they'd send out some sepoys, unwind a lot of red tape, burn a perfectly innocent longhouse or village, and be satisfied. That's rather silly. No great harm is done."

"But that bullet was meant to kill you—a square hit, and you'd be dead."

"I'm not dead so why worry?"

A broken rib, a bit of gashed hide—Carter had traveled days with far worse hurts. He shoved the thought of Verbeck into the back of his brain. The rat had shot and skipped out, no doubt thinking him dead. Well, Verbeck could wait.

Carter really enjoyed that evening; the care and efficient tenderness of Beth Hurd was a delight to the heart. They had been drawn immeasurably together by this incident, and they grew still closer under the stars. He remained in the boat shelter, and she with him, for she was worried about fever in the wound. Little developed, fortunately.

MORNING saw them again traveling upriver, passing occasional struggling clearings and plantings of tobacco or coffee. Nobody had really made the business pay big money so far, except the Van Leuven brothers farther up, near Jim Hurd's place; but hopes were ever strong. The Van Leuvens had wanted to buy out Jim Hurd too, for more reasons than one, but offered him no big price. And Jim Hurd, who made hard camphor, and quills of gold dust, and the very occasional diamonds of the hills pay far better than tobacco, was in no mind to sell.

That night they reached Fort Rynsdam. It was only a little trading-post, but it administered Dutch law for hundreds of miles around. Verbeck was not here; he had arrived the previous day but had gone on again.

The *controleur* was not here either. He had gone somewhere upriver with his barge and sepoys, on the trail of illegal trading. Carter listened grimly, without comment; he had an idea that Jim Hurd was mixed up in this affair of the military.

He said nothing of his injury; although he was stiff, he could handle himself quite well. The captain in command of the fort welcomed him and Beth Hurd to dinner and quarters; he, like Jans Pretorius, blinked upon learning that she was Jim Hurd's sister, but kept his thoughts to himself.

However, Carter's boatmen talked. Upon saying good-by in the morning, the Captain gave him a significant look.

"Mynheer, I ask no questions. Perhaps you are making a mistake in not reporting any trouble you may have had. Would you like me to send an escort with you?"

Carter smiled, thanked him and refused.

They went on. Carter took it easy all that day. These broad, sluggish upper reaches of the river were pleasantly cool; so were Beth Hurd's fingers. They sat hand in hand, not talking very much. Carter was too conscious of his rioting emotions to dare any but casual words, lest he dare too far.

The afternoon was young when they sighted a boat headed downstream, a wide scow of a boat piled high with goods of all kinds. The two Van Leuven brothers were aboard; stalwart bearded Dutchmen who spoke no English. The two boats came to shore side by side for a smoke and a talk. Beth Hurd smiled and nodded and shook hands, and the two brothers made her florid compliments that she did not understand; then Carter got out his pipe and sat with them, aware that something was up. It was astonishing to find them headed for the coast.

"We heard news by wireless," said one of them, opening a bottle of squareface. "It was bad, about the Japs starting a war at once. We are in the reserves, and all reserves have been called in; no one knows what may happen at any moment. The *controleur* is somewhere up the river, seeking a trader from across the mountains who buys hard camphor."

"So it looks as though the war were really coming?" asked Carter.

They nodded. "*Ja.* We had a war of our own with Mynheer Hurd. He will not let us take possession of the land we bought from you. He was drunk, and threatened us with a rifle."

"When was this?" demanded Carter.

"Two days ago. He was like a madman. All the natives have run away and left him alone. He used the whip; you know they will not stand the whip."

Carter swore under his breath. So Jim Hurd was on a bender again!

"Have you seen Verbeck?"

"No. We have no trade for that man; he is a bad one. . . . So this is Hurd's sister, eh? A pleasant young woman. Does she know what it's like, up ahead?"

Carter scowled. "No. Someone had to lend her a hand, so I did. I brought some mail for you from Balikan; wait till I dig it out of the luggage."

While he was getting the mail for them, his brain had a chance to clear. If the long-threatened Japanese war was actually at hand, this was no place for Beth Hurd. It would help Jim to brace up, too, and give an excuse to get Beth out of this in a hurry. Yes, things might work out after all!

They parted with the other boat and went on again. Carter could not very well tell Beth about having sold out, so he hedged and spoke of getting Jim to sell out. Privately, his thoughts were busied with the official barge and sepoys, and the trader who had come from over the mountains. That trader must have come to buy Jim Hurd's illegal stuff; perhaps the *controleur* had gained wind of it.

IN their camp that night Carter made one last effort to tell her the truth, but it was a faint effort and died quickly. He was much in love with her, and aware of it. They belonged together, somehow, and each of them knew it. And the rest of the trip cemented things for them; their understanding was complete, although they did not put the matter into words. Carter was still in hope of evading the issue at the last moment.

They arrived at length, in early afternoon. Here came the familiar reach of water; Carter saw the little wharf he had built, the godowns and the drying-sheds. The sight of it all choked him. His own bungalow, his no longer, lay a quarter-mile back from the water, near a clear cold spring he had found. As the boat floated in to the wharf, Carter turned to Beth and pressed her hand, and smiled.

"I want you to wait at the godowns here, please, with the boys. They'll have to unload the boat anyhow. Let me run up to the shack, first, and make sure everything's right. I'll have to send a boy to find your brother, too. It'll all take time. Will you wait?"

"If you want it; not too long, though," she said, and looked at his sagging pocket. "Why did you get that pistol out of your bag?"

Carter laughed. "Snakes, my dear. We get cobras around the compound occasionally; big fellows, too."

He ordered the boatmen to wait and get about the unloading, and they assented. If the Van Leuvens had met Jim Hurd here, he might have come over to use Carter's bungalow. Anything was possible. So all the native

workmen had run off, eh? Looked bad.

They drew in at the empty wharf. The godowns and tobacco-sheds scented the air richly. Carter gave Beth Hurd a hand up to the wharf, and nodded at her.

"See you later, my dear! Sit tight."

He went up the trampled path at his swinging pace, whistling blithely; once out of her sight, his whistle ceased. He took the pistol from his pocket and stuck it under the waistband of his trousers; the bulk of the bandage kept it from being noticeable. His gaze flitted ahead, alert and wary.

He was getting close to the bungalow when he came to an astounded halt.

A white-clad figure was approaching him from the compound. It was Jim Hurd, but a Hurd almost beyond recognition—freshly shaven and decently dressed, his shaggy hair sheared. Jim Hurd as he had looked two years ago! Catching sight of Carter, Hurd came to an equally amazed halt, and his jaw dropped.

"You!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord, it *is* you! Verbeck said you were dead!"

"He didn't tell you that he'd murdered me, did he?" said Carter, chuckling. Upon closer look, he saw that Jim Hurd was shaken and in a tremor: just sobering up, no doubt.

"Where is she?" Hurd demanded gustily. "Is it true that she came? Did that swine lie to me, or is this some of your damned meddling? Who told you I had a sister? How'd she get to this country? What are you doing back here, anyhow?"

Carter listened to the babble of questions. It was easy to guess that Verbeck had been here and had told his tale, shocking Jim Hurd into some semblance of decency.

"She's here, at the wharf, waiting. I brought her upriver."

"At the wharf?" echoed Hurd. He licked his lips, swallowed hard, and stared; he was white and topply. "My Lord! My Lord, Lee! How'd she get here anyhow, to this country?"

"You sent for her. Congratulations on being sober," said Carter in sardonic, biting words. "Remember that big bender of yours down at Balikan, when you got cleaned out at the Red Hot? You wrote her then, and sent her the money. You were drunk and didn't remember doing it. You never did know where all your money went; thought you'd lost it at the tables. And now she's here. I came ahead to get hold of you and straighten you up a bit; haven't told her a blessed thing about you."

The level, dispassionate phrases took hold of the other man.

"Lord! You didn't say anything about me?" said Jim Hurd. "I can't believe it, after that blow-up we had, and you walking out. You must have told her I was a swine."

Carter smiled grimly. "She'd not have believed it. She's pure gold, Jim. I brought her, hoping to spare her the shock. Didn't expect to find you all slicked up."

Jim Hurd took a long breath, fumbled out a cheroot and lit it, and wagged his head.

"I thought you were dead, Lee," he said unsteadily. Terror flickered in his eyes. "Verbeck said so, two days ago. The *controleur* was here last evening. I dunno where he went. He—he found a bit of hard camphor. I had put it in your bungalow. Thought you were dead and it wouldn't matter—"

His voice died, under the chill of Carter's narrowed eyes. The fumbling words had brought understanding. Verbeck here, with a warning; Jim Hurd hastily hiding his loot!

"Why, you dirty dog!" Carter said slowly. "You got caught, did you? Thought I was dead, and eased the blame off on my shoulders! What good would that do you? Think the natives don't know the truth? I suppose you sold the best part of the stuff and got caught with some that the trader didn't want, eh?"

Jim Hurd's eyes dilated; he was uncertain, shaken, afraid.

"How did you know about that trader?"

"None of your damned business." Carter's hand had rested on his pistol. It fell away, and the blaze of fury died from his face. "Never mind; she's waiting. Later on we'll straighten this out together. Just now she mustn't suspect anything wrong. You'd better go and bring her up to my bungalow—is the place in shape, or have you turned it into a pigsty?"

Jim Hurd brushed a hand across his eyes.

"It's all right, Lee, it's all right. You're a white man. I've hated you for it, but I admire you for it too. Wait, now! What was it you said about Verbeck and murder?"

"Oh, he tried hard, but failed." Carter laughed. "On Beth's account. Never mind that now. More important things are afoot; war's about to break. What have you got over the wireless in the past day or two?"

"Nothing. Won't work till I get new batteries," said Jim Hurd. "Wait, now—I'm not finished. Don't put me off. About Verbeck, I mean. Where does Beth come in?"

"Oh, he had his eye on her; he had come on the boat with her from Macassar," Carter explained carelessly. "He was going to fetch her up here himself; you know what that would

He opened the gate. Beth Hurd stopped. "Lee! That's Jim's voice—"

have meant. I spoiled his little game at Balikan. He didn't forgive me, that's all. I'll settle up with him some other day."

Hurd dropped his cigarette and wiped sweat from his cheeks. His eyes were bright and glittering with fever. A low, savage oath escaped him. Then his shoulders squared.

"Look here, Lee, help me out a bit more," he said appealingly. "I'm in no shape to meet her; I need a drink to pull me together. Just one, no more! You go on back and bring her along. I'll be in shape by that time. So Verbeck—why, the damned snake! I wish I'd known all that, when he was here!"

"No harm done." Carter nodded and turned. "All right, one drink; no more! I'll go back and bring her."

He swung away on the path he had come, and saw Hurd heading back for the compound at a shambling run. Probably to kick out some native woman he had installed in the bungalow, thought Carter with contempt. And to think the cur had not hesitated to plaster a dead friend's record! That burned. Not that any harm would be done; Lee Carter's record was well known. It was just the dirty shame of the thing—

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Carter saw Beth Hurd and the boatmen ahead. He was not a third of the way back to the wharf. He was already in hot anger, and his surprise burst forth in furious oaths that made the brown men shrink. But the girl came to him and put out her hand, smiling into his eyes.

"Lee! Don't look so angry; you're not really angry, you know!"

His face cleared. "I know it; sight of you surprised me."

"I couldn't bear to sit there waiting. Don't blame the men; it's my fault."

"Forget it," he said, and laughed. "I met Jim; he's at the house now. He's been working like a dog and rushed to get a change of clothes before you arrived. It's all right, my dear. Come along."

He turned and went on with her, the boatmen following with their burdens. The clearing appeared before them, and the compound amid the trees, encircled with its thorn fence. No one was in sight; the absence of any natives at once struck Carter, but meant nothing to her.

He opened the gate for her. They started for the bungalow beyond—the little two-room shack with thatched roof, shaded veranda, fowls scratching around the piling. Then voices came to them with startling violence—deep, furious voices.

Beth Hurd stopped short.

"Lee! What is it? That's Jim's voice—"

Talking Dutch, thank heaven! The oaths were scalding. Someone else was there, then. Lee Carter touched her arm. From the pitch of those voices, there was hell to pay.

"Wait here," he said, and left her. He strode rapidly forward and sprang up the steps. A frightful premonition was upon him, half-sensed and vague.

A man came into the doorway and saw him, and screamed out something. It was Verbeck. Verbeck here! Carter saw him swing around; then a pistol exploded. Upon the roaring blast of sound, another shot lifted and another. Three in all. Verbeck fell out of sight, inside the bungalow.

Carter leaped into the doorway and stood aghast. Jim Hurd was facing him, lips drawn back in a snarling grin, pistol in hand, a spreading tide of crimson spurting across his white jacket. Hurd tried to speak; the eyes gave the message, but the lips failed. Then he was sinking down, coughing, falling almost across the body of Verbeck.

The truth flashed on Carter, while he caught the falling man and stayed him. Jim Hurd had come back here to kill Verbeck, carefully saying nothing about Verbeck's still being here.

CARTER never knew how he got through the next half-hour, how Beth Hurd got through it. Yet strangely enough, she had little need of his help and support, for Carter was far more shaken than she was, it seemed. She worked over Jim Hurd, and Carter saw that the body of Verbeck was carried out and made ready for burial. He went with two of the natives to point out a place for the grave.

And there, outside the compound, he met the *controleur* and six sepoys, coming up from the wharf. The Dutch official was a stiff, precise man, but now he was excited. And he was not excited over the wandering trader who lay ironed in his barge; he did not even show a trace of interest at Verbeck's body, or at Carter's story.

"No matter, no matter! No, I will not come to the house," he said, taking off his sun-helmet and wiping his half-bald head. "It is news; we got it in the barge, by wireless, an hour ago. Never mind. I came to tell Mynheer Hurd. Now I must tell you."

"Hurd's been shot," said Carter. "You mean, you came to arrest him?"

The official waved his hands.

"Arrest him? No! What does it matter now—smuggling, hard camphor—*ach, Gott!* What do those things matter?"

"Glad you feel that way about it," said Carter. "He's got a bullet through his body, but he'll pull through all right—"

The Dutchman grabbed his arm. "Listen! It does not matter, I tell you!" he cried, his red face all sweating, his eyes bulging. "The Japs, do you understand? They have opened war today, without warning! They have attacked Hawaii and sunk your fleet. They are attacking the Philippines and Malaya. It has come, do you understand? Soon they will be here—"

He said a lot more, then took his sepoys and went away. Carter remained dazed, uncertain, incredulous; gradually the news took hold of him. After a little he turned and went across the compound to the bungalow. Beth Hurd came out and met him on the veranda. Her eyes were red.

"He'll pull through, Lee," she said. Her face startled him—rather, what he read in it. "Not even his life here can stop it; not even the drinking and all."

"How do you know about that?" he demanded. She looked at him. Her brown eyes were lovely, starry through their mist; a smile lay hidden in their clear depths.

"Nobody is all bad; it's equally true, my dear, that nobody is all good," she said. "You laid on the colors too thickly. I love you for it, but I guessed long ago about Jim. The letter he sent with the money told its own story. And the hotel man in Balikan told me a great deal, before you came. You were trying to keep me from being hurt—"

"Well, I've got news," blurted out Carter. "Big news!"

He told her. He was speaking almost mechanically, as he repeated what the *controleur* had told him. But the back of his brain was busy with another vista.

The whole thing lay clear now—they would turn around and go back, of course. Jim Hurd would get well. They would go back to Balikan, all three of them; she would get out of this; Jim would get out; everything was falling into a swift pattern. This frightful news about war made their own paths come together and lead outward.

"Jim was in the Marines—it'll mean everything to him, too," he concluded. "It'll buck him up. It means a new life for him, for you and all of us. The past is wiped out—a new future's ahead—a hard, grim future, maybe. The end of the world, maybe. It's as the Dutchman said—nothing matters now! The little things, I mean. The mistakes and so on. All gone now. Just tomorrow matters to us all, if you understand me."

"I understand you," she said gravely. "You're a dear man; that's what matters, Lee! Are you sorry you came back upriver with me?"

"Hell, no! It was—well, it was the grandest thing that ever happened!" he cried.

"To both of us," she added softly. And after that, he did not care if the world came to an end or not.

BOLIVAR

The Life of an Idealist

by Emil Ludwig

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A BRILLIANT gathering thronged the great house, which for the most part stood closed and shuttered. All the society of the capital was there to celebrate the birthday of Charles IV, the All-Catholic King of Spain, the sun of whose grace shone from far across the Atlantic to the shores of his oldest and most loyal colonies where, three centuries before, Columbus had hoisted the Spanish flag.

The place was Caracas, the year 1790, and the manor belonged to the widow of one of those great nobles who, at the extreme end of the Spanish world, determined to preserve a reflection of the splendors of the court of Madrid when they came riding into town from their seats on their huge estates. . . .

Under the old pomegranate tree in the patio, a boy of eight, sitting half perched on his chair, with his feet in his buckled shoes drawn up under him, watched with a cool and rather tired expression the comings and goings of the ladies and gentlemen between the long curtains, among the ivory cabinets, and even under the trees in the patio, their jewels, uniforms, lace and flowers and daggers flickering and flashing in the candlelight.

From time to time, through the moving crowd, the boy caught sight of a figure in black silk—his beautiful, ailing mother, who sat bolt upright in her carved chair, her straight back scorning its support, as stiff and proud as a Spanish queen. . . .

Not until the strains of Haydn's minuet rose in the green hall, and the couples took up their stand to weave its intricate figures, was Simon's curiosity moved. But the dance moved too slowly for him. . . .

Life was happier in the country, at San Mateo, where he could hunt and fish all day long with his brother and the steward. . . .

There was many a hiding place in the old country house. He could feed the poultry and pigs there; there were dogs and horses—above all, horses! Simon was just eight when they gave him his first horse; till then he had had to ride a donkey. And when his riding master yelled that he would never learn to ride, he yelled back in a rage: "How can I learn if you always put me on this donkey? It's only fit to haul wood!" Then they gave him his first horse and marveled to see how the lad rode it. For forty years, until his death, horses shared Bolivar's life. If he had not been a great horseman, he would never have reached his goal, would never have held his own in battle, on mountain paths and mountain passes, and in spite of all the noble feelings which later moved him to ever-greater deeds of daring, would never have become a man of action. A horseman, and only a horseman, could become the liberator of the plains and mountains of South America. . . .

Suddenly, fate struck the first promise of joy from his hands. When he was barely nine, his mother, then in her middle thirties, died. At fifteen she had married a man thirty years older than herself and, at his death, had been left a young widow with four children. Bolivar's father was fifty-six at the birth of his youngest son who was destined to make the world ring for the first time with the name of his ancient line. It was his father's fine, noble, and reserved face which looked out of the frame of an old painting.

At this juncture, Uncle Palacios took the boy into town and handed him over to the priests to be educated. . . . One Capuchin taught the ten-year-old Bolivar the rudiments of mathematics, another botany, the study of which had been recently introduced to those parts by a Spanish physician, a friend of Linnaeus. The main thing, however, was to go regularly to Mass, to kiss the bishop's hand, and to steer clear of all the dangerous, newfangled notions with which the air was rife. For until shortly before Bolivar's birth, nobody in the Spanish Empire was allowed to teach that the earth revolved round the sun; that departure had been first announced at Santa Fé in 1762 by a devil-ridden doctor from Cadiz. . . .

The boy took little pleasure in it all. He listened, learned, and repeated, and recited history and geology just as he recited his prayers. But he was far happier when, stealing into the courtyard of an evening, he could listen to the old Negro telling for the hundredth time the story of the tyrant Aguirre, whose soul was doomed to wander forever, and could be seen flitting about like a will-o'-the-wisp. The uncle seems to have recognized the imaginative trend of the boy's nature, or at any rate to have understood his romantic bent, for he took him away from the monks and set about finding a proper teacher for him. . . .

Since the time of Alexander, the decisive influence exercised by their teachers on youths who were to become great statesmen or soldiers has rarely become known; genius generally rebels against the education forced upon it and grows in opposition. What Bolivar, between the ages of nine and fifteen, learned from his new tutor, however, stood in sharp contrast to everything he had seen in the loyally monarchist home of his parents. . . .

When Rodriguez was born at Caracas, twelve years before Bolivar, there were no Marqués or grandees to stand round his cradle; his straitened, commonplace childhood opened his eyes very early to the inequality of classes and races in his country. Early orphaned, like his future pupil, he ran away at fourteen, embarked on a ship bound for Europe, and tramped through Spain, France, and Germany. "For," he said, "I will not be like the trees, always rooted to one spot, but like the wind and water, constant in change." . . .

On his wanderings through revolutionary France, Rodriguez had become both a disciple and a prophet of Rousseau, and if we anticipate his pupil's later development, he must be recognized as the most productive of all the devotees of that reformer. No maker of history learned so much from Rousseau as Bolivar. The *Contrat social* had revealed to Rodriguez not only the top-heavy structure of society, but also the formulas by which it could be restored to balance, while *Emile* showed him the way to put his own passion for teaching into practice. Rodriguez knew himself to be neither a lawgiver nor a liberator; he therefore hoped to become the teacher of one, and resolved to seek an *Emile*, who could grow, under his hands, into both Rousseau's natural man and a natural leader of newly awakened men. . . .

For the first time, the little, dreamy Marqués heard things which had till then been kept from him—that the good King far across the ocean was anything but a good king, that, like his fathers for three hundred years before him, he was suppressing every intellectual advance, every desire for liberty, here and all over America. A dozen years ago, a descendant of the old Inca kings had risen in Peru with reasonable demands and had sent some of his family to the King in Madrid to obtain the abolition of the old slave customs, but the King had had them all poisoned. Under the outrage, the

descendant of the Incas had stirred up a revolt; for thousands of miles the natives had rallied round him, and he would perhaps have liberated the country if he had not been betrayed by his own men. But the royalists won and, having taken him prisoner, first killed his wife and friends before his eyes in the marketplace, then laid him on the ground, bound a horse to each limb, whipped them up, and tore him to pieces alive.

The boy had listened with wide-open eyes. Torn in pieces by four horses for having risen against the King? And he was nearly successful? Why did his own men betray him?

The teacher smiled at him with deep affection and sympathy. Here was *Emile* in flesh and blood, and Rousseau himself would have rejoiced in such a prey! Then he told him that the Creoles would not suffer an Indian to be their leader and had betrayed him rather than drive out their common oppressors by his side.

The Creoles, thought the boy. But that is what we are. So there were pure Spaniards like his father, grandfather, and uncle who revolted against the King! He burned to hear more and yet more. . . .

He learned that the Creoles had headed the risings because they, just they, were cleverer and richer. It had been so in New Granada, the neighboring territory. A revolt had broken out there in 1781, the same year as in Peru, set going by a woman of the people who tore a royal tax decree from the wall and trampled it underfoot. At that time the flame had spread through the whole country, as far as Panamá. The highborn Creoles had led the indignant people, twenty thousand strong, to the capital; all wore on their breasts, as a talisman, a hymn to freedom and the fatherland. Singing the hymn, they marched to the Captain-General's palace and forced him to capitulate. But when he had received enough reinforcements from Spain, he tore up the capitulation treaty and had the leaders executed.

The same thing had happened everywhere to the Americans, at Quito on the equator, at La Plata down in the south, in Mexico. At first the revolutionists had carried the day, for the Spanish troops were of no great service, and their officers, who were often Creoles, went over to the rebels. But the Spaniards were cunning; they had sent for men from Havana and crowded the unreliable Creoles out of the army. . . .

FROM the world of ideas with which Rodriguez was filling the awakening soul of his pupil, the problem soon issued into reality before their very eyes. One day the teacher, greatly agitated, brought the boy news of a revolt which had broken out in the neighboring colony of New Granada. . . . One thing is certain—that in the course of this affair, Rodriguez himself started a conspiracy with his friends at Caracas; it is uncertain whether he let his pupil into the secret. It is, however, probable, for, as he said himself, he could never hold his tongue. For the first time, emigrants, terrorists, and deportees from the islands off the coast dawned on the horizon of Simon the younger, who had, till then, never seen anything but a world of loyal monarchists. . . .

The new *Emile,* now some fourteen or fifteen years old, became an accomplice in thought of things which would have horrified his house. Suddenly, one morning, his teacher failed to appear; rumor had it that he had been taken prisoner. The bridge to that world of adventure was broken. The plot had actually been discovered; forty-five men, most of them young, and many of them Creole nobles and friends of the family, were tried and sentenced, some to imprisonment and some to death. Rodriguez, who had managed to destroy his papers, was acquitted for lack of proof, but realizing in whose hands the power in that country lay, he fled, and for the time being saw his pupil no more. . . .

A successor to Rodriguez was soon found. Bello, later a great poet and champion of liberty, a man only a few years older than his pupil, now became his teacher. He seems, however, to have gained no great ascendancy over him and stayed only a year. The star of childhood had set. From that time on, Bolivar's life as a little soldier was embittered, like all life in that city, of whose inner movement he had heard too much ever to be able to forget it, but from which his rank cut him off. So restless a frame of mind could not long remain hidden from the eyes of the uncle and guardian under whose orders he stood. His uncle realized that what this high-strung boy needed was a change, that he must be sent to his loyalist relatives in Madrid if he were ever going to become what his fathers had been before him. Bolivar was fifteen when, well provided with money and letters, he left home to be turned into a real nobleman across the ocean in Spain. . . .

The prepossessing youth with his slim and rather small horseman's figure, with dark eyes glowing in his pale olive face, now entered a circle which showed him, in its heedless zest, the delights of power and love. It was the kind of company best calculated to ruin for life a young millionaire and man of fashion between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. The example of a court unrivaled in debauchery gave all who belonged to it by virtue of wealth or family a welcome pretext for vying with His All-Catholic Majesty. . . .

At seventeen, Bolivar fell ardently in love for the first time. Maria Theresa was older than he. She belonged, like himself, to a noble Venezuelan family, that of the del Toros. She herself, however, had been born in Madrid, though her family had made its fortune at Caracas. For the first time in Bolivar's life, happiness took on a tangible form, and he threw himself into it without restraint. . . .

For the moment, what had to be won was a game, for his beloved's father imposed a delay on account of his youth, while months must pass before he could receive an answer to the request for permission to marry which the young man had written to his guardian at Caracas. . . . Bolivar embarked for Marseilles and went on to Paris.

NAPOLEON was still called Bonaparte. He was still First Consul. In the months the young Creole spent getting to know the notorious city of Paris, he could not fail to be fascinated by all Napoleon did. The Code was published, and it contained many of the ideas and doctrines of the great revolution. Everything Rodriguez had told his pupil about the new rights of man seemed realized in it—at least in principle. . . .

We have no documents to show the first impression Napoleon produced on Bolivar, yet all that followed, and all that the dictator of America later said about the dictator of Europe, reveal the importance of the encounter. The mingled admiration and criticism which his great prototype stirred in Bolivar all his life is proof of how deep that impression was. Yet at this time there was a gulf between them, for the younger was as yet fired by no desire to do. He had but one desire—to dream his life away with his young beloved wife under the palms of home.

And yet his rancor against the Spanish rulers could not but revive when, returning after these months in Paris, he had as an officer to petition for the King's permission to marry, and obtain the blessing of the Church by prayer. . . .

But all such thoughts vanished when he had her safe in the cabin of the sailing ship, at whose door fathers and kings, guards and ministers, would have knocked in vain. Life lay before the two young creatures as serene as the sunny days on the ocean on which their ship was riding, for no passion, not even a plan, can trouble the world of fantasy built up by two handsome, healthy, and rich young beings, deeply in love and neither yet twenty, when their ship seems to be bearing them to the land of their dreams. For a few months it was granted to them to live in pure, unearthly tenderness, in the purposelessness of young love. At the country home of his ancestors in the forests of Aragua, under the protection

of highborn and influential relatives, entertained by everything luxury and love could devise for their pleasure, the two lived on from day to day without even the signs of a future heir coming to disquiet their idyl.

Suddenly the young wife died of a violent fever. She is said to have tripped over the train of her dressing gown in her bedroom, to have lain for a time unconscious, and to have succumbed to the fever in consequence. The doctors seemed not to have recognized what kind of fever it was. She died after five days' illness. For Bolivar it was a shattering awakening; in the first violence of despair, his life seems to have been saved only by his brother. After nine months of marriage he found himself a widower, and as he had long been an orphan, he, who but yesterday had been a child of fortune, now stood in every sense of the word alone in the world. He made up his mind to live a life dedicated to the memory of his beloved in the halls and forests which had seen his dream come true, and, as he said later, "to die a simple country gentleman" . . .

But the cup the world had set to his lips was too sweet, the dream had been too fleeting, and the soul of this sensual dreamer was too hungry. In the long, lonely evenings, with the slender dream figure of his beloved for sole company, there rose behind her in the shadows an intoxicating vision of all the women and highborn men he had met at the court of Madrid. . . .

When Bolivar, at twenty, handed over the management of his estates to his brother, and again embarked, this time alone, he was moved by mingled feelings of disillusion and expectancy. Early mature, cast at one blow from joy to renunciation, there was nothing steady in his heart but a single resolve. He had sworn to keep faith with the memory of his beloved by never marrying again. . . .

In the Manzoni circle in Milan and in the salons of Florence and Rome, Bolivar is also said to have met Madame de Staël and Lamartine, Rauch and Thorvaldsen, Chateaubriand, and even perhaps Lord Byron. It is notable that none of these great minds should have later recalled the world-famous man in youth, although Byron, twenty years later, even named his yacht after him. . . . He also read and thought a great deal, at that time largely under the influence of Spinoza, while decidedly hostile to Machiavelli. This conflict between power and ethics was another of the things which were later to bewilder the mind of the practical idealist. . . .

It was the same confusion of curiosity and admiration, of defiance and hostility, which moved Bolivar in presence of the Emperor and the Pope. Power attracted him irresistibly, even where its source conflicted utterly with his own liberal and humanitarian ideas. . . .

One afternoon, Robinson relates, when they had climbed the Aventino in the sweltering heat of August, he became aware that his silent companion was struggling with some great emotion. "Suddenly Bolivar rose from the base of a column and, as if he were alone, gazed rapturously toward the horizon through the rays of the setting sun. 'So this is the city of Romulus and Sulla, of the Gracchæ, of Augustus and Nero, of Caesar and Brutus!' he cried. Here they walked, the empresses and courtesans, the martyrs and apostles, criminals and heroes—and yet they accomplished almost nothing for humanity. What but their names did they leave behind them? On my life and honor, I swear not to rest until I have liberated America from her tyrants!" . . .

THE most famous man in South America, and one of the most famous in the world at the time, was Miranda. . . . Francisco Miranda, born, like Bolivar, at Caracas, more than twenty years before him, descended from pure Spanish stock and was also of Basque origin. As a young man, however, he and his rich middle-class father had, with indignation, felt themselves slighted by the aristocracy; Miranda later conferred upon himself every imaginable title. When he went to Spain at seventeen to join the army, he was at once introduced, in Paris, to the circles of the new thought, but as there was no revolution pending then, he enrolled in the American War of Independence, fought on the Mississippi, and won so much distinction as a kind of espionage officer in the English Antilles that at twenty-six he was already a lieutenant colonel. It was then that the Spanish Ambassador at Philadelphia introduced him to General Washington—a great moment for the young officer and revolutionary. From that time on, he strove to emulate that great example, and sought to seize the moment to become the liberator of the South.

. . . . When he landed at Coro in August, 1806, after twenty years of preparation, to liberate his country, when he posted his proclamations and rallied his countrymen, he realized that the Venezuelans either through apathy or hostility had no desire to be liberated. They are Jacobins and revolutionaries, the native leaders cried warningly to the inhabitants. He has been bought with English money and is going to sell us to England. No one went to the help of the naval officers and men who had been captured by the Spaniards from a number of capsized vessels and publicly hanged. . . .

Bolivar had had no share in these doings. Returning home shortly after Miranda's abortive rising, he lived for a year not far from him, in the neighboring country if not in the same, without ever coming into contact with him. . . .

He was on good terms with the Spanish authorities. If the Governor gave a ball, Bolivar was there, being one of the few Creoles to be admitted to court circles. On one occasion, however he rose at the table which represented the authority of the King and startled all present by toasting the independence of America. The Governor then requested him to remain a few days on his estates. It was a politely worded command. . . .

One day in July, 1808, the Governor sent for the learned Bello; a packet of English papers had just come in from Trinidad; he could not read them. Bello left them lying for two more days, then opened the packet and read that he, the Governor, and all the rest were no longer officials and subjects of King Charles. For, three months before, Crown Prince Ferdinand had deposed his father, then Napoleon had deposed both. The Queen and her minister-lover had fled; Joseph Bonaparte was King of Spain and India.

An English ship, which shortly after demonstrated against the Bonapartes, brought fresh news: in all the as yet unoccupied parts of Spain, juntas had been formed against Napoleon and for England, but even then, no junta was formed at Caracas, for all the liberals in the town, or nearly all, were loyal, and, even now, their sole aim was a more liberal constitution and by no means a republic. . . . Only a few cities, more especially in Chile and Mexico, had Napoleonic leanings. Even in Caracas, resolute men were well aware of the moment. Imploring letters arrived from Miranda in London: since France and England were squabbling and there was no government in Spain, they should make haste to form sovereign juntas everywhere and send their proceedings to him in London. "But," Miranda concluded his exhortation, "no foolhardiness, which might complicate everything. Unity! Disunion and strife would mean the end of our schemes."

Bolivar read the letters, listened to the reports, and was one of the first to grasp the implications of the great moment. And as generally happens with men who have held themselves in check too long, he suddenly became the most radical of all. . . .

In contrast to most of his friends, he refused to recognize any order issued from the still-independent parts of Spain. . . .

The very appearance of the new Captain-General whom the Spanish Junta sent over in 1809 was enough to bring the discord to light. Emparan, a Spanish general and aristocrat, was familiar with, and well-disposed toward Bolivar's circle—from his former

period of office in one of the provinces. The junta had sent over with him, as commander of the militia, one Colonel del Toro, who was related to Bolivar through his wife; all three had been friends in Madrid. But as the young nobles of Caracas were aiming at liberty for their country, and the government only at liberty for itself, the conflict soon came to a head. When the Governor gave a kind of trial banquet, to which he invited his former, now liberal, friends, there was a great deal of politeness and irony on both sides, at the end of which Bolivar proposed an ambiguous toast to the freedom of the new world. Soon afterwards, Emparan rejected all petitions for the summoning of a local junta, and put a number of the leaders in prison.

That was in March, 1810. The liberal leaders were meeting at Bolivar's country house, a conspiracy was planned, a famous preacher joined them, and arms were collected, the object being to attack the Governor by surprise on the night of the first of April and then summon the first junta. The plot was betrayed. The Governor had the ringleaders imprisoned and ordered Bolivar and some of his friends to remain on their estates outside of the town. A few days later they showed themselves in the streets, attracting as little attention as possible.

Again news from Europe brought this crisis to an end. Two Spanish officers, well known to Bolivar and his friends, brought the news with them; Andalusia, and with it Cadiz, the last stronghold, had fallen into the hands of the French, the Spanish Junta had been dissolved, so that America was either in Napoleon's possession or free. Both town and country soon heard the great news. Most of the leaders, in all about a hundred men, spent the night in conference, for the next day was Holy Thursday, the most solemn festival of the year.

THE day dawned—with processions, crowds, a meeting of the City Council, all in the place where the Governor had his residence. He was compelled to attend the council meeting, where he was called upon to summon a junta and gave the reply: "After Mass." With his troops and bodyguard, the Governor could arrest them all, for the men, though not the officers, were still obeying his orders. The mob yelled, he had to turn round and go, not to the Cathedral, but back to his residence. In the City Hall there were provocative speeches. "The Spanish government has come to an end! No half measures! Our government should consist only of Americans! Our first duty is to depose the Governor!" By noon the forced abdication had taken place, the Governor was conducted to the harbor by a bodyguard and allowed to embark for Spain on a safe ship.

"The Junta for the safeguarding of the rights of Ferdinand VII" was the title of the first assembly to declare itself constituted in America, five weeks before Buenos Aires and several months before the other Spanish colonies, with the exception of Peru, followed suit. . . .

Bolivar was not in town that day, so that he cannot have been present at the nocturnal conference. Possibly his former friendship with the Governor made him wish to have no hand in deposing him. The next night, he rode into town from his estate, accompanied by Bello, who had gone to fetch him. To obtain admission to the junta, he produced his papers as a thirteen-year-old militiaman; they abounded in good reports of the little ensign. The only blank stood beside the entry: "Active Service." Further down, his whole history had been added in a single word—"Widower." Soon afterwards, the junta gave him the rank of colonel, as one of the intellectual pioneers of the revolution. As he entered, seeing his friends laughing at the crowds who had forced their way in, he reproved them and welcomed this first sign of democracy.

He was not, however, appointed one of the four secretaries of state whom the young republic chose from Bolivar's circle. We do not know whether he refused, or whether the appointment was not offered. What we do know is that he neither took part in the rising nor helped to take over the government. What was offered to him, and what he gladly accepted, was an office for which he seemed in every way born. He was made the most important diplomatic representative of the new republic. He was sent as ambassador to London. . . .

Bolivar could, of course, pursue a more radical line of action since his real aims were not set forth in his letters. The two friends he took with him, Bello the poet and young Lopez Mendez, who themselves accompanied him as official envoys, were, he knew, completely devoted to him; they were practically the only friends to remain faithful to him all his life. He may possibly have confided to them even on the voyage that he intended to go far beyond his instructions; that what he wanted was not beloved King Ferdinand, but a republic in every sense of the term, everybody at home knew.

Thus Bolivar's first political action took a dramatic turn, as befits genius. Instead of merely handing over his credentials and presenting his friends to the Foreign Secretary in London, Bolivar left his instructions behind him by mistake and proceeded to harangue the minister with true Spanish eloquence, demanding complete independence for his country and thus abandoning beloved King Ferdinand, England's protégé. He spoke with fiery hatred of Spanish slavery. . . .

On his return home, the ambassador was met with critical coolness. What he should have brought, namely arms, money, and treaties from England, he did not bring, and the man whose arrival he announced was precisely what he should not have brought. . . . The Spaniards had dispatched a "Royal Commission," during Bolivar's absence, and which, staying in Puerto Rico, worked against the patriots. At the same time a number of provinces and separate towns had issued proclamations against "the infamies at Caracas," while the Governor had also set the counter-revolution going on the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

In Caracas itself, the enthusiasm had soon died down. The quiet citizens, who had done no more than just not keep out of the affair on Maundy Thursday, were now accusing the leaders of having lost, through their act of violence, the new schools and privileges planned by the government at Cadiz. Everybody was jeering at the new universal suffrage which had been given even to wild Indians who could not so much as write and had no desire for freedom. In view of such resistance, it was little wonder that the small army of four thousand men, some armed with pikes, was annihilated by the Spaniards, more especially as it was commanded by a man of no experience whatever, namely Colonel del Toro. . . . Bolivar landed immediately after the defeat.

HE was met by news of his brother's death. Returning from Washington, to which he had been sent as ambassador, his sailing ship loaded not with the arms he should have brought but with machines, he had gone down with the whole cargo. Thus Bolivar, who now returned to America never to leave it again, was doubly alone; at twenty-seven he had lost his father and mother, his wife and brother; the letters he later exchanged with his sisters are in no way intimate. But the fact that he henceforth stood alone, without family ties, merely lent new strength to his determination to satisfy his longing for great deeds. . . .

Miranda's arrival in January, 1811, aroused Bolivar, still brooding in solitude, from his pessimism. The citizens, and most members of the government, watched suspiciously as the English brig landed, for the return of the old Jacobin meant for them not salvation, but simply war with Spain and hence, most likely, their annihilation. . . .

Miranda, who wished for a Committee of Public Welfare on the classical model, was obliged to withdraw, with the radicals, to a "Patristic Society," whose nocturnal sittings he pre-

sided over in Dantonesque style, and where the only celebration of the first anniversary of the first rising was ventured. In these days Bolivar made a fiery speech, the following passage of which has been preserved:

"The Congress is still debating what it should long since have decided. What are the intentions of Spain, it asks. What does it matter to us whether she means to keep her slaves or sell them to Bonaparte? For our part, we mean to be free. Plans of such a magnitude, it says, require mature consideration. Were three centuries not enough? We respect the Congress, but it must listen to what we have to say. Let us fearlessly lay the foundations of South America's independence. To hesitate longer means to lose the great game."

The allusion to the three centuries in this, the first example of Bolivar's oratory to have been handed down to us, caused such excitement in the club that the Congress was startled and began to move. Miranda's election to the Congress, at last accomplished, and a betrayal of military plans to Spain soon brought feeling to such a pitch that a deputy actually dared to raise his voice against the King appointed by the grace of God, and the ever-ready mob besieging the monastery applauded him. Three months after its formation, the Congress was summoned to a great meeting in a church where, in the torrid heat of July, one speaker after another demanded independence for South America. When Miranda announced a great victory by Massena over the Spaniards, and pointed out how soon the united French and Spanish forces would appear on the American coast, forty-one deputies resolved to sign the Act of Venezuelan Independence on July 5, 1811. The yellow, blue, and red colors chosen by Miranda were given national status and have retained it till today. On the great marketplace, outside, where one of the first champions of freedom had been hanged, his sons now hoisted the flag of freedom, and the troops took the oath to the national assembly. . . .

While the people had no real share in the creation of the republic, neither had the only two men who knew its models from actual travels in France and the United States. Those who copied the Constitution of Philadelphia almost word for word, on the basis of the *Contrat social* and the *Esprit des lois*, were the doctrinaires of the clubs, a handful of lawyers. Bolivar and Miranda, with a few friends, were the only men to grasp the problem from the outset. They sought in vain to centralize what afterwards fell apart into a federation of seven states.

Miranda does not seem to have been fortunate in the establishment of his little army. By giving preference to foreign, and especially to French, officers, he antagonized the native officers, particularly as the wish for visible honors is said to be a main characteristic of this proud people. By giving slaves their freedom if they pledged themselves to ten years' service in the army, he antagonized the rich landowners who were beginning to arm their Negroes against the republic. The very blacks who were said to have been in possession of the rights of man since the day before yesterday now had to kill their own brothers. . . .

WITH this very mixed little army, which he drilled relentlessly on the model of Frederick the Great's, Miranda set out to retake Valencia, hoping by that to force the whole coast into obedience. To Bolivar he handed over the fort of Puerto Cabello in the west, his most important base for his action. . . .

On the arid coast, where a few sparse cacti struggled to live, Bolivar, as a kind of prison warder, found time to think about his friend the dictator. . . . Suddenly, one afternoon, the sound of gunfire reached him in his room. He rushed out; it came from the citadel. Through his field glasses he saw, to his horror, that his officers were commanding the guns, while the Spanish prisoners were moving about freely, some of them manning the guns. It was treachery on the part of his own officers. . . . In the distance, troops appeared with the Spanish flag; the plot stood revealed. He sent the following report to Miranda at headquarters:

"July 1, 1812. General. An officer, unworthy of the name of Venezuelan, has taken the fort of San Felipe with the help of the prisoners and is bombarding the town like a madman. If Your Excellency does not attack at once, the place is lost. I will hold it with all my strength till you come."

Four days later, Miranda opened the letter in the company of a few friends, realized what it meant, and exclaimed: "Struck in the heart." That very day, the Spanish Army advanced on the fort. Bolivar, who had collected a troop of 250 cavalry, sent 200 against the Spaniards. Seven came back. On the sixth day he fled with five officers and three men on a small brig in the direction of La Guaira. . . .

Miranda gave himself up for lost. News from New Granada in the west, from the Orinoco in the east, told of the Spanish advance. From the plantations, reports were coming in of risings by slaves and massacres by masters. The enemy held three-quarters of the country and was threatening the capital. And now the Spanish general, Monteverde, had fallen heir to all the wealth of war material in the lost fortress! . . .

Miranda was a broken man when, twelve days after the fall of Puerto Cabello, he decided, with the consent of a military and civil council, to surrender the country to the Spaniards in return for Monteverde's solemn promise to declare an amnesty for all the republican leaders, to allow free emigration to all, and to leave all property unmolested. . . .

Bolivar managed to make his way back to Caracas, where a friend hid him in his house, for his name headed the list of proscripts. . . . He heard in his hiding-place how eight of his friends and officers had been sent to Spain in chains. That would be his fate too if he were found. And yet he could not remain in hiding forever. He therefore looked about for some influential man to stand surety for him, and found one in an old friend of his family who was also a friend of his host's; Iturbe, a distinguished Spaniard, was let into the secret and set about obtaining an official passport for Bolivar. . . .

Three weeks after Miranda was taken prisoner, Iturbe, the Spaniard, presented Bolivar to the General in the Governor's palace. According to the practically identical accounts of Iturbe and Bolivar, the following conversation took place:

"This is Don Simon de Bolivar. I will take upon myself any punishment due to him. I stake my life for my friend."

"As you wish," replied Monteverde, courteously. "I promise safe conduct to Don Simon de Bolivar as a mark of gratitude for the service he rendered to His Majesty in capturing the traitor."

A terrible moment for Bolivar: If he protested, he risked his life; if he was silent, he sacrificed his honor. Without a moment's hesitation, he replied: "It was not at all in the service of the King that I took part in General Miranda's arrest. I did so because I regarded him as a traitor to my country."

It was said: in the room of the General who represented the King in that colony, one of the rebel leaders had openly declared himself and his action to be anti-royalist.

But Iturbe intervened, to save his friend once more. "Forward, Your Excellency! Let us waste no time with a madman! Give me the papers and away with him!"

"Do as you like. I have nothing more to say."

The next day, accompanied by a few friends, he (Bolivar) embarked on a Spanish ship, under Spanish protection, to reach as soon as possible the neighboring island of Curaçao, which now belonged to England. It was Bolivar's first banishment from home. The history of the next eighteen years was to be darkened by three further banishments, but this was the only time that the Spaniards banished him. Later, it was his own people.

The amazing story of Jimmy Smith, who found himself in a strange city, greeted by pretty ladies with a name not his own, and—suspected by the police of murder.

by John T. McIntyre

Who wrote "Drums in the Dawn" and "Steps Going Down."

The Man Who Forgot Three

The story thus far:

OF course, he decided, it wasn't any Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr. Hyde business; and yet—yesterday had been a day in the late winter of 1936, and he had been Jimmy Smith, in St. Louis; today, he discovered, was September 12, 1939, and he was Wallace Redge, in Los Angeles. And he didn't know the answer!

Moreover, in St. Louis he had been a wealthy young man about town, whose hobby was raising thoroughbred horses, and who was engaged to lovely Joan Birnett. Here in Los Angeles, it became apparent, he had been traveling with a swift and shady crowd; his business—*"Wallace Redge, Investments,"* whatever that might mean—was close to the edge of bankruptcy; he was being pressed for the payment of various debts, including the price of a race-horse he had purchased; and two of his creditors, Louis Oppert and Joe Stort, made disturbing references to another creditor, Richard Conningsby, who had been found shot to death by the roadside after a quarrel with Redge.

Jimmy put in a long-distance call for Joan and told her his story—that he had no recollection of how or why he had left St. Louis, or of how he had come to be Wally Redge of Los Angeles. . . . She seemed cool and skeptical, but—she took a plane for Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, Jimmy determined for the moment to keep up his identity as Wallace Redge and try to straighten out his tangled affairs. He had a talk with his secretary at his office, and learned something of the tangled skein of his affairs. He had a guarded interview with a handsome girl named Vivian, who it appeared had been his business partner, and another with Sylvia Stort. He talked with a crippled ex-jockey, Danny Quirt, and with a very decent fellow Sherry Noles, who seemed to be a friend of his. He discovered that he maintained an apartment in charge of a valet named Winten, from whom he learned more of the quarrel with Conningsby in this very apartment the night before the murdered man's body was found.

Joan arrived and listened to Jimmy's story; she seemed but half-convinced though inclined to help him. And he needed help; for in his apartment, he found in a drawer a .38-caliber automatic from which two shots had been fired. Conningsby had been killed by two .38-caliber bullets.

Sally Falconby, a college friend of Joan Birnett's, and her hostess in Los Angeles, advised Joan against the man whom she knew as Wally Redge; but Joan, spurred on by her belief that he was indeed Jimmy Smith, set earnestly about solving the puzzle. And she unearthed a valuable clue when she discovered that a letter from Conningsby to Jimmy was missing—apparently taken by Vivian. Joan traced the letter to Oppert's hotel-room, and entering precariously by the window-ledge, found the letter; but she barely escaped from Oppert, returning inopportunely. Unaware that Jimmy was also there searching for the letter, Joan fled in alarm. *(The story continues in detail:)*

JOAN, and Jimmy Smith, sat in a quiet corner of a Hollywood restaurant; they ate a little and drank a little and talked a great deal. Jimmy said, as he leaned across the table toward her: "Of course, all these other things have bothered me; but your not believing what I'd told you was the hardest of all to take."

"Please," said Joan, "don't say I didn't believe you. For I did. There hasn't been a moment in all the time I've

Oppert looked at Joe, his black eyes burning. "Look, Louie," protested Joe, "I didn't say that. It's a frame. I didn't say it!"

Years

been here that I haven't believed you. But at first I didn't dare admit it. I felt I must know more; that I must be guarded in everything I did and said. And watchful."

The young man regarded her with admiring tolerance.

"You were quite right, too," he said. "I'm sure I'd have stood a story like that off myself for a long time before accepting it. However," nodding at her confidently, "it's all settled; you know, now, and I know you know. So we can go along from there. And now about this Palmfield Plaza business; I know you are wanting to hear about it."

"You didn't appear there by chance," said Joan. "It was too opportune, and you were too sure of what you were doing for that."

"When Winten told me of your visit to the apartment, and what you'd done and said," Jimmy informed her, "I was a good deal upset. The idea of Vivian shooting Conningsby was a shock. And at once I made up my mind to have a talk with her. I called her apartment, but there was no answer. Then I thought of the office, and tried that. She was there; and within the next quarter of an hour I was there also and was talking with her."

"About Conningsby?" asked Joan, a shiver in her voice.

"Not at first; I thought I'd better save that until after I'd had it out with her about the letter. At first she denied knowing anything about it; but when I persisted, she admitted she'd taken it."

She had learned about it from Conningsby himself. She'd gone to him during the clamor made by the people who had entrusted their funds to Wallace Redge, Investments; she was bitterly angry and had accused Conningsby of planning and accomplishing the ruin of the concern. He'd laughed at her; and he'd admitted what she said was true.

"It seems," said Jimmy, "that Vivian and Conningsby once worked in very close harmony; but she dropped him after she became acquainted with Wally Redge. She charged him with doing what he'd done because he wanted revenge. He said that wasn't so; he'd broken Wallace Redge, Investments, for a reason that meant a great deal more to him than she'd ever meant. He wanted Wally without money, so he could fit him into a transaction that promised a heavy profit.

"But he didn't say what this was," Jimmy went on. "He mocked her, and seemed to get a good deal of satisfaction out of the whole situation. And it was while he was enjoying himself in this, that he mentioned the letter. She told me it was a slip; he hadn't really meant to say anything about it. But she kept the thing in mind, and knowing his letters were addressed to Wally at his apartment, she went there when she knew, by telephoning, that no one was at home, searched for it and found it.

"I insisted that it be turned over to me," said Jimmy. "And she, willingly enough, said she would get it. She was to return immediately; but I waited in the office for more than an hour before I heard from her. She telephoned me, and told me some parts of the story you've told me. When she reached the apartment, she saw Oppert in the building. She knew him only by sight, but she suspected his presence and was afraid. When he got into the moving cab with her, she was even more so.

"But he began to talk about Sylvia and Joe Stort, about Conningsby, about Wally Redge, about the heavy sums of money that could be made if only he had full information. He said he'd then stand where Conningsby had stood a few days before. With this difference: she would be a full partner in the matter. And persuaded by this, she went to the Palmfield Plaza, turned the letter over to him; she was convinced that she'd done a clever stroke of business."

"And all this time," said Joan, "you hadn't asked her what the letter was about?"

"I thought it best not to. For I wanted the letter itself and not her report on it. I learned from her that Oppert had locked it in a trunk in his room. Afterward, I went to the Plaza, engaged a room as near as I could to Oppert's and set about the adventure, most of which you witnessed."

"And to think," said Joan, "that it was you in the bathroom fixing your hurt finger, while I was creeping about the place, frightened and wondering what I'd do if you came out."

"I got a glimpse of you as you struggled with Oppert at the door," said Jimmy. "But before I could get well started, you were off and he was after you. The fact that he was stopped for an instant by the door to the stairway closing before he could reach it, gave me a chance to overtake him." And there was a look of satisfaction on his face as he added: "He had that sock coming to him from various directions, and I hope he appreciated it."

Joan got up and went to a telephone, where she called Sally. They talked on awhile. Finally the waiter said Miss Falconby's car had arrived for Miss Birnett.

"Be careful, Jimmy," said Joan as she got into it at the curb. "And if anything happens, let me know."

"I'll be sure to," he said with a smile. "For I think I'll need help. Something tells me that a lot of things are going to happen to me in the next little while."

"Keep your fingers crossed," she advised. "And if I'm not at hand and there's anything very serious and in a great hurry, call Sherry Noles. He's a good soul, and thinks a great deal of Wally in spite of everything that's happened."

JIMMY went back to his apartment. He noticed that the people of the establishment looked at him rather sourly as he made his way through the lobby. Winten came forward when he entered the apartment.

"Anything going on?" asked Jimmy.

Winten looked solemn. "I'm afraid so, sir. Inspector Plum of the police called three different times since you went out a few hours ago."

"You told him I wasn't in?"

"Yes, Mr. Redge. . . . But sir, the house management has been complaining, sir."

"What's wrong with them?"

"It's the police, sir. There's a half dozen of them stationed here and there about the building. Under orders to watch you."

"I see," said Jimmy. "That would indicate that there *have* been developments."

"Yes sir." Here the telephone rang, and Winten answered it. He looked over his shoulder at Jimmy. "Mr. Quirt, sir," he said.

Jimmy took the telephone. "Hello, Quirt," he said.

"I'm glad I found you in. There's something I thought you ought to know. The police laboratory has been working on things. And they found the bullets that were in Conningsby's body came out of your gun."

"I was afraid of that," Jimmy said.

"I think," said Quirt, "it'd be a good idea if you and I talked a little. What say if I come up to your place?"

"Quite all right," said Jimmy. "Any time you say."

"Tonight," said Quirt. "In an hour or so."

Jimmy, after he'd put down the telephone, walked the floor, considering the situation. This business of the automatic was direct and incontrovertible. A weapon is purchased; it is recorded by the police; a murder is done by means of bullets fired from it. And then, immediately, the owner is called upon to explain.

"And he'd better be able to," Jimmy said to himself. "He's going to have plenty of trouble if he's not."

Winten came quietly into the room.

"Miss Vivian is at the door, sir," he said.

"Ask her to come in," said the young man.

When the girl entered, she looked pale, and her manner was hurried. She sat down in the chair Jimmy placed for her; and her hand shook as she took the cigarette he offered her.

"Maybe," he said, "you'd like a brandy. You look rather down."

"I am a bit shaken," she said. "And a drink might do me some good."

Jimmy poured out the liquor for her; she drank it, and began to look better almost at once.

"Has something happened?" he asked her.

"I had a telephone call from Oppert awhile ago," she said. "He told me what happened tonight at his hotel."

"I thought he might do that." The young man looked at her quietly.

"There is a girl," said Vivian. "He hadn't told me about her before. He was in my room this afternoon—one of the porters let him in with a pass-key. And while he was there, this girl came in. He thought it was me, and he talked to her. She knew all about everything."

Jimmy nodded.

"A girl, eh?" he said. "Has he found out who she is?"

"She came to *his* room sometime later. He says she agreed to arrange things." Vivian's beautiful green eyes were fixed upon Jimmy's face. "She then left. Sometime after that he went out, but in a short time returned. She was there again," said Vivian. "And he said you were there, also."

"Yes," said Jimmy. "I sort of happened in. To get the Conningsby letter, if I could."

Vivian continued to look at him.

"Who is the girl?" she asked.

"Oh, a friend. From sometime back. You wouldn't be knowing her."

Vivian was silent for a time. When she spoke again there was a lack of assurance in her manner.

Jimmy asked: "When you came that night, was Conningsby's letter all you had in mind?" "Only that," said Vivian.

"Don't you think it was a mistake to do what you've done?" she asked.

"I don't think so. After all, the letter wasn't his. And it it passed into my hands, that seems quite all right to me."

"I don't think," said Vivian after another silence, "that it is advisable to cross Oppert. He looks like a dangerous person to have for an enemy."

"I don't mind dangerous people," said Jimmy. "I found out sometime ago that they often merely look that way."

"Our business is gone," said Vivian. "I have only a little money left, and that will go in any bankruptcy proceedings that may be established. What Dick Conningsby wanted to do, and what Oppert now wants to do, gives us a chance."

Jimmy lighted a fresh cigarette. He said to her:

"There is Sylvia—also there is Joe. It's a smart idea; but with the money going five ways, its value will shrink a good deal."

"So it will—if we do that. But is there any real need of it? Oppert doesn't think so."

"I'd not put too much confidence in Oppert's thinking if I were you."

"Suppose," said Vivian, "I call him and say you'd like to see him?"

"I wouldn't do that. As a matter of tact," said Jimmy, "I like my Oppert only occasionally." He looked at her through the smoke of his cigarette. "There's an angle of this affair that I didn't take up with you when we talked at the office today. Quite an important one, too."

"There is nothing more that I've been concerned in," said Vivian. "I've told you everything. I came here that night to speak to you about the letter. When I found you weren't in, I searched for it. I was anxious to know what it was about, because I distrusted everything Dick Conningsby did. I felt sure the letter had something in it that meant you no good."

Winten came quietly into the room.

"Pardon, sir. Miss Gale is here again—the newspaper woman."

Jimmy frowned; then on an impulse he said:

"Ask her to come in."

Miss Gale was tall and slim; and she was ash blonde, with large, pale eyes.

"Mr. Redge," she said, "it's so nice of you to see me. I know I'm bothering you greatly. But, the press—you understand how it is with that, I'm sure. It is a great hungry maw and must be fed."

She sat down with a sort of slimy grace and coiled herself composedly. Jimmy offered her a cigarette.

"What can I do for you this time?" he asked.

"I know it'll bore you terribly," she said. "But I'm seeking more and still more information in this fascinating Conningsby affair."

"That seems to be interesting quite a lot of people."

"Oh, it must be. And that being the case," said Miss Gale, "the press must deal with it very thoroughly and carefully." She looked at Vivian. "You're Mr. Redge's partner in Wallace Redge, Investments, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Vivian.

"I'm so glad to have seen you. Is there anything you care to say about your affairs?"

"No," said Vivian.

"Thank you," said Miss Gale sweetly. She gave her attention to Jimmy once more. "Do you mind saying if Mr. Conningsby had any business with you other than the matter of your horse deal?"

"No."

"It's rumored that he talked quite impatiently about you at times."

"This is the first time I've heard of it," said Jimmy.

"Also that he seemed to have a good deal against you."

"What could it be, I wonder?" asked Jimmy.

Miss Gale was very self-possessed.

"Surely," she said, "you don't mean to talk this way to the police?"

"I don't think they'd mind," said Jimmy. "They're accustomed to being talked to in various ways."

"Not in things like this. I'm told they've found the pistol that Conningsby was killed with."

"Well, that should start them off somewhere."

Miss Gale laughed.

"So you'll not talk, eh?" she said. She turned to Vivian. "It's a mistake to seal oneself up in a case like this. A few enlightening words will sometimes do so much." She put down the cigarette and arose; there was a smile upon her face, but she was not pleased. "A column can often be a good friend," she said.

"I know," said Jimmy. "But just as often, not."

AFTER the columnist had gone, Vivian said: "That woman would gnaw a person's bones."

"She's a lean she-wolf," said Jimmy. "A kind that lurks in a column of type, waiting for someone to miss a step." He noticed that Vivian was disturbed; her hands shook as she fumbled with her gloves. "She mentioned that the police have found the pistol that killed Conningsby. Were you listening?"

"Yes," said Vivian.

"They'll not be able to do anything to you," said Sylvia.

There was silence for a moment, and then Jimmy said:

"When you came here that night, was Conningsby's letter the only thing you had in mind?"

"Only that," said Vivian.

"Did you read it after you'd found it? I mean while you were still here?"

"Yes, I did."

"Were you angry at some of the things he'd written?"

"I was furious."

Again there was a silence. And Jimmy said:

"Was the letter the only thing you took while here?"

"What do you mean?"

"Was there anything else?"

"No."

"You didn't take my automatic out of the table drawer?"

She put her hand to her mouth as though to hold back a scream. She arose.

"Wally! Why should I do that?"

"You did it once before. You said you meant to—"

But she interrupted him. "I didn't mean it. You know I didn't."

"I'm not sure. People who reach for weapons in a moment of anger are not to be trusted. You talked of shooting me that time. The other night you may have had it in your mind to shoot someone else."

"Wally! What are you saying? How dare you? I didn't kill Dick Conningsby!"

"I haven't mentioned him."

"But you meant him. I didn't shoot him. I didn't take your automatic pistol. I hated him, and had good reason for it. But, Wally, I wouldn't murder him."

"To keep close to the facts, I don't mind saying I haven't much interest in Conningsby," said Jimmy. "From all I hear of him, he couldn't have been much; and maybe shooting him was no great crime. I've got something else in my mind. The person who took the pistol, I feel quite sure, took it to kill Conningsby. And after killing him, it was brought back, put into that table drawer where it would be found, and so put the murder upon me."

Vivian seemed appalled.

"Wally! Are you telling me you think I'd do such a thing? Do you mean to say it's in your mind I would—" She stopped, one hand lifted in shocked protest, her red lips parted, her eyes wide with disbelief. "Wally, I have loved you! I'd have done anything for you. If I'd killed Dick Conningsby and was found out, I'd have taken the blame and said nothing. I'd not have tried to put the guilt upon anyone else: and especially, Wally, not upon you."

The telephone had been ringing. It was Quirt; and the man said:

"I'm not able to get there. Something has happened. Something important. Suppose you drop down to police headquarters. I'll be there. Don't waste any time. Things are boiling, and I think you'll be needed."

SOMETHING like an hour before this, Joe Stort had entered the wide hall of his Hollywood house and went hastily up the stairs. He knocked upon the door of his wife's room, and without waiting for an answer, entered. Sylvia sat before her dressing-table, a light burning on each side of a mirror, and various tubes, boxes and bottles arrayed before her.

"I do wish, Joe, you'd not come bouncing in that way! How often have I told you?"

He sat down at the side of the table and looked at her.

"You've told me a lot of things, and all of them often," he said. "You make a practice of telling me, just to show how dumb you think I am."

She held a small compress to the corner of one eye, a spot where she fancied a wrinkle was beginning to show.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"There's news," he said. "Something's happened that maybe has cut the ground from under us." He drummed with his fingers upon his knees and looked exasperated. "You're smart, eh?" he said. "In a pig's ear, you are!"

"That isn't what you came in to tell me," said Sylvia.

"You wouldn't trust me. You wouldn't even tell me what this thing is all about. You had to take on a high-geared operator like Dick Conningsby. I was no good. I was shoved out."

"You've said all that before."

"Yes, I know. But there's something else I haven't said. A thing I've just heard. The police have put it right over the dish. They've found the gun that killed Conningsby."

There was fright in Sylvia's face, but only for a moment. When she spoke, her voice was quiet.

"Have they arrested Wally?" she asked.

He had begun to speak, but stopped, his jaw hanging open. Then he said:

"How did you know I meant him?"

She had continued to hold the compress against the suspected spot, and now she removed it and turned to the mirror to see the result.

"The moment I heard Conningsby had been killed, I knew it was Wally who did it."

Joe got up; he walked up and down the room in ponderous agitation.

"Listen," he said, "this is murder! Have you looked at it that way? Do you realize we can be let into it?"

"Keep your mind off it," said Sylvia. "That's the way I do."

"Well, it's not the way I do," said Joe. "Not even a little bit like it. Don't you see that when Wally's picked up, he'll talk."

"He'll not; he's not at all the fool you've thought him. Besides, while Conningsby might have been killed with Wally's pistol, can they prove Wally used it?"

"The police always have proof," said Joe. "And let me warn you: don't get it into your head that they can be fooled with. I'm quitting on this. I don't want to be in on anything like a killing."

Sylvia permitted some drops of a lotion to fall upon the compress which she now held in her hand. And she said:

"Do I understand that I'm now alone in this work?"

"I'm out," said Joe. "But"—looking at her—"there's Oppert."

"I don't even know Oppert is in the matter. He was merely an attachment of Conningsby's."

"He can give you trouble," said Joe. "Maybe he's on the way to doing it right now. He's got acquainted with Vivian. I was waiting to see him in the lobby of his hotel today, and I saw them together."

Sylvia replaced the compress upon the suspected spot.

"Vivian doesn't mean anything," she said.

"As I've told you," Joe persisted, "I'm out of the thing. But I don't mind giving you a friendly warning: Don't underplay Vivian. She might be smart. Another thing: Oppert told me Conningsby had her on his mind a good bit toward the last. He might have told her something."

"No," said Sylvia. "Conningsby wasn't like that."

"Well, Wally might have told her. She was his partner; and some partners," said Joe bitterly, "talk to each other about things."

"Wally never told her anything. He promised me he wouldn't. And he never lied to me."

Joe sniggered. "Yeah," he said, "I know. Wally's your weakness. But that bird has made a business of lying to women."

"Joe," said Sylvia, "when you talk about someone not knowing much, and I sit and look at you and see how big you are, and how thick you are between the ears, I can't stand you. And it's getting worse all the time."

"Well," said Joe, "now that we're talking about it, some of your stuff makes me think the same way."

Sylvia took this very quietly. "It may be," she said, "we've come to the place where we ought to let go of each other. Do you see what I mean? You go that way, and I'll go this."

"You took the words right out of my mouth," Joe agreed. "It's been a long time since you've been any use to me. Your ideas don't run in smooth-enough places. I don't mind stepping in somewhere and trying to outsmart someone. But I don't like things the police figure in."

Sylvia's blue eyes snapped venomously.

"You've got no spirit," she said. "You're a stupid clown. And I was a terrible fool for ever seeing you as anything else."

Joe got up.

"O. K.," he said. "We're out. Especially, I am. Before I go, I'll try and advise you a little. Whatever you've got with Wally Redge, drop it. Because it's on the rocks. If you stick, you'll get nothing out of it but trouble."

He went out of the room. When the door had closed behind him, Sylvia turned to the bedside telephone and dialed a number.

"Wally," she said, when an answer came, "it's Sylvia. I'm so glad you're there. I want you to get a cab and run down here at once. There is something very important that I must talk over with you."

"Too bad," said Jimmy, "but I can't do it. Not just now, anyway. There are some things happened that I must see to."

"Couldn't you put them off for an hour or two?"

"I'm afraid not. The police are kind of an impatient lot, and I'm due at their headquarters in the next fifteen minutes."

"Wally!" There was fear in her voice. "Before you mention anything to them, I want to speak to you."

"I'm sorry. I can't possibly take the time to go to your place now."

"I'll come to headquarters at once. I'll be there almost as quickly as you. Only be sure to tell them nothing until you've listened to what I have to say."

There was a brief pause; then Jimmy said:

"All right. Only don't delay in getting there."

He had scarcely put the telephone down when it rang again. He took it up once more. "Yes?" he said.

"Wally!" said a voice. "This is Sherry. Sherry Noles. I'm downstairs."

"Come up," said Jimmy.

In a few moments Sherry was in the room.

"I'm exhausted and dumfounded," he said, shaking Jimmy's hand. "Never," he said, "have I undergone such a series of shocks." He mopped his face with a handkerchief. "I wonder if Winten could get me a little brandy? I must keep my legs under me," he said as Jimmy nodded to the valet. "The sayings and doings of the last hour have taxed me so heavily that I need stimulation."

"What's bothering you to that extent?" asked Jimmy.

"You are," said Sherry, and fixed him with a wondering eye. "No one else but you." He put down his hat and stick.

"You've been listening to something. I can see that," said Jimmy.

At that moment Winten handed Sherry the brandy and left the room. Sherry drank off the contents of the glass, his eyes still fixed upon Jimmy; he nodded in answer and waited for the liquor to grasp and help him.

"I've been at Sally Falconby's," he said finally. "I went, thinking it would be just as well if I kept her mind on the subject of a horse I've had her look at. An excellent animal, and one that would just suit her. Also, I talked with Miss Birnett."

"Yes?" said Jimmy.

"She had been relating her adventures to Sally; and she repeated them to me. Her doings and experiences of the afternoon," said Sherry. "They almost took my breath. However, the real startler came when she began to talk about you. A double person!" said Sherry, staring at Jimmy. "You and somebody else! They had to work like the mischief on me to get me to understand it; and even now I'm not sure of myself. Not that it makes any difference, see? No difference at all. You can be Wally Redge and at the same time Jimmy Smith, and it's all right with me. Though how you can be Wally Redge who knows not a thing about horses, and Jimmy Smith, who has consorted with them all his life, I'm not able to say. And there is a question I'd like to ask you: when did you first drift back to— What I mean is, when did you first realize that you were Jimmy Smith and not Wallace Redge?"

"That morning when I met you in the bar. The morning you told me about Vivian telephoning you."

"Really?" said Sherry. "That morning?"

"I knew at that time I was Jimmy. Though I was not at all convinced that I was Wally. I'd been called by that name and some things had happened that puzzled me, but that was all."

"I FEEL I'm walking in a kind of dream," said Sherry. "And I doubt if I'll ever really make anything of it. As I drove Miss Birnett into town in my car this afternoon, after my visit at Sally's—"

"Did she come into town with you, after that?"

"Oh, yes; I forgot to tell you that. She wanted to see Vivian. She telephoned her, but got no reply. But she said she'd chance finding her, and came in with me. I put her down at Vivian's."

"I see," said Jimmy.

"As I was saying," said Sherry, "this thing has me so puzzled that I'll take it all for granted; I'll leave it for future discussion. What I want to try and fix my attention on now is this rather frightening thing about Conningsby, and the possibility of your being arrested for it."

"It's not hard for me to fix upon it," Jimmy said. "I can't think of anything else."

"That night," said Sherry, "I put you in a cab and you went home. You did not leave with Conningsby. You did not follow him. You got into a cab and drove off. The cabby can testify to that; and I dare say the hotel people saw you when you came in. The police," he said firmly, "won't dare lay a hand on you."

Jimmy smiled at the pippin-faced young man, for the fervor of his belief was warming.

"It's fine of you to think that and to say it, Sherry," he told him. "But I know the police have another idea about it, altogether. You probably didn't notice it as you came in, but there are a number of them stationed around the building."

"No!" said Sherry, aghast. "Well, it's a wicked situation. And so completely foolish, too. Anyone who thinks you shot Conningsby is an idiot."

But Jimmy shook his head. He then related to Sherry all the outstanding happenings of the last few days. And Sherry looked dazed.

"The automatic!" he said. "Your weapon! That makes it rather dreadful, doesn't it?"

"It is my great difficulty," Jimmy said. "For I have no way of recalling what happened that night. Then I was Wallace Redge; next day my memory was swept clean of all that person's doings and all his thoughts. I was Jimmy Smith. I am still Jimmy Smith. And whether Wallace Redge killed Conningsby or no, I am not able to say."

But Sherry protested, shocked.

"Now, old chap, I wouldn't let any one hear me say that. I wouldn't, indeed," he said. "And after all, there can't possibly be anything in it. Wally Redge never fired those shots. He wasn't the kind of person to do that. I don't care," said Sherry stoutly, "if it was his gun that the thing was done with; *he* didn't do it. There's a good deal more in this than meets the eye."

"Thank you, Sherry," said Jimmy. "That has a fine, heartening sound. And everything of that kind helps."

"I was always fond of Wally," stated Sherry. "In spite of all his drawbacks he had something that was extremely likable. And now that he's changed over into Jimmy, I find that I haven't changed a bit."

"Good sport," said Jimmy gratefully.

"There's another thing I'd better mention," said Sherry. "Something from another friend of yours. I mean Quirt. I met him a while ago at a bar where he'd come thinking to pick up someone or other. He asked about you, and seemed to be quite filled with excitement. I told him I was on my way here, and he said to tell you that he's going briskly about your business and that he'd have something to report very soon."

"I hope so," said Jimmy. "He had me on the telephone a while ago and asked me to drop into police headquarters as soon as possible. There seemed to be something, but whether pending or proceeding, I don't know."

"You'd better go there," said Sherry. "And if you don't mind, I'll go with you. It doesn't do any harm to have a watchful eye on the side, in cases like this."

Jimmy took up the telephone and called the hotel office.

"Ask the policeman in charge of the detail to call me," he said.

In a few minutes the telephone rang; Jimmy took it up.

"Yes?"

"Sergeant Devett."

"Oh, yes, Sergeant. I'm going out—to police headquarters. This is just to avoid any embarrassing delay in the lobby. I'll be taking a cab; and one of your men can go with me if you like."

"Right enough," said Devett. "I'll be waiting for you."

INSPECTOR PLUM sat in a big desk chair at headquarters listening at the telephone. Quirt sat opposite him. "There are a few things we're checking on, Mr. Oppert," Plum was saying, "and if it'll not be too much trouble for you, we'd like you to look in at headquarters sometime in the next half hour." There was a pause, Plum listening. Then he said: "That will be quite all right. We'll only keep you a few minutes. Ask for me at the desk."

The Inspector put down the telephone, leaned back in his chair, folded his thick hands across his stomach and fixed his eyes upon Quirt.

"Excuse me for interrupting you," he said. "You can now go on."

"As I was telling you," Quirt said, "I knew Conningsby when I was only a kid around the stables. He was a big gambler, and a couple of times he was ruled off the track, but he always had influence enough to have things fixed. I began to ride races when I was eighteen. That was in '25. I got up on a Conningsby horse for the first time in '33."

"Is that when you knew of this Vivian?" asked Plum.

"A little while after that."

"In Chicago?"

"Yes."

Plum unfolded his hands and rubbed one with the other; he fingered the cheap-looking rings; his small eyes searched Quirt from head to foot.

"They were friendly, you say?"

"Yeah. Especially she was. But they fell out. She fixed it up to sue him, and while she was waiting for the case to come up I read in the papers she'd gone to Mexico on some business. Afterward, the case was dropped, and I didn't hear any more about her. Not for a while."

"But you did, finally?"

"Yeah. A fellow that used to rub horses for a couple of people I was with—his name was Sam Cobe—had drifted south and used to write me once in a while. He said he'd often seen Vivian at a race track at Tijuana. And that she had money in a small outfit that was down there making pictures. Also," said Quirt, "he said she'd taken on a new boy friend. A drifter that used to hang around the stables. With no object. They just kind of attracted him, somehow. He was a nice-looking fellow, and Vivian got him a small part in the picture they were taking."

"Don't get too far away from the Conningsby business," suggested Plum.

"I'm staying right with it. This hooks right on. I didn't think any more about Vivian. I went down with Cloven Foot that day at Miami and came out of it a ruin; and that kept me to myself for quite a while. But when I came out here I began to hear of her again. She was in the investment business with a party named Wallace Redge. And I used to see him once in a while with Sherry Noles. A good-looking young fellow, with plenty of manner. And one day it struck me: maybe this was the pick-up she'd made at Tijuana. One night I was talking with a fellow who ran a kind of clearing-house for used films. Mostly stuff that was never meant to be more than Class D. I'd always remembered the name of the picture Vivian's outfit had made in Mexico that time; it was called 'Sand Hill Stage.' I asked this fellow if he had it; and he had. Also he had it run for me. And sure enough, Wallace Redge was in it."

"Neat," said Inspector Plum, caressing his rings. He was silent for a moment and then said: "Was it just out of curiosity that you did this?"

"I'd noticed something," said Quirt. "Conningsby was in and out of Los Angeles a good bit, and had got acquainted with Redge; and I'd heard it said by Sherry Noles and others that Vivian was sore about it."

"That kind of attracted your attention?"

"Yeah. I wondered if Conningsby wasn't trying to get even somehow with Vivian. Anything he did interested me, for he'd put me up on a doped horse and spoiled me for life, and I was feeling around for some way of getting even."

"People shouldn't remember things like that," said Plum. "It often gets them in trouble."

"Listen," said the ex-jockey, "don't get adrift. I didn't knock this party off. Stick to what I'm telling you."

From that time on, Quirt told Inspector Plum, he'd looked and listened and asked about Conningsby. Also about Wallace Redge, and about Vivian. There wasn't much to be found about the gambler, except that he'd got to going around with Wally—that he'd sold him a race-

horse. Also he was on easy talking terms with Joe Stort and his wife.

"Also," said Quirt, "Wally was on all the race-books. He lost heavy money, and was the prize simp of the season."

There was a tap at the door, and a policeman looked in. "Inspector," he said, "Sylvia Stort is here."

Plum, with difficulty, heaved himself up straight in his chair.

"Wanting to see Joe?"

"She hasn't asked for him. Seems waiting for someone, though."

"Bring him in here. But don't let her see him."

The man disappeared.

"How much do you think Joe knows?" asked Plum of Quirt.

"When I talked to him, he didn't do anything much but listen. But he's got things on his mind. I knew that when he phoned me this afternoon."

"Why did he do that?"

"I'd met him awhile before; we got talking, and I happened to mention how you had Wally's gun, and how the slugs that killed Conningsby had been fired from it. Well, right away the boy turned blue. He didn't like it at all. It must have been an hour or so afterward that he telephoned. He talked a good bit then, but maybe thinking he was saying too much, he suddenly hung up. I didn't know where he was, and as I wanted to hear more, I started out to find him. And when I did, he was walking around in circles and talking to himself. And I told him he'd better see you."

"I'd say you and him were pretty good friends," suggested the Inspector.

"He likes my judgment," said Quirt. "I've given him quite a few horses that won. So, when he felt he was in a jam, I suppose he picked me out to talk to. And then lost his nerve."

THE tap on the door came again; the policeman reappeared, and with him was Joe Stort.

"Sit down, Joe," said the Inspector. "Make yourself a little comfortable."

Joe sat down beside the desk; he looked at Quirt, who winked reassuringly.

"I've been thinking over this thing, Joe," said Plum. "And it's my opinion you needn't worry much about your wife."

"I'm not worrying about her," said Joe. "Not a bit."

"There's always little differences in families," said the Inspector. "I'm a family man myself, and I know. This thing of yours'll turn out to be nothing at all. Just don't get nervous. After you've explained everything, we'll smooth them all out, and that'll be all there will be about it."

"I've told you all I've got on the thing," said Joe. "There isn't anything else."

"Yes, I know. But I always think if a thing is gone over a few times, everybody sees it better." Plum nodded at Joe in a comforting manner, and looked at his rings. "Now, as I understand it, sometime ago your wife was at a party. Is that right?"

"Yes; at this Vivian's."

"And while she was there, she met Wally Redge?"

"Yes."

"And after that, I think you said, she sort of had him on her mind. She talked about him a good bit." Plum nodded at Joe, and seemed quite satisfied. "What was it she said?"

"A good bit. She thought he was an ace."

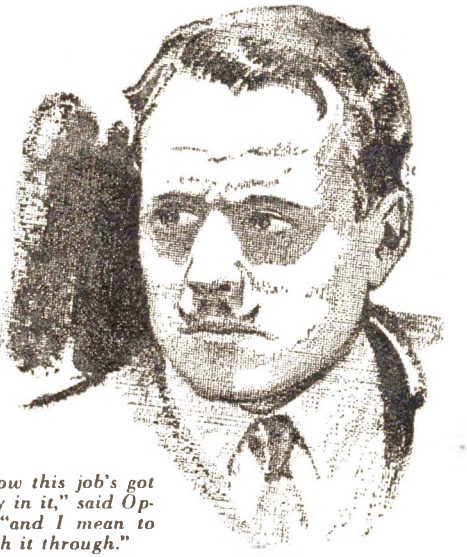
"Wasn't there something more to the point than that?"

"Yes. She said if we had somebody like Wally to work with, we could get ourselves some money."

"But she didn't say how, did she?"

"No."

"But there was *one* thing, I think."



"I know this job's got money in it," said Oppert, "and I mean to push it through."

"When I asked her what she meant, she said it was a touchy piece of business; that it'd have to be handled by an expert."

"It was then that your wife got to having conversations with Conningsby, wasn't it?"

"Yeah; he was called in on the side. When I wasn't around," said Joe bitterly. "And now look what's happened."

"It'll very likely be all right," said Plum. He gestured with his ringed hands. "These things sometimes look bad at first, but turn out all right in the end."

"Well, I want it to turn out all right for me," said Joe.

"You said awhile ago that you'd never seen the bottom of this thing."

"And I say it now," stated Joe. "I don't know what it was about at this minute any more than I did at first. Oppert was brought into the thing by Conningsby, and he's got the blinders on too."

Once again there came the policeman's tap upon the office door, and the man looked in.

"Mr. Wallace Redge is outside," he announced.

"Say I'll see him in a few moments," said Inspector Plum. When the man had closed the door, Plum said to Quirt, "I'd like you to step outside there and start a little conversation with him. I have a few more things to go over with Mr. Stort, here; and I want to make sure Redge doesn't leave in the meantime."

Quirt got up; he looked at Joe encouragingly.

"Keep going," he said. "Don't hold back on anything."

HE closed the door behind him; and as he passed into the large room at the front, he saw Jimmy sitting with Sylvia at one side. And they were talking.

"Of course," Sylvia said, "it's all too bad; but what of it? They'll not be able to do anything to you. Suppose they *can* prove the weapon was yours? That doesn't mean a great deal. It's only a possible way to something. It's not the thing itself."

Jimmy listened attentively: embedded in each of her remarks was a thing he'd recognized the day before.

"Yesterday," he said, "while I was talking to you, I took a very definite impression. Not from your words so much as from your general manner. You believe I killed Dick Conningsby."

Sylvia smiled at him. There was a caressing quality in this; but also there was a coldness.

"Wally," she said, "what difference does it make what I believe? I am not the police; I'm not the district attorney, or the judge. You should not let what other people think bother you. People who move along successfully never do. When the police begin their questions, you answer them briefly. Add nothing to their questions in your replies. Don't remember too much, nor forget too much. Those things are normal. And any moving away from what is normal attracts attention."

But Jimmy paid no heed to what she was saying.

"Why," he persisted, "do you think I killed Conningsby?"

"There may have been a number of reasons. There have been dozens of people I think I would have killed gladly if I could have got away with it."

"Tell me one reason why you think I might have killed him."

"He struck you," said Sylvia. "He humiliated you."

But Jimmy shook his head. "That wouldn't be enough," he said. "I certainly would never have done a cold murder for a thing as cheap as a blow."

"Very well," he said amiably. "Then let us not talk about it. You know what you know, Wally; and I know what I know. Let's not go any further unless we must."

SYLVIA sat very close to him and talked. And he listened, studying her. She believed he'd killed Conningsby; but upon what was this belief based?

Had she been, for some reason, in the neighborhood of the place where the murder had been done? Jimmy himself had been plagued all that afternoon by a vision of the wretched Wally creeping through the darkness on a mission of death. Frightened, shaking, but with the last horrid determination of a weak man to be weak no longer. Had she seen something like that? Had she—

She had continued talking, but now he caught the name of Vivian, and it broke the chain of his thought.

"She was not acquainted with Oppert," Sylvia said. "And yet today she was seen with him." She paused, and then said: "I've never liked her, and I don't trust him; and their being together may mean something."

"What?" asked Jimmy.

"I don't know. However, they can't know anything."

"You're wrong. This seems to have been an active day for all of us, and those two have got pretty well along."

Her eyes were swift and hard as she looked at him.

"How can they know? There is only you and I who could give any real information."

"There *was* Conningsby."

"Conningsby was not really clever," she said finally, "though I once thought he was. And he would not tell anything."

"Not knowingly, perhaps. But he seems to have had his moments. Sometime during the past week Vivian went to him. She was angry; and it was the first time she had spoken to him since they had quarreled and parted. It seems he couldn't resist certain little unpleasing quips—jokes pointed to show how mistaken she'd been in leaving him. And in that amused state of mind he seems to have dropped the makings of something."

Sylvia was silent, and Jimmy continued:

"At any rate, when Vivian left him, she seems to have had some facts about the letter he'd written pretty well fixed in her mind. She had a key to the apartment; and she went there—on the night Conningsby was killed. No one was at home. She rummaged around until she found what she wanted."

"And then?" said Sylvia, and her voice shook a little.

"Oppert must have surmised she had the letter. At any rate, when the opportunity came, he took it from her."

Sylvia sat very still for a time; her eyes never left his face.

"It's too bad," she said at last. "Now I suppose we'll have to change our plans. We'll have to cut the money differently. There will be those two to be taken care of. Also, there will be Joe."

Jimmy looked at her wonderingly. She was lovely and small; there was a delicacy about her that was very attractive. But there seemed to be astonishing depths of coldness.

"Maybe," he said, "I don't see the money side of this as I should; but the police are very plain to me."

She smiled at him charmingly, but again with that strange coldness.

"That is no real danger," she said. "No matter what you've done; no matter what they see, it's still a clear road. Oppert, Vivian and Joe may be stupid; but not altogether so. They will do what I say. We'll come out of it quite easily, Wally; we can't help it."

The police messenger now appeared in the room.

"Mrs. Stort," he said to Sylvia, "Inspector Plum will speak to you."

Sylvia's small firm chin went out; her look was hostile.

"I have not asked to see Inspector Plum," she said.

"He has heard you are here," said the messenger, "and suggests that you step in for a word with him."

Plum was alone in his office when Sylvia entered. He arose ponderously and placed a chair for her.

"As you were here," he said, "I thought it'd be a nice idea to have a little talk with you."

He lowered himself into his chair once more, sat back, and began turning one of the rings round and round on his finger.

"Awhile ago," he said, "I had a little chat with your husband."

"With Joe!" said Sylvia, a marked lift in her voice.

"Yes. A nice person. I enjoyed his visit very much."

"He came here?"

"Yes. I suppose he didn't mention it, not having the time. That," said Plum apologetically, "is one of the difficulties of the police business; we have often to bother people so suddenly."

He seemed to expect Sylvia to say something, and sat looking at her. But she was silent; and after a time, he went on:

"I've met Joe on several occasions and found him to be very amusing. A wisecracking, good-humored kind of a fellow; but also with some interesting things to say of other kinds." Sylvia continued silent. Plum folded his hands across his stomach. "Yes," he said, "Joe's awfully pleasant. Awhile ago he was telling me about Conningsby." There was another short space of silence, and Plum added: "You were acquainted with Conningsby, weren't you?"

"Yes," said Sylvia.

"I think Joe said that. Also he said you were on good terms with Wallace Redge." Plum smiled; he nodded in mild enjoyment. "Joe was laughing and telling about how impulsive you were in your business affairs. How you met Wallace Redge one night at a party, and how you made up your mind on the spot that he'd be a first-rate partner in some sort of business enterprise you had in mind."

"Joe doesn't always get things right," said Sylvia. "Wallace Redge was already engaged in a business."

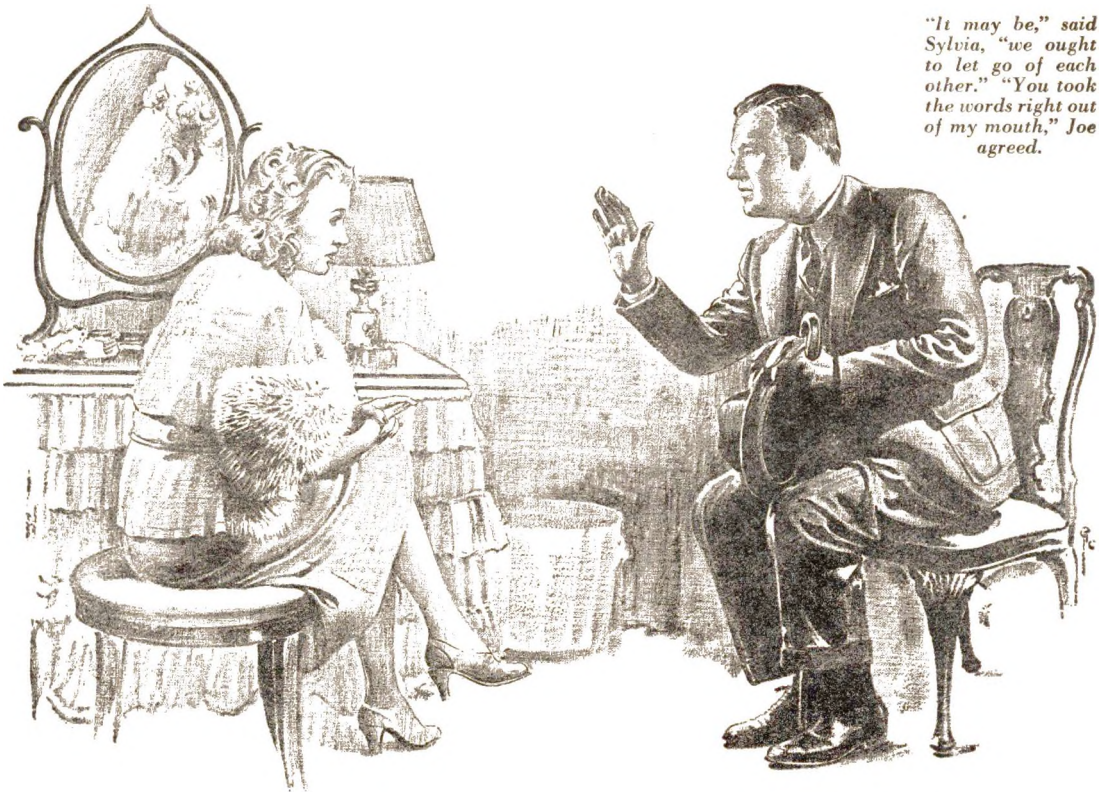
"Yes, I know. But people often take up things on the side. Most of them," said Inspector Plum, "like to see their profits coming from several directions if they can fix it that way. And I supposed that was your idea about Wally. And," said Plum, "he seemed to need another income, for I notice that his firm began to gradually break up after that."

"I could wish," said Sylvia, "Joe wouldn't talk about things he knows nothing about."

"I'll admit," said Plum, "he did seem a little confused. Here and there I couldn't understand him. He said," added the Inspector, "you'd taken this proposition to Dick Conningsby to handle for you."

"I did have an idea," said Sylvia, "and I did speak to Mr. Conningsby."

"What makes me think Joe was a little mixed up," said Plum, "was that he said Conningsby was to blame for the breakdown of Wallace Redge, Investments."



"It may be," said Sylvia, "we ought to let go of each other." "You took the words right out of my mouth," Joe agreed.

"That sounds like one of the ridiculous things he'd say."

"Anyway, it seemed queer to me," said Plum. "What reason could there be for it?" There was a space of silence; and then the Inspector said: "Your business takes you around a good bit, doesn't it?"

"Not as much now as it did some time ago."

"I wonder," said Plum, rubbing one of the rings with his thumb, "if you've ever been in St. Louis?"

Sylvia did not reply at once; but finally she said:

"Yes; several times."

"A nice old city," said Plum. "Nice folks, too. They've got a fine sporting class of people; a good bit like Kentucky, I've thought." He held up his hand and admired the polish he'd given the ring. "There's a nice lot of racehorses down there, and they know how to breed them. I was there some four or five years ago when they were running the Western Handicap; the year Modoc won it. And they gave a dinner to his owner, a young fellow of the name of Smith. . . . I suppose," said Plum, "you didn't meet any horsy people when you were down there?"

"No," said Sylvia.

"This young fellow, Smith, came of a horsy family; had lots of money. Had a stock-farm that was the talk of that part of the country. I didn't see him," said the Inspector, "but there was a lot of talk about him as an up-and-coming kind of fellow."

THERE was a tap upon the door, and the police messenger came in.

"Mr. Oppert is here," he said.

"Ask him to come in," said Plum. When the man had gone out, he continued to Sylvia: "Yes, there was a lot of talk about this Jimmy Smith then; but there was a lot more about him some time afterward. That was when he dropped out of sight. A very strange case," said the Inspector. "Nobody knew where he was; you may have seen it in the newspapers. They searched for a year or more, but never found him."

Here Oppert was shown in. There was surprise in his face when he saw Sylvia.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Oppert," said Plum, getting up. "And I'm terribly sorry to have to trouble you this way; but it's all in the line of the department's work, you know." He motioned toward Sylvia. "You know Mrs. Stort, I suppose."

Oppert nodded to Sylvia, who looked at him coldly.

"I know you're acquainted with her husband," said Plum. "He mentioned awhile ago that you and him had been working together on some things. But sit down." He indicated a chair. "And if you'll pardon me while I have a word or two with the outer office, I'll not detain you for more than a few moments."

Plum went out of the room, and Oppert said to Sylvia:

"What's he mean that Joe has said things to him?"

"I don't know." Her look was like ice. "I gave up sometime ago trying to keep track of Joe's sayings and doings."

He regarded her from under frowning brows.

"I talked with Sherry Noles outside in the office when I came in. He told me they had Wally here."

"They asked him to come in for questioning—in the Conningsby case."

"Something about the automatic?"

"I don't know."

"There's a fellow who, if he don't watch his step, is going to walk into trouble." She said nothing, and the man went on: "He could get out of this whole thing if he'd try and see where his interests are. Even now, if he'd listen to reason, they'd never be able to convict him."

He paused. And again, as Sylvia continued to be quiet, he proceeded:

"I've found that he's a party that can't be trusted; you're never sure of him. Another thing: I've found he's working with an outsider, a girl."

Sylvia's attention suddenly increased.

"What girl?" she asked.

"I don't know her name. I never saw her before today. But she's beautiful. And she's got a lot of savvy."

"Where did you see her?"

"In Vivian's apartment. Afterward in my apartment. I talked with her, but she gave up nothing."

"She's a friend of Vivian's?"

"Vivian doesn't know her. She told me so. She said she didn't know what she was doing in her place. After seeing her at my apartment, I went out. A little later I came back, having a hunch something was wrong. She was there again; had got in by way of a window. There was a trunk broken open."

"She did that!"

"No; Wally was there too. It must have been him who worked on the trunk."

"Wally was in your apartment?"

"Didn't I just tell you he's playing along with this girl? And against us?" Oppert shook his head. "There's a lot of mistakes been made in this job; but the big one was to keep me in the dark." He looked at her bitterly. "I understand that was your doing."

"It was," said Sylvia candidly. "I never saw any use for you in the thing. You were Conningsby's idea; and he didn't consult me when he brought you in."

Oppert's face wore an ugly look.

"Anyway," he said, "I'm in. I know this job's got money in it, and I mean to push it through."

"What about Vivian?" said Sylvia.

"We've got to have her. She's inside on everything now. I've talked with her, and she's been working on Wally."

WHEN Plum returned, he seemed quite pleased. He smiled at Sylvia and at Oppert; then he settled into his desk chair and crossed his hands comfortably.

"I think we are making progress," he said. "There is a light breaking. I'm glad you came in," he said to Oppert, "because you can corroborate what Joe has just been telling me."

"Joe!" said Sylvia. "Is he here now?"

"He's been here for several hours. I thought, when Mr. Oppert came in, and before I began talking to him, I'd like to have a few more words with Wally and Joe. Also with Miss Birnett."

"Who is Miss Birnett?" asked Sylvia.

"A friend of Wally's. And," said Plum, "a lovely girl."

Sylvia looked at Oppert, and he said:

"It's probably the girl I mentioned awhile ago. I said she was a fine looker."

"I hadn't understood Joe was still here," said Sylvia to Plum. "You spoke of him, but I thought he'd gone."

"No," said the Inspector genially, "you'll find he's still here. I kept him because I want to discuss some things with him in the presence of Mr. Oppert."

Plum spoke into an intercommunicating device upon his desk. "Have them send Mr. Stort in," he said.

Joe came in with a good deal of smiling confidence; he beamed at Sylvia, and waved a hand at Oppert. And Plum regarded all three with satisfaction.

"A nice little friendly gathering," he said. "I find there's no way of coming to an understanding like exchanging views and suchlike. You see," he addressed Sylvia and Oppert, "Joe has been telling me about a letter. Which seems,"—Plum nodded,—"to have contained some much-desired information. Maybe either of you"—to Sylvia and Oppert—"can say something about that document?"

But both were silent. And Plum proceeded:

"That is the way it is most times—and quite natural, too—one remembers a thing quite plainly, and the others can't recall it at all." He asked Joe: "Who wrote this letter?"

"Conningsby," said Joe. "To Wally Redge, as I've told you. I've never seen it, but I understand it was some kind of a business proposition. Conningsby had talked with Wally about the matter a number of times but never got any satisfaction. He said that Wally had seemed not to like the idea, and kept side-stepping when it was mentioned. Then Conningsby put the thing down in writing; that was to be his last bid. Wally was broke, and if he didn't join up then, he was to be tossed overboard."

"Don't you think it a little peculiar that you should be working in a thing like this and never knew what the nature of it was?"

"I always thought that," said Joe. "I thought it was *very* peculiar. But my wife"—and he darted a glance at Sylvia—"thought it was just the way to do. Her idea seemed to be, if you have a dumb husband, don't trust him."

Plum looked at Oppert.

"What do *you* know about this business?"

"Not much. I was Conningsby's partner in some things, and he asked me into this. He said it was a deal he was to undertake with Wallace Redge."

"And *you* didn't know what the deal was?"

"I never asked. I was busy with other affairs, and knew everything would be explained when the business was ready."

"I see!" said the Inspector. He examined his rings carefully, and after a few moments looked at Sylvia.

"One night you went to a party given by Wallace Redge's partner Vivian, didn't you?" he asked.

"I've gone to quite a number of parties given by her," replied Sylvia coldly.

"The one I mean," said Plum, "is the one where you met Redge for the first time. Where you got the idea about the business that Conningsby afterward tried to get Wally into."

"I haven't any real idea when I first saw Wally," she said.

Plum looked complacently at Joe.

"She met him one night at Vivian's, just as I've told you. She came to me afterward and began talking about some kind of a proposition; something she was going to take up with Conningsby because it was too big for me."

Inspector Plum spoke into the interoffice communicator.

"Ask Mr. Redge and Miss Birnett to come in," he said.

In a few moments Jimmy Smith and Joan came into the room, and the Inspector introduced Joan to the others.

Oppert leaned toward Sylvia, and said in a low voice:

"That's the girl I told you is working with Wally."

SYLVIA looked at Jimmy; and then she studied Joan. She saw a girl with a slim, supple figure, beautiful dark eyes, and a lovely face alive with character.

"He's in love with her," she said to Oppert. "And she with him. I can tell by the way they look at each other."

"I'd like," said Plum, "to have the attention of all of you for a few moments." He took out a sheet of paper and unfolded it. "This, so I've been told, is the letter I've just been talking about: the one written by Richard Conningsby to Wallace Redge. And it reads like this:

"'Dear Wally:

"'I haven't been able to get your attention in the matter I put before you a few weeks ago. You seem as if you'd rather act like a sap than a sensible man who wants to get out of a nasty situation.

"'You are broke. You are much more completely broke than you have any idea of. In fact, if your smash-up is ever thoroughly explored, I wouldn't be surprised to see you in jail.

"'I have carefully shown you a way out of this; not once but a half-dozen times; but you keep stepping away. You'll not listen. This is the last effort I'll make. You now take what I've laid out for you, or, this time, I'll do the stepping away. And you'll sink.

"'I'll provide you with everything. Money, proof, and legal talent. All you'll have to do is stick to the state-

ment that you are Jimmy Smith. Stick to it, no matter what is said to you. If you do, you'll find yourself in the clear, and with a quarter of a million or so besides.

"This, as I've just said, is your last chance. It's make or break. I'll see you tomorrow night, say about ten o'clock.

"Conningsby."

When the reading was finished, and the Inspector refolded the sheet of paper, Joe Stort stood rubbing his chin and looking rather stupidly around.

"I don't get it," he said. "This Jimmy Smith, now; who'd he be? What would be the idea of Wally—" He stopped suddenly and looked at Sylvia, his mouth and eyes wide open. "Now, listen," he said, "you don't mean—"

But Sylvia's look seemed to freeze him; he stood mentally pawing around, his eyes going from one to another.

"This letter, Miss Barnett," said Plum, "is the one you found today in Mr. Oppert's room at the Palmfield Plaza?"

"It is," said Joan.

"It's the one,"—Plum looked at Jimmy—"that you took from the trunk in the same room?"

"Yes," said the young man.

"And it's the same letter you told me Mr. Oppert took from Miss George?"

"Miss George?" Jimmy wrinkled his brow inquiringly. "Your partner, Vivian George."

"Oh, yes—though I hadn't known her name was George."

THE eyes of Sylvia and Oppert met, at this. Joe Stort stared and chuckled.

"Your memory doesn't get any better, Wally, does it?"

But Inspector Plum seemed quite at ease.

"Would you mind," he said to Jimmy, "telling how long it's been since you saw Sylvia Stort for the first time?"

Jimmy Smith frowned thoughtfully.

"Things have been so confused lately, that I wouldn't be sure. But it couldn't have been more than three days ago."

Joe's chuckle now turned into a laugh.

"Keep an eye on him, Inspector," he said. "He's beginning to kid you."

"That," said the Inspector, paying no attention to Joe, "wouldn't have been at the party I've heard about?"

"It was in the street. She was in a motorcar. I was afoot—walking along. She spoke to me at an intersection as her car stopped. It was about three days ago."

"You never saw her before that?"

"Never."

Sylvia drew in a deep breath. Oppert said to her in a low tone:

"What's he getting at?"

"I don't know," she said. "Wait."

"I think," said Plum to Jimmy, "you are acquainted with both Mr. Oppert and Mr. Stort."

"Yes."

"How long since you saw them first?"

"I met them for the first time on the day after I first saw Mrs. Stort."

"Oh, now, listen—" began Joe, but Plum silenced him.

"That would be two days ago?" the Inspector said to Jimmy.

"Something like that. It was in the afternoon. I'd gone to the apartment. The valet, Winten, told me they were in the sitting-room waiting for me."

"You'd never seen them before that?"

"No."

Complete silence followed this. Joe Stort had ceased laughing; he seemed dumfounded. The faces of both Sylvia and Oppert were set like masks.

"How long has it been since you saw Richard Conningsby?" Plum asked Jimmy Smith.

"I've never seen Richard Conningsby. I first heard of him maybe a half-dozen years ago. And I've heard of him very often in the last few days. But I have never seen him."

"Inspector," said Joe Stort, "I must protest. Now, don't shush me; I know what I'm saying. This is a serious business and Wally's making a farce out of it." He turned to Jimmy. "You've known me for two years. You've known Sylvia for that long. And you've known Oppert for at least six months. And as for Conningsby,"—to Inspector Plum.—"he knew Conningsby well; he talked with him dozens of times. You could get a hundred people to testify to that in an hour's time."

"All right, Joe," said Plum. "You know we always leave testimony for the district attorney. What I'm doing now is get some statements." He turned to Joan. "How long have you known this gentleman?" He indicated Jimmy.

"About five years. Maybe a trifle more."

"Here in Los Angeles?"

"In St. Louis."

"How long have you been in this city?" he asked Jimmy.

"I couldn't say."

"Where did you live before coming here?"

"St. Louis."

"What's your name?" asked Plum.

"James Harkness Smith."

For a moment there was silence. Then Plum resumed: "Do you think you'd have any trouble proving that?"

"Not any."

"You've been known here as Wally Redge, haven't you?" Jimmy nodded.

"How long have people been calling you by that name?"

"I don't know. The first time I have any knowledge of being so called was on the day I first saw Mrs. Stort."

"Now, listen, Inspector—" Joe began to protest.

"Don't interrupt," said Plum.

"Mrs. Stort spoke to me from her car," continued Jimmy. "She called me Wally. A little later a girl at the cigar counter in the hotel called me Mr. Redge—and in the next few hours a number of people called me by that name. All were people whom I'd no recollection of ever seeing before."

"I understand. And you say you have no recollection—no remembrance of Conningsby?"

"Not any. Though, as I've said, in the last few days, I've heard him mentioned very often."

INSPECTOR PLUM settled back in his chair, looking gratified. "I think," he said, "this is going to prove an interesting case. The district attorney will probably call it conspiracy." He looked at Sylvia with admiration. "It was your idea, was it?" he said. "Well, it was an unusual angle. I suppose as soon as you saw Wally at Vivian's party that night and saw how much he looked like Jimmy Smith, the whole thing popped into your mind. Well, it was nice trying. And it's almost a pity it didn't go through."

"Now, look," said Joe to Sylvia. "I want you to tell me something. Is that what you had in mind—that Wally looked like Jimmy Smith, the fellow who disappeared some time ago? And you meant to pass him off for Smith?"

But Sylvia paid no attention. She had risen to her feet. Her lovely face was set, and her blue eyes were like ice.

"I don't give *you* any credit for what you're trying to do, Wally," she said to Jimmy Smith. "It's much too clever for you. You didn't think of it." She turned her look upon Joan. "*You* did that," she said. "I've done all the work getting the matter going, and you have arranged to try and step in at the last moment, out of nowhere, and take it all from me. But I'm going to break that idea up for you, sister. You're not going to do it."

She turned toward Inspector Plum; Oppert said:

"Be careful, now! Don't forget you're talking to a cop."

"I know what I'm doing," Sylvia said. "I am going to show these smart people that I am not the kind they can play tricks on. I've always treated you nice," she said to Jimmy, "but you can hardly expect me to go on doing so when you call in your girl friends to take over from me."

She again turned to Plum.

"You know," said Sherry, "I liked old Wally. . . . But we all think a good deal of Jimmy, too. Don't forget that, will you?"

"I did see Wally for the first time at one of Vivian's parties," she said. "Just as my talkative husband told you. And I saw how remarkably he looked like Jimmy Smith. I'd seen that young man in St. Louis. But to make sure I was not mistaken I got some photographs of Jimmy. Then I *knew* Wally was exactly like him.

"I had an idea that he could, with some management, be put forward as Jimmy Smith; and that a good deal of profit could be made out of it. I explained this to Dick Conningsby, and asked him to come in with me. He said he would. But he told me nothing could be done as long as Wally had money; he had met him and talked with him and was sure he wasn't the kind to go into such a thing unless he had to."

"So Conningsby broke him, financially?" Plum asked.

"Yes," said Sylvia.

"After Conningsby's death—then what?"

"I meant to go on with the thing myself. But I found there was opposition. From Oppert. From my husband. And now, I find," bitterly, "from Wally. I tried to tell him where his advantage was; but it seems,"—her look went to Joan,—"he thought he'd better himself in the hands of someone else."

"This young man admits he's best known here on the coast as Wallace Redge," said Plum; "but he claims he is actually Jimmy Smith, of St. Louis."

Sylvia smiled coldly.

"So I've noticed," she said. "And I've also noticed that you've wasted some of your time listening to him. He'll have more trouble with the district attorney than he seems to have had with you."

"What I'm telling you," said Plum, "is what he claims. And it's my business to listen to everything. But, when it comes to believing things, that's another matter."

Sylvia turned once more to Wally.

"Your girl friend, being more clever than most, has, I suppose, given you advice about the automatic—the one that killed Conningsby? Or maybe you've not spoken to her about that. Anyway, it'll take some smart going to get past it. Then, there's your saying that you've only known me for three days, and that you've never seen Conningsby. Also that you didn't meet Joe or Oppert until the day after you say you first saw me. And, too, it will be pretty hard to tell how it is that you didn't know Vivian's last name, she having been your business partner for the past two or three years. How does your Miss Birnett hope to steer you through all those things, I wonder? Hollywood's full of people who will tell another story about every offering you've made."

"I see what you mean," said Jimmy, "and I can understand how difficult it is for you to see around all the corners that've been set up. I've had a lot of trouble with them myself."

PLUM had been regarding Oppert with marked expectation. And now he said: "You haven't offered anything in this matter, Mr. Oppert."

The man looked at him with something like mockery.

"I've been asked to come here, Inspector. I think for questioning."

"Well," said Plum, "I questioned Joe awhile ago, and I think he told me all I need to know about what you've had to do with this case. But, at the same time, I believe in giving everybody a chance, and if you feel like telling I'm willing to listen."

"I don't care much about what's been said here this evening," Oppert told him. "And I'm not adding anything to it."

"Quite all right," said Plum. "Just as you see fit. But, you know, this thing is maybe a conspiracy. There has been a planned attempt to pass one man off as another, and in that way acquire possession of a great deal of property."

Oppert grinned at him.

"I think, Inspector, you're moving too fast. If you'll stop and think for a minute or so, you'll see that no such thing has been tried. What you've heard only says it's been talked of."

Plum polished one of his rings carefully.

"Where there's smoke," he told Oppert, "we always find fire."

"There's still something more," said Oppert. "And you ought to get it all straight and nice before you hand the package to the district attorney. The charge you're going to bring is that a man was being readied to make claim that he's somebody else. Is that right?"

Plum nodded.

"Here," said Oppert, indicating Jimmy, "is the man. A moment or two ago he stated, and you seemed to believe him, that he was actually that someone else. And that he can prove it."

"Yes," admitted Plum. "He said that."

"If he *can* prove it," said Oppert, "where's your case? It's not a legal offense for a group of people to try and prove that a man is really himself."

"But," maintained Plum, still working with the ring, "he hasn't proven it yet. We only climb fences when we come to them."

The Inspector spoke through the intercommunicator, and a policeman came in.

"I'll ask you two," said Plum, speaking to Oppert and Sylvia, "to step outside for a few moments." He nodded to the policeman. "I'll want them back in a few minutes. And as you go out, send Quirt in."

QUIRT came in at once, and the Inspector said to Jimmy Smith: "All right; here he is. Ask him what questions you have in mind."

"If you have no objections," said Jimmy to Quirt, "I'd like to take you over a few steps of the ground you covered with Miss Birnett in the talk you had with her an hour or two ago."

There was a thin smile upon the pain-drawn lips of Quirt; he nursed his helpless arm.

"O. K.," he said. "Here I am, all ready to go."

"You told her about an old shooting incident in Havana."

"Oh, yes," said the ex-jockey. "That was when Conningsby gunned Oppert about some mishandled money."

"Gambling money?"

"It could be. But I don't know that."

"Was the thing serious?"

"Not too much so. Oppert was in the hospital; but Conningsby paid the bills. Afterward they were working together again."

"On good terms?"

"I don't know that, either. You never can tell about these people, with their dead pans and things like that. They hide everything. But I did have a feeling that Oppert never liked what had happened. And I did hear him say one time if Conningsby ever again tried to get him down he'd fix him."

Jimmy Smith said to Joe Stort: "The afternoon I came in and found you and Oppert waiting at the apartment I gathered you were working together."

"Well, we were, kind of," said Joe. "Not that I knew Oppert very well. He wasn't the kind I usually teamed up with."

"In what you said, and what he said, I found that neither of you had much of an idea of what was really going on."

"I hadn't any," said Joe. "And from what Oppert said here and there, it was the same with him."

"And neither of you liked that part of it very well?"

"I didn't."

"What about Oppert?"

Joe hesitated; and then he said:

"I don't think he liked it, either."

"He resented Conningsby's keeping him in the dark?"

"What I think is, he wasn't used to playing stooge to anybody."

Jimmy turned to Quirt.

"Have you heard of any trouble between Conningsby and Oppert in the last year?"

"I get information from here and there," said Quirt, "and I had some about Oppert finding out that Conningsby, in spite of them being partners, was playing something on the side. Something good that he hadn't mentioned. And because he hadn't been cut in on this, Oppert began to talk."

"Was it just talk?"

"I heard they once squared off at each other, right in the office."

Jimmy once more gave his attention to Joe Stort.

"How did Oppert feel, in a general way, about Conningsby?" he asked.

"Sore," said Joe. "Sometimes a good bit that way. Conningsby was a kidder, you know. He always had the needle in somebody. And when he got the chance he liked to work on Oppert."

"Do you recall the night you were at the apartment with Conningsby and Oppert?" Jimmy asked.

"Was that the night you were tight?" said Joe with a grin. "And Conningsby pasted you one? Yes, I remember."

"Maybe you'll also remember something else that happened. That Wally, during the excitement, rushed out of the apartment, into the hall. And Conningsby followed him."

"You weren't as drunk as I thought you were," grinned Joe. "I wouldn't have thought you'd remember that."

"I didn't," said Jimmy. "Winten remembered it. And he told me that you and Oppert were left together in the living-room."

"Yeah," said Joe. "So we were."

"I've studied that and I think I know what happened."

Joe's grin broadened into a laugh.

"We began to search for the letter," he said.

"That's what I thought," said Jimmy. "And while I was thinking about it, I wondered if either you or Oppert looked in the writing-table drawer?"

Almost in an instant the laugh vanished from Joe's face; there was a sudden, startled choke in his voice as he replied.

"No, we didn't," he said. "We gave the place a good going over in the few minutes before Conningsby came back, but the table drawer's one place we missed."

"I don't understand that," Jimmy said. "Because on the afternoon I found you and Oppert waiting for me, and the matter of finding the letter came up, the table drawer was the first place I thought of."

"Maybe that was because you were used to putting things there." Joe shook his head. "It never came into my mind."

"What about Oppert? Did you notice what he was doing during the search?"

"He never went near the table at all."

"You're sure of that?"

"I'm sure."

"All right. But that seems to bring the thing back to you. When I opened the table drawer to look for the letter, that afternoon, almost the first thing I put my hand on was the .38 automatic. And when I laid it on the table you were scared."

"I was," said Joe. "You and Oppert hadn't been getting on very well, and I thought you were going to shoot him."

"You knew the weapon was in the drawer," said Jimmy. "And I could see in your face that my getting it out reminded you of something."

"It didn't," protested Joe. "What are you getting at, Wally? I didn't know it was there. How could I? I didn't even know the table had a drawer."

"The gun was missed some time after you and Oppert and Conningsby left the apartment. Conningsby didn't take it. We can be sure of that." Jimmy looked steadily at Joe. "Did you take it?"

"No."

"Then it must have been Oppert."

"I tell you he didn't—"

"Now, wait," said Jimmy. "Take a little time and think the thing over. Make sure of what you're saying. If it wasn't Oppert who took the gun, it was you."

JOE, his face gray, wiped moisture from his forehead. "That time when Conningsby was out of the room," he said, "I was too busy searching for the letter to notice anything about—"

Plum stopped him with a gesture.

"Just a minute," the Inspector said. And then to Jimmy: "I think you've got as far as you can go. So, if you don't mind, I'll take over."

His small eyes peered at Joe out of the deep creases of fat, and he said to him:

"All along you've acted sensibly, Joe. You've done what anybody in a jam would do, who wanted to get out of it. But now you've gone off the road."

"I tell you, Inspector, I don't know anything—not anything at all—about this gun."

"I always like to carry things on by persuasion," said Plum. "It's the easiest way, and the best. But when a person begins to hold out, we've got a way of working on him. I'd hate to take you downstairs, Joe. And I don't think you'd like it, either."

"I don't see why you pick on me this way," said Joe, much agitated. "I came to you, didn't I, and I told you all I knew?"

"Not all," Plum said. "I'm afraid there is at least one thing you've not spoken of. That's the automatic. Come clean on that point, Joe, and you'll be all right. You were in the room with Oppert at the time; I don't see how he could have opened the drawer and you not heard him, or seen him."

JOE breathed heavily; he seemed to crumple, and looked wet and soggy with perspiration. He cleared his throat several times before he spoke.

"I don't want to say anything against anybody," he told the Inspector. "And, at the same time, I don't want to shoulder anything."

"All right," said Plum. "Let's hear what you have to say."

"Well, that night while Conningsby was out in the hall talking to Wally, maybe I did hear something. Something like a drawer being opened, or shut. But I'm not sure if I did or not." He mopped his face with his handkerchief. "No matter what you do to me, Inspector, I can't say any more than that."

"All right," said Plum; "but what about the other time?—that afternoon when you and Oppert waited for Wally at his apartment? That was two days after Conningsby was killed."

"We did more looking around for the letter that day," Joe said. "But not much, for Winten was around a good bit."

"The gun was returned," Plum said. "The chances are it was returned that same day. If Oppert took it on the night Conningsby was killed, I think he brought it back on the afternoon you were there with him."

"If he did have it," said Joe wretchedly, "if he brought it back that afternoon, I don't know. If he put it into the drawer again, I didn't see him do it."

"But," persisted Plum, "he could have done it? He had the chance?"

"Yes," said Joe, fumbling with his handkerchief. "He could have done it. He did have the chance. But I don't know anything about it. As I've said, I didn't see him."

Plum called through the intercommunicating device and asked that Oppert be brought in. When the man appeared, Plum settled back in his chair comfortably and nodded at him.

"We've just been having a little discussion," he said. "Joe's been telling me some little things—"

"I didn't tell you anything," said Joe. "Not anything."

"Well, of course," said Plum, "if you look at it that way, maybe you didn't. What I mean is, I was asking you some questions, and you were answering. Just to help things along," he said affably to Oppert. "You know how it is: to get anywhere at all with anything you've got to have co-öperation."

"Yes, I know. I've got some idea of police coöperation," said Oppert. "What did he tell you?"

"Listen, Louie," said Joe. "He's going to work on you. I didn't tell him anything."

Oppert paid no attention to him, waiting for Plum to speak.

"It's about the automatic we found that belonged to Wally, here. It was in a table drawer the night you were at Wally's place with Joe and Conningsby. And Joe said maybe you found it while you were searching for the letter."

Oppert looked at Joe, his black eyes burning.

"Look, Louie," protested Joe, "I didn't say anything like that. That's a frame. I didn't say it."

"Maybe you didn't say it, but you will," said Oppert. "You're just that kind."

"He got talking," said Joe, "and I—"

Oppert interrupted him.

"Yeah, and then *you* got started. Well, you're not going to put me in anything, I'll tell you that!"

"The way it was," Plum said to Oppert, "Joe thought it possible that you took the automatic that night, and then maybe brought it back the afternoon the two of you were together in Wally's place."

"He thought it 'possible,' and he thought 'maybe,'" said Oppert. "Well, all right. It's 'possible' I can say something. And when I've said it, 'maybe' things'll look a little different."

"Don't let a cop make a slob of you, Louie," warned Joe. "Don't you see what he's doing this for?"

"Listen," said Oppert to Plum, "I did go through the table drawer that night. And I saw the gun. I mentioned it to Joe. Afterward, I searched the drawer again to make sure about the letter, and the gun was gone."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. I thought I'd wait and see what *he* said."

"Did he say anything?"

"He never mentioned it. But the next time we went to Redge's place—on that afternoon—I watched him. I saw him slip the gun back into the drawer."

"You didn't see him take it, but you did see him put it back?"

"Yes."

Plum nodded his head at Joe.

"This puts the thing up to you," he said. "What are you saying about it?" Joe stood silently, rubbing his wet palms together. "What did you shoot Conningsby for?"

Joe spoke to Oppert.

"No matter what anybody says, Louie, I didn't insinuate anything. I didn't try to put anything on you. He asked the questions about you, and I did my best not to answer them at all."

Then he turned to Plum.

"I didn't shoot Conningsby," he said. "But I did take the automatic. And the reason I took it was that I was afraid of Wally. He was pretty drunk, and was excited. Conningsby was putting the pressure on him, and the boy was getting worse all the time. So, when Louie said there was a gun in the drawer, I got it and put it in my pocket, so's to play the whole thing safe."

"And what then?" asked Plum.

"I took it with me. The next time I went to Wally's, I took it back and put it in the drawer where I'd got it."

THERE was a silence; Plum shifted in his seat. "I call to mind," he said, "that the weapon had two cartridges fired. And the bullets from those two cartridges were found in Conningsby's body. As you brought the automatic back about two days after the murder, those cartridges must have been fired while it was in your possession."

"Listen," said Joe desperately, "all that I know is that I took it. And that I brought it back. I didn't shoot Conningsby."

"Do you know who did?"

"No."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"No."

"You had the weapon for two days. Did you carry it with you during that time?"

Joe did not answer.

"Did you leave it at home?" Plum asked.

There was a pause, and then Joe said: "Yes, I did."

"In your room?"

There was a still longer pause. And then:

"Do you share that room with your wife?" asked Plum.

"No."

"Is her room adjoining?"

"Yes."

Plum spoke into the telephone on his desk.

"Ask Mrs. Stort to come in," he said.

There was complete silence as Sylvia entered the office. Her face was white, her hands were clasped tightly together; but her manner was unruffled. She seemed to expect something, for her small, determined chin was thrust out and there was a defiant look in her eyes.

"I've been talking to Joe," said Plum in an apologetic way, "and he's been mentioning a few things."

SYLVIA looked at her husband with a silent bitterness that made him squirm.

"He's been asking questions," Joe said. "And I haven't mentioned anything."

"Anyway," said the Inspector, as Sylvia made no reply, "between us we've managed to get to a definite point. Joe, it seems, took Wally Redge's gun one night while he was at the Rookery, being afraid Wally might, in his excitement, use it on someone. He took it home and kept it in his room. And then, as he was going back to Wally's place one day, he took it with him and put it where he'd found it."

"Joe seldom mentions these things to me," said Sylvia, in her clear voice. "And I never ask him about them."

"Between the time he took the weapon and the time he returned it," said Plum, "two days had passed, and two bullets had been fired from it. Both were afterward removed from Dick Conningsby's body."

Sylvia said nothing. She stood quietly; her attention was fixed upon Plum, but Jimmy Smith noticed that she was even whiter than she'd been before.

"Jimmy," Joan whispered to him, "she seems so alone! Oh, I'm sorry!"

"Working through the regular formula of the department," said Plum, "we've made a few inquiries. And you and your husband, having business and social relations with the deceased, were among those we inquired about." He paused, inspecting his rings; he breathed upon one of them and rubbed it upon his sleeve. "I've heard you have a car," he said to Sylvia.

"Yes," she replied.

"Our information is," said Plum, "that from about eleven o'clock until some time after two on the night Conningsby was killed, your car was not in the garage."

He waited for her to speak, but as she did not he went on:

"According to the judgment of the medical section of the department, the murder was done within that space of time."

Sylvia's voice was quite steady as she replied:

"If my car was out of the garage at that time, it was taken without my permission. I was at home."

Plum's manner was most apologetic.

"Of course, that probably is so. Things fall together awkwardly sometimes. And what makes this one especially annoying is that one of your maids has stated that you were *not* at home during that period. Also, some people have reported to the police that you were seen at the Barranca some time after midnight."

"They are mistaken," Sylvia said.

"An employee of the place said there was a quarrel between Conningsby and Wallace Redge just about that time; and that almost immediately afterward you appeared in your car, picked Conningsby up and drove away in his company."

"That is impossible!" said Sylvia.

"Of course I know you'll be able to prove that," said the Inspector, nodding his head confidently. "But, at the same time, it is pretty direct evidence. The whole series of events, as we picture them, and when they've been put one after another, have a difficult look. Here's how they stand: Some time ago you had an idea; you thought it would get you some money and you took it to Conningsby to handle for you. Later you saw he wasn't managing it to suit you." He looked at her inquiringly: "That all runs together, doesn't it?"

Sylvia said nothing, and he proceeded:

"And now another thing follows in, and fits very nicely. Your husband brought home an automatic pistol which he'd taken from the apartment of Wallace Redge. He put this in his room. Your room adjoins his. There is a communicating door. Now, we do not know this, but it is possible that you saw this weapon that same night, and took it with you when you got out your car and drove to the Barranca. There you met Conningsby. He got into you car and you drove away. He was last seen alive in your company. Next to that comes the fact that he was killed by the weapon which, as I've said, we think you took from your husband's room."

There was another silence after this. And Joan Birnett, watching Sylvia intently, said in a startled whisper:

"Jimmy, she did it! And she's going to tell!"

Sylvia stood perfectly upright, white but steady. Even her voice was without a tremor as she said:

"Yes, I took it. I happened to see it when I looked into the room, thinking Joe was there. I had an appointment with Dick Conningsby. I had been in love with him. I've pretended with Joe, and Wally Redge, and others, but I'd really loved Dick Conningsby. He'd begun to treat me badly, and I felt I hated him. He'd gone back to Vivian, whom he'd known before he knew me. Anyway, he said he had; and those times when I spoke to him about seeing them together, he'd laugh. I told him several times that no one could do that to me; and he laughed at that, too."

She sat down as though a sudden weakness had come over her. She was silent for a space. Then she continued:

"We were going to his place beyond Beverly Hills when I shot him. He fell against the car door. I alighted at my side, and opened the door: he fell out upon the road; and I drove away, leaving him there."

BOTH Sally Falconby and Sherry Noles were at the airport next afternoon before Joan Birnett and Jimmy Smith took off for St. Louis.

"I'll say," said Sally, "you've made every front page in the country by now; and you may as well expect a reception when you step out of the plane at your own town."

"It'll take a week for me to get reestablished," said Jimmy.

"Longer," said Joan. "Much longer. There will be people there a year from now who'll think there's a chance that you are Wally, after all—that you were only a little cleverer than the other conspirators and that you have no right to anything there you claim belongs to you."

"I'd like to see any of them say *you* don't," said Jimmy fervently. "Just a mention of anything like that'll be their finish."

"You'll be coming back for the trial," said Sherry. "But don't wait for the exact date, old chap. Get here a little before, and stay a little later. You know by now, I liked old Wally a good deal. In spite of any little thing you might say against him. But we all think a good deal of Jimmy, too. Don't forget that, will you?" . . . .

"I want to get back to Harrow," said Jimmy to Joan, as the plane soared through the sky, eastward-bound.

"There are new yearlings," said Joan. "A lot of them! Kirby says they're as handsome as any the farm's ever seen. And I think so, too."

THE END

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HELL and

by Michael Seaven, R.A.F.

AT the time of writing this, the author is alive and well. He is now a squadron leader, attached to the staff of the Air Ministry "Somewhere-in-England." Incidentally, Michael Seaven and the writer—the Two Mikes, as they were known in those days—flew Camels together in the last war. With two others—one of whom has since died—they were members of the "Brotherhood of Cameleers," a quartette which flourished in 1917-'18, and which encountered Richtofen and his Circus on more than one occasion.

Bomber Command, R.A.F.,
Somewhere-in-East-Anglia,
7th. June 1940.

DEAR K.:

You ask for "details please" about the Gang—Peter Piper and Buddy Butch and "Hoch Aye" Angus. Well, we all trained together, We were here, there, and everywhere together, from the Theory of Flight and Navigation, to the Link Trainer, Tiger Moths, Avro Ansons, Harvards, and the crates we now fly. It didn't *seem* like eight months, but then, it was luxury compared to that he-man training we had in 1915.

We got our wings together (mine for the second time), and we were posted together to the same base, here, in East Anglia. The thing that absolutely took my breath away was the fact that we *were* posted together.

Now the A.M. has changed—for the better! In those days, the Personnel Department didn't bother about psychology and morale. That's probably why we lost one hundred per cent more pilots in 1914-'18 than we're losing now—*and with an air force less than half as large as today's.*

Peter Piper isn't his real name. He was christened "Peter Henry Wadsworth." His parents hoped he'd be a poet. But no dice. What's in a name? Peter plumped for airplanes so quickly after he was born, that, instead of a play-pen, his father had to build him a cockpit complete with instruments (at least, that's Peter's yarn. He calls it his "Blink Trainer"). We nicknamed him Peter Piper because every time he goes on an op, he takes a jar of pickles up with him. We, of course, still stick to the conventional raisins, nuts, sweets, chocolate, and chewing gum. I wonder what old Peter would say if he knew I was actually one year older than his father! (Peter's twenty-two next month.)

Hoch Aye Angus is a genuine thirty, and at the moment, is acting as second pilot, like me, and sometimes as rear gunner, according to the needs of the moment. He's a "braw bricht laddie fra' Aberdeen," and before the war, was training to be an Imperial Airways pilot. He's working for a transfer to a Spit squadron with the rest of us. The most phlegmatic chap I've ever seen.

Buddy Butch is twenty-seven. He comes from Los Angeles, and fancies himself as a second Humphrey Bogart. I knew "Bogey" in Hollywood. Butch is nothing like him to look at, but there's a similarity in voice and manner. Anyway, Butch is determined to be a tough guy. When he's in the air, he *is* a tough guy. When he's on the ground, he's as swell a fellow as is Humphrey himself—under the "Bogey" surface, that is. . . .

DIARY NOTE: *June 9th, 1940.* Less than twenty-fours hours' "rest," and we were up again.

It was pretty hectic. We hared off just after lunch—quite a bunch of us. Butch in *A for Arthur,* Peter in *D for Don,* Angus in *T for Tommy,* and I (I'm getting suspicious!) as second pilot in *R for Robert,* the flagship, under the same Flight-loot I had on my premier (Bertie the Banker we call him—used to be a cashier in Barclay's Bank.

Bertie drove her to St. Omer (what memories that old R.F.C. base conjures up!) and then left the hulk to me. Dunkirk still smoldered. There was hardly a building left standing. You can tell you're nearing Dunkirk halfway across the Channel, by the stink of burning wood and oil, and by the clouds of smoke. Makes you feel sick inside to see the devastation, and to realize what those devils have done to a once-prosperous city.

At St. Omer, Bertie gave me my vector and rounded up the rest of the Gang.

"Tanks," he said, "armored cars, motor lorries, petrol dumps, troops on the march—go to it. Loose formation in line astern. Bust up everything you can!"

We certainly did our best. Took it low, well down so that Archie couldn't get us. I sat tight, and felt like a taxi-driver. Shadwell wasn't with us. They had to send him to hospital with that plugged shoulder. But little Tich nursed the rear guns, and a fellow from my old school in Croydon—a fledgling P/O—navigated and ruled the egg roost.

Streaking over the Bresle and the Somme, I could actually *feel* those bombs leave the ship. The effect was like going up in an elevator, short jerks at a time. I couldn't *see* anything, of course, but I could quite easily imagine what was happening (I wonder how many bombs I've seen dropped, in this war, and the last?)

On the return journey over the same sector, I managed to get a glimpse below and ahead. We were so low, I could actually see the bodies lying in the road and between the poplars at the side of the road.

Then Bertie took over. Through the intercomm, I heard him say: "Forward guns, Croydon. Let 'em have it the moment I yell."

Croydon hopped forward with a "That's the stuff to give 'em!" and I glued my eyes to the windshield. Bertie put the kite into a steep dive. . . .

God, to see those poor swine down there run! Flop on their bellies they went, flatter than pastry under a rolling-pin. But they couldn't all escape.

At two hundred feet, Bertie yelled, "Right-o!" and Croydon pressed his buttons. . . .

Seeing those Heinies go down under Croydon's guns was a pretty gruesome sight. Some of them threw up their arms and fell flat and lay still; some of them pressed their hands to their bellies; some of them fell and wriggled like earwigs after you've stamped on them on soft earth; some of them twisted round like tops; some of them crumpled up saggingly, as though they were kneeling to pray; some of them fell and crawled: on one knee, on two knees, on their stomachs—to "safety" underneath a poplar; some of them screamed—I couldn't hear them, but I could distinctly see their mouths open, and their eyes close, and their faces contort like a Hallowe'en mask; some of them fell head foremost and bounced two or three times. *And these were human beings like ourselves, not wild beasts of the field.*

HIGH AIR

Edited by Captain Michael Ventura, (R.A.F., Ret'd)

It made me sick to my stomach. I could almost *smell* blood and entrails, the way I smelled it one hot day in Fort Worth at the meat-packing plant. Shooting an Me. down from a Spit (or a Fokker D7 from a Camel in that other life) isn't so bad. It's you against the other fellow, and you've both got equal chances. . . .

Coming back over for the third time, I saw some of the damage we had done earlier. A long column of tanks and transport vehicles had been pretty badly knocked about at a cross-roads near Quevanvilliers. It's funny to see a tank over on its back—reminds me of an upside-down woodlouse.

But how paltry and ineffective our efforts! What were a dozen guns, tanks, lorries, or a *thousand* men, out of the hordes that were sweeping into France? Everywhere I looked, there were columns and columns of gray marching figures, of swiftly-moving transports. Had we had ten thousand bombers, we might have done something worth while; with no more than a score or so, it was like trying to put out a prairie fire with a garden hose. . . .

We climbed now to two thousand feet. Croydon dropped an egg on a road a little north of Poix. Peter Piper, Angus, and Butch, following closely on our tail, did the same thing. When he flew back, I noticed that the lorries we had passed over were no longer there.

At Airaisnes, a whole battalion dived for cover when they heard us coming, leaving their transports standing defenseless in the middle of the road. We dropped our last bombs, got a direct hit, and hared off. From the rear turret, I watched the other three coming on after us. Very clearly I saw their bombs fall and burst, and very clearly I saw what was left of that transport: just a pile of junk. . . .

We all got back safely, none missing. In the mess hut, later, Bertie said to me, "You're pretty cool under fire, aren't you, Seaven? More like a vet than a rookie. I think I'll recommend you for duty as commander from now on."

Now, what did he mean by that?

We got twenty-four hours' leave and went up to town.

I spent every minute of it with Janey. Though she's thirty-three, and I'm nearly forty-four, no man could be exposed to Janey for long without falling in love with her. Actually, I've been that way ever since the day she brought a Tiger Moth from the factory to the Elementary Training School at which I was stationed.

I'll certainly never forget that raw February day. Previously, I'd taken very little notice of ferry-pilots. They'd just come in, and landed their new Moths and Magisters, reported to the station C.O., and gone away again—usually by tender. The girls—there were very few of them—had had a snack in the WAAF mess, and the men had had a drink with us. Routine.

But Janey's arrival on this particular occasion was spectacular. As she said afterward, she didn't know it, but the left wheel of her undercarriage must have dropped off somewhere *en route*. Anyway, when she came in, it wasn't there. The Watch Officer noticed it and radioed the information to her. By chance, I was in the Control Tower at the time. I raced out to meet her. So did the ambulance and the fire-truck. Women pilots rated no great shakes, and we were all convinced that there was going to be another write-off, and probably a funeral as well.

Butch came out with me. As we raced across the tarmac, I remember him saying, "Dames, huh? Cheez, it's a crime!"

Butch thinks differently now. So do I. Nobody but Janey knows *how* differently.

She came in steadily, made a circuit of the field, lost height, and turned her nose dead into the wind. No monkey-business.

"Smart kid," I said to Butch. "I wonder who she is?"

Butch snorted. Even then, he wouldn't give her credit.

Janey came in like an expert. Suddenly it dawned on me what she was doing. She was making a rumble landing (a gliding approach, used for forced landings, and on any occasion when judgment is difficult). Obviously looking for a good spot to put her kite down, she dragged the airport, opened her throttle at the boundary, and zoomed up for another circuit. This time she came down at gliding speed, turned into wind, lost height, and kept her air-speed constant with her stick and her throttle. It was quite plain to see.

She seemed to know exactly where she wanted to land, and I thought to myself, "By Jove, whoever she is, she's got a dandy sense of humor. She's going to land right alongside the fire truck and the ambulance!"

And she did, too. It was one of the prettiest sights I've ever seen. She pulled her left wing up, and, at a couple of feet from the ground, just above stalling speed, she held off.

I drew in my breath and closed my eyes. Butch said, "Cheez! Wotta honey!"

I opened my eyes. Janey had made a perfect stall landing. The Tiger Moth sat firmly on the ground, listing to port, but apart from the missing wheel, undamaged.

I raced across. I'll certainly never forget my first glimpse of the grandest grey eyes and the merriest smile I've ever seen.

Janey said: "I'm awfully sorry. I didn't *mean* to crack up on your nice new aerodrome—honest. Perhaps I'd better faint before your C.O. tells me just what he thinks of me?"

I couldn't say anything. I just stood there staring. Butch saved the situation. He said: "Cheez, lady, that was the swellest thing ever. No C.O.'s going to bawl *you* out!"

And of course he didn't. On the contrary, he made quite a fuss of her. So did the entire station.

Group Headquarters, R.A.F.
Somewhere-in-South-East-England,
14th. July 1940. 6 p.m.

MY DEAR:

Looks like things are beginning to pep up. Except for Dunkirk, this afternoon was the high-spot of the war. I suppose the Heinies thought: "Better the day, better the deed."

You listened-in to Charley Gardiner's running commentary on the scrap off Hell's Corner an hour or two ago, of course? We had a ringside seat. Luck, and nothing else. We landed here on the first leg of a sortie over Germany. I can't tell you exactly where we are, but I expect you can guess.

We got quite a kick out of *seeing* the show, and listening to Charlie's description of it at the same time. The Gang was supposed to be asleep, pre-

paratory to going on that raid, but who the devil could sleep through that din, racket, thrill, spectacle, or whatever you like to call it? Certainly the Gang couldn't—and didn't.

There were Stukas and Messerschmitts and Hurricanes and Dorniers and Heinkels and Spits up there by the score. Last-war dog-fights were nothing to it. We could hardly tell who was who or what was what. It was like some weirdly futuristic film—a 1940 version of Buck Rogers and the Space Pirates. You couldn't believe any of it. It wasn't happening in flesh and blood and steel and aluminum over the Straits of Dover—or if it was, then it was a super show put on by the Air Council for propaganda purposes.

Actually, the Heinies were trying to strafe a convoy. There must have been at least forty German dive-bombers, and double that number of Me's tangled up in the sky. When a Junkers 87 hurtled down and dived into the sea less than half a mile from shore, Buddy Butch nearly yelled his head off. The poor devil of a pilot bailed out. We could see him plainly, floating down at the end of his parachute. He fell into the sea, and was drowned.

One of our Hurribirds attacked an Me—so low, that both of them disappeared from view behind the White Cliffs. For a second, we lost sight of them. Then up came the Hurribird like a rocket. It hung on its tail, turned over to starboard, and dived down on the Me so fast that it made itself almost invisible.

The Me couldn't dodge—it hadn't time. Our chap fired. There was a sudden puff of smoke from the Me, then a cloud of black stuff, and the Me staggered off in the direction of the French coast. It lost height rapidly, and we're all convinced it never reached its base. It couldn't have been more than five hundred feet up. The noise of its engine sounded like a gang of riveters at work in a shipyard.

There were high jinks away over toward Folkestone too. Remember that show at the Hendon RAF Pageant, when our bombers attacked a dummy ship in one corner of the field, and "sunk" it? Well, what we saw an hour or so ago might have been a movie version of the same episode, except that this was the real McCoy (I'm still trying to convince myself that it *was* the real McCoy!).

A lone destroyer blasted away at the Stukas with everything she'd got. I don't think she scored a hit, but at least her efforts put the Stukas out of kilter. It's a really amazing sight to see those Stukas dive—thrilling isn't the word for it. The scream of their engines is like something out of the nether regions. It's a weird kind of high-pitched whistle that sets your heart going sixteen to the dozen. Down they come, apparently straight for you—yelling dervishes in a swallow dive. At less than a thousand feet, they release their bombs, and a second afterwards, angel up into the sky and circle round for another attack. You can see the bombs leave the bellies of the ships, and you can follow them down until they smack the water and send up a mighty column of spume and spray.

Incredibly enough, despite the severity of the attack—forty dive-bombers is a lot, believe me—we didn't see a single ship damaged. But we did see a Junkers 87 hit—by that stout little destroyer. One of her shells must have burst directly amidships, because the Heinie began to corkscrew down in a spiral of white smoke. Then she caught fire. In a twinkling, the white smoke changed to black, intermingled with the scarlet and gold of the flames. She fell like a stone, then, ending up with a hiss and a splutter in the sea—and *under* the sea. That was the last we saw of her.

Altogether, the scrap lasted an hour. We're credited with bringing down seven of them—four Junkers and three Me's. Good going. But you'll probably get the low-down from Richard. He was there in a Spit. Lucky devil!

Bomber Command,
Somewhere-in-East-Anglia,
15th. July 1940. 9 p.m.

DEAR K:

Just after I wrote you my last letter from Kent, we took-off for Germany and Holland to sink a few barges. Bertie's flight (that's the Gang) were scheduled for a round trip of about seven hundred miles, or, barring "incidents," roughly four hours flying.

Our first objective was Bruges. We didn't fly over Dunkirk this time, but made direct for Westende. It was a grand evening. Over to the west, the sun looked like a huge orange, decorated with wisps of cotton wool. It was quiet and peaceful, and there was a sort of strange hush in the air, like you get so often at your cottage door in Devon on a still summer's evening. I could almost smell the scent of roses, and hear the birds chirping goodnight. What a contrast to the din of a couple of hours ago!

Bertie left the ship to me. He seems to be determined that I shall get in all the practical experience possible, so that I'll be able to take command pretty soon.

Nothing happened. We might have been beetling across the Channel in an air-liner. "Dusk, and the shadows falling." The only thing we missed was the stewardess. Long ago, we decided that it would be a grand idea to include a stewardess in every bomber—strictly from a "nursing" point of view, of course.

Near Bruges, we spotted a whole nest of barges—scores of them—just asking for trouble. We flew through a heavy barrage of flak, which tossed us about but didn't do any damage.

We made our run in, and Shadwell dropped two five hundred-pounders. He reported through the intercomm that he actually saw them land square on their objective and blow "an 'arf-dozen of the skunks sky-'igh." On our second run in, we checked on it, and, since we saw it was so, Bertie gave him the credit.

From Bruges to Harlingen, on the Dutch Coast, it's about 120 miles, and from Harlingen to Emden, another seventy-five. An easy trip. In clear weather, you hardly need a compass course or a vector diagram, because, even at an altitude of ten thousand feet or more, the Canal shows up plainly.

At Emden, we ran into several spots of bother. Little Tich was kept pretty busy. He said afterwards that the odd Junkerschmitt or two that attacked showed very little spirit, and absolutely no guts. The moment Tich started firing, they hared off and left us alone. Probably they were new fellows on practice flights.

Flak was a nuisance. We wanted to come down low and get a direct hit on the docks. The docks were our Primary Target, and you *must* have a very good reason for not getting your primary target. Shadwell kept grumbling away to himself like a growling dog. Through the intercomm I heard him mumble: "'Ow the 'ell can a bloke 'it anythink from this 'ere 'eight? Lor luvaduck, take a gander at it, and shove 'er blinkin' nose down, Skip—just fer 'arf a mo'."

Bertie heard him, too. He grinned at me and winked.

"Are you game, Seaven?" he asked through the mike.

"You bet." I replied, my heart doing a sort of old-fashioned Immelman turn.

"Okay," said Bertie. "Watch that flak. Take a wide sweep out over the mole to the west, lose height, and come in at full gate. Archie won't get you if you keep her down to five hundred feet. All set?"

"Aye."

Sharp as I could (Wellingtons are not really heavy on the controls), I shoved on full left rudder and stick. *Old Glory* (we called her that as a tribute to the U. S. and Butch, although her official designation was *T for Tommy*) lurched round and hared west. Then I opened her out and put her nose down.

We skimmed over the mole—remember that old song, "The Zuyder Zee?" I hummed it all the time—and Bertie called a halt just under a thousand feet. I turned her around again and headed east.

Just a few moments of hedgehopping over the water and the housetops, and Bertie said, "Ease her back. Keep her heading onto the Canal."

I don't know what Jerry was throwing up at us, but I do know that the next three or four minutes were about the most hectic I've ever spent. Great flakes and balls of fire and flaming onions floated up toward us. We slithered and bounced and skidded and rose and fell like a kite in a stiff breeze. It was far worse than being on shipboard in a gale. One second my stomach was up there; the next, it was down here. Thank goodness I've always liked roller-coasters. This was as bad as the best of them.

BUT despite it all, we made the docks. I yelled, "Bomb doors open."

Shadwell called, "Left, left," and after I had altered course accordingly, he said, "Steady."

I held on. Shadwell laid his eggs and called, "Bombs gone." One crump—I call them that because that's just how they sound—caught the right wing. Shadwell yelled: "Blimey, it's left a 'ole the size of a dinner plate."

Another crump caught us in the belly, and a piece of shrapnel, or a bullet, or whatever it was, sang past me—twanging like a steel guitar string. . . .

Things kept hitting us like hail on a tin roof. Poor *Old Glory* shivered her timbers valiantly and kept going by sheer force of will alone. Shadwell yelled: "Got 'im, sir—got 'im. There's a fire down there worse than Old Nick's."

Bertie asked him if he had had enough. Shadwell snorted so loud it nearly deafened me through the intercomm. "No bloody fear," he shouted. "Come back at 'em again, sir—just once! more!"

Well, I was all hopped up now. I didn't care what happened. I swung round over the Ems river (it was quite a job, too—I found out afterwards that an aileron had gone), and somehow brought her back over the docks again.

Shadwell was right. The fire he'd set was raging so fiercely that I thought it would catch us. I looked across at Bertie. It gave me quite a shock to see his face in that ruddy glow. It was the nearest thing to Faust's Mephistopheles I have even seen—skull cap, horns, sardonic grin and all.

More junk hit us—ahead, astern, amidships, and smack through the tail assembly—according to Little Tich, who was blazing away at the ground for all he was worth with his rear guns.

Shadwell dropped more eggs—a close stick this time,—shouted "Bombs gone" again, and then we quit.

"One thousand-pounder left for Willems'aven," yelled Shadwell through the intercomm.

I climbed, and asked Bertie, "What next?"

Bertie said, "Is she okay?"

I said: "Seems all right,"—although I knew she wasn't.

"Then follow the Canal to Wilhelmshaven—it's barely forty miles."

After we left Emden, we flew at ten thousand feet. We were over Wilhelmshaven in less than fifteen minutes. Flak caught us at the moment that Shadwell released his thousand-pounder. It sent us lurching down in a fierce sideslip. When I tried to recover, I found that the rudder controls wouldn't.

It was a nasty moment. I managed to get the ship up on the stick alone, then I told Bertie.

I said: "Rudder gone. Can't turn."

Bertie said, "Okay—sideslip her round and keep on going until we run out of juice."

What a prospect! Four hundred miles from home, and no rudder. Like a car with a locked steering-wheel. Fortunately, I knew there was little or no wind. Shadwell said that I was running a course of 270°, and that that would eventually bring us in somewhere near Hull—*if* we could keep going that long. . . .

Well, we *did* keep going that long, or I wouldn't be writing this now. *Old Glory* was pretty badly smashed up, I could tell. She lost height over the North Sea persistently—very, very slowly, but very, very surely. A most unpleasant sensation. Looking at the clock, looking at the petrol gauge, looking at the altimeter, calculating how much farther there was to go, and how much more petrol there was to "go it" on—a jittery business. If we hadn't made that altitude over Wilhelmshaven, we'd certainly never have got back. As it was, it took us more than three age-long hours.

Shadwell sighted the coast well after dark, when we were only 500 feet up. None of us had spoken for twenty minutes or more. I'm certain we all thought it was "finis." I know I did. But it didn't worry me. I've looked Old Man Death in the face too often—his pan is so familiar that it no longer scares me.

Suddenly, just as I had resigned myself—with my fingers still crossed—Shadwell's shout came through the intercomm: "Land ahoy!" . . .

God, did that sound good! I actually *laughed*. Light-headedly, I spoke through the mike to Bertie: "Another ten minutes, and *Old Glory* would have *gone* to glory!"

Bertie said, "Glory be—but we're not on deck yet."

Then he told me to change over. A commander, you know, always brings his ship in himself. . . .

Bertie wriggled into the pilot's seat. He picked up his flap mike and said: "Hullo, everybody. We're over England, but we don't know where. There's nothing to worry about, but we may have to make a crash landing. Hold tight. I'll do my best. Seaven, you can pop back and help Shadwell get a 'fix.'"

I looked across at Bertie and stuck my thumb up. It was pretty decent of him—at an anxious time like this, he knew how nerve-wracking inaction could be.

I went back. Shadwell had already got his "fix," and the wireless operator was sending out a call for a direct magnetic bearing. Apparently, we'd passed over Spurn Head and the mouth of the Humber, and were approaching Hull.

By this time, we were down to two hundred feet, but almost beneath us, a flare-path suddenly lit up, rendering even the Lorenz approach-beam unnecessary.

Through the intercomm. Bertie said, "Cross-wind landing, boys. Remember I can't turn her. We'll have to dive in and flatten out. Keep your fingers crossed. Here we go!"

I scrambled back into the pulpit. This was worth watching.

Bertie dived *Old Glory* as steeply as he dared. I could see the Watch Officer signaling with his Aldis lamp. Thank goodness it was green. We couldn't have done a thing but keep on, even had it been red, which, of course, means that the plane is too low and must make another circuit.

But Bertie brought her in beautifully. Landing was a bit bumpy, and at one point a wing-tip touched the ground, throwing the W/O out into the catwalk in a heap.

But that was all. We climbed out and stretched our legs and our arms, and Bertie said laconically, "*Nothing* can upset the equilibrium of these crates—except a direct hit, and even then I believe they would *fly* to hell!"

I was so interested, I had to inspect the damage. Port aileron was gone completely; rudder hung in shreds; Shadwell's "dinner-plate" in the right wing was now a man-hole, and the elevator had one control wire shot clean through. Minor damage was almost as bad—flak holes were everywhere, and even the right aileron was bent up and battered. . . .

THE fellows gave us a grand time in the mess, and Jingo, flare-path officer at our own base, was jubilant when Bertie gave him the low-down on the phone—said he'd got a bottle of champagne waiting for us the moment we got back.

But I was a little depressed. I always take my "pleasures" sadly, as you know. Supposing, I thought, the skipper of *Old Glory* on that flip had been *me*? Would I have brought her back and landed her as skillfully and as phlegmatically as Bertie had done?

Coastwise Diary

What it feels like to steer a ship through the submarines off our East Coast

by BOSTON BLACKIE

NEWPORT NEWS for New York: Departure—9:30 A.M. Thursday. . . . Crew nervous, but all fighting mad.

Tuesday two ships near us had got it on our way in; we just made it ourselves inside submarine net in time. That was Tuesday, and the tension had relaxed until now, when we passed a tanker being towed in, her flag at half-mast, her dead still aboard. There is a gaping hole in her side where the torpedo had struck. That's all right; this is war. Further aft in the crews' quarters, shell-holes. That is not war; that's murder. An unarmed tanker, with absolutely no chance to retaliate. Cold meat for anybody. The sub knew she wasn't armed, or she would have never surfaced after discharging the torpedo.

The crew were silent as we passed. I knew that like myself, they were all saying a prayer for the crew of that tanker.

11:30 A.M. Just passed the mosquito net. The patrol-boat signaled: *"Good luck. You are on your own."* That lonesome feeling crept over me. On our own, on our own. One ship is ahead of us, and two behind, all unarmed, all on their own. . . .

11:45 A.M. The pilot has just left us and is being rowed back to the pilot boat.

12:00 noon. Well, here's my relief. Two and one-half hours at the wheel is enough for anybody, especially when the wheel steers hard. We could have had this wheel fixed if enough money was appropriated, or if people would just take their change in defense stamps when they go to the movies or buy liquor. . . . Well, I'm off until eight o'clock tonight, and then I will have to stand a four-hour wheel watch, as we are short three men.

5:00 P.M. Just woke up for supper. Bulletin on the board. *"Everyone will don his life-preserver and keep it on until arrival in N. Y. Sleep with it on. Eat with it on. Steward's Department orders are not to feed anyone unless he has his life-preserver on."*

5:55 P.M. *S.O.S.* The ship that was ahead of us coming out turned south off Hatteras, and now was being attacked by a sub. *S.O.S. We have been torpedoed. S.O.S. We are sinking.* Position?? Latitude?? Longitude?? Silence— — — — 6:30 P.M. *S.O.S. Abandoning ship. That water looks cold. So long. "Eighty-eight."* (Love and kisses).

7:40 P.M. Just been called to go on watch. Crew are gathered in crews' mess discussing torpedoed ship. Feeling better. Ship was heading south when she was torpedoed. We are heading north. Maybe we will get through.

8:00 P.M. Relieved the wheel. Still steering hard. Ship is completely blacked out. Two ships behind us also blacked out. Hope they maintain their speed and don't run us down. Can't see a thing outside. Pitch black. Hope nothing blacked out ahead of us runs into us. Too bad for us both if they do. We just have one cargo on board. Ammunition.

8:30 P.M. *"S.O.S. S.O.S. S.O.S. We have been torpedoed. Sinking fast. S.O.S. S.O.S."* Latitude? Longitude? Silence. . . .

Two of us left now. And we are within ten miles of each other. The last one was twenty miles from us. Getting close. Another prayer for the one that just went down. Why am I saying a prayer for them, and not ourselves? At least they have a chance to launch a lifeboat. If a tin-fish gets us, there won't be a piece of the ship big enough to float. Well, we get three dollars a day until they get us; then our pay stops, one way or the other. Besides, we can have all the sugar we want in our coffee, and the people ashore can't.

10:00 P.M. Coffee time. Let the mate try and steer this tub for the next twenty minutes until I get back. Maybe he will appreciate what I've been up against for the last two hours. Everybody is awake and fully dressed with a life-preserver tied fast around him. Lots of pale faces. Not scared, but pale at the thought of two ships gone so soon.

10:20 P.M. Back at the wheel. The mate is glad to see me. I put her back on her course. Why don't mates learn how to steer? If I was that far off, he would have bawled hell out of me and had the captain disrate me.

10:30 P.M. Another hour and a half to go. Wish I was back home. Wonder if John Davis is still standing in front of the Morris Plan at Front and Chestnut. Or maybe at Front and Walnut bawling out the Coastliners who have been passing him and that corner for years. Wonder if the wind still embarrasses the girls at Front and Chestnut. I would like to rent an office in the P. O. or Laney's in Morris Plan Bank, on a windy day.

10:45 P.M. *"S.O.S. S.O.S. We are being attacked. Two torpedoes. One forward. One amidship. S.O.S. S.O.S."* Latitude? Longitude? *"Sinking fast. Abandoning ship. S.O.S. S.O.S."* Silence— — —

10:50 P.M. Changing course. Heading in. Hope we don't run aground on some of these reefs. If we get stuck, we are meat for torpedoes or gunfire. Zigzag. Zigzag. Zigzag. A few prayers for the crew of the last ship. . . . Alone. We are all alone. . . . Four came out, and now there is one. *None* rhymes with *one*. Four little ships going out to sea. Along came a sub, and then there were three. Three little ships trying to get through. Another tin-fish, and then there were two. Two little ships trying to run. The sub ran faster; then there was one. Zigzag. Zigzag. Zigzag. Stop. Take soundings. Still got enough water. Head in some more. More prayers for those poor fellows out there all covered with ice and trying to keep afloat. Dr. Barclift would never say I was a Christian. I wonder if I am? Guess not, or I would go to church every Sunday.

11:30 P.M. Here it comes. A white streak in the water. A torpedo, coming fast. Faster. Faster. Wheel hard right. Hard over until my hands are white, holding it so hard. I don't need that much pressure to hold it over. I shall relax my fingers a little; the wheel won't come back. I can't relax. They are cramped on the wheel. Oh, well, I am better braced for the shock. . . . Shock—what shock? It missed. Missed by inches! Wheel amidships. Zigzag. Zigzag. Get ready for the next one. Wait. Wait. Wait.

12:00 Midnight. Wheel relieved. Need a good cup of coffee. Crew

standing on boat-deck, close to lifeboats. Waiting. Waiting. Alone in the messroom drinking coffee. Wishing that I was with the gang having coffee at Saffos on the Crystal. Crew drifting in to the messroom one and two at a time. Finally no more room. They are standing in the passageway. The air is heavy with smoke. Everybody is smoking. The toughest fellow on the ship is talking. It's unethical. Submarines always attack before sunrise and after sunset. Who ever heard of them attacking in the middle of the night? It's unconstitutional. Pipe down. Take it up with your Congressman. Write the Chamber of Commerce. Why don't you report them to their local Labor Union for working overtime. Take it up with your Draft Board.

The tension is broken; everyone is laughing. Talk resumes about the narrow escape. With that Tar-heel steering as lousy as he does, how could anybody hit us with a torpedo? He writes his name every time he takes the wheel, all over the Atlantic. He even goes back to dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s. The Old Man asks him if he's taking a short-cut, every time he steers. On and on. Wait. Wait. Wait.

5:30 A.M. Daylight. Best sunrise I've ever seen. A plane in war color zooms over us and dips his wing in salute. He goes out to sea.

6:30 A.M. A Navy blimp comes out and hovers over us for at least an hour. So low we can see two men in the cabin of it very plainly.

7:30 A.M. Breakfast. All hands are bleary-eyed from lack of sleep. Oh well, tonight we will be safe inside the sub-net at New York and sleep for eight long hours.

Camera Men Take Chances

Fast work reporting a riot south of the border

by RICHARD REYNOLDS

I HAD been a newspaper man several years before I consciously realized that a news photographer, if he is a good one, gets into tight spots oftener than a reporter—and tighter spots. A correspondent can cover a battle, for instance, without being within artillery range. He can pick up his facts from headquarters of the army he's with, splatter up his copy with a handful of sharp verbs and lurid adjectives, and he's credited with being on the scene of action. But a photographer has to get right up within lens range. It took a baby revolution south of the border to make me appreciate the boys with the cameras.

I crossed one morning with a photographer to cover the story for the old *Sun*. The night before this, a soldier had murdered a little girl, and the town had boiled over. A big lynch mob formed and tried to get the imprisoned suspect. At that time, the town had been hit hard by the depression and a certain rebellious political element was eager to seize upon any incident that it might turn into a full-fledged revolt against the Federal government. Away over in San Luis Potosi the late Saturnino Cedillo was preparing for a major revolt (which failed miserably a year later) and he would have welcomed any disorder elsewhere too.

The mob, spurred on by the anti-government agitators, had stormed the police station at four A. M. Police managed to spirit the prisoner out and into the Federal barracks, and the mob, its fury unappeased, had burned the police station. The crowd didn't disperse; after dawn broke its ranks swelled to more than two thousand. Obviously more violence was brewing, and the city editor rang the photographer and me out of bed and ordered us down to cover developments.

When we got there, the mob was packed twenty deep along the street facing the barracks where the prisoner was hidden. Near by smoldered the ruins of the police station. The mob was held at bay by several squads of *Federales*, tough-looking boys who carried their stubby Mausers unslung and ready for anything.

Earl looked over the scene and grumbled. "No action," he complained. On any assignment like this he wanted action pictures—those were his orders from the city editor; and an idle mob didn't appeal to him. Nevertheless, he took a couple of pictures, and I offered to stick with him and carry his box of film plate holders. I didn't realize what sticking with him meant until the action started.

It began soon. One end of the mob began to drift down the street. It became a rush. Earl and I were caught up and swept with it around a corner in front of the big *palacio federal*, the Federal government building. There the plan of the agitators quickly became plain—they began inciting the mob to burn the *palacio*.

The mob needed little urging. About one thousand, however, remained across the street and started hurling rocks through the windows. Meanwhile a wild group of several hundred gathered right in front of the building. They began battering at the big main doors with timbers. My photographer walked up close and I followed him, handing him fresh film as fast as he triggered the shutter. Showers of rocks were flying over our heads against the wall and I grew anxious. I looked around for a convenient doorway, but he coolly went on working his camera.

"It's getting pretty hot," I told him. "We'd better shove."

His eye was glued to the finder, and he answered me out of the corner of his mouth:

"Can't yet. Those doors are going to bust in any second, and I want to get it."

Crash! The great doors smashed inward. Part of the mob streamed inside, and I noticed several men carrying cans of gasoline. In a couple of minutes flames belched out of the lower windows. Earl kept clicking the shutter, and all the time the barrage of stones from across the street kept up. One rock hit him on the shoulder just as he was about to snap a picture. He looked around for an instant with a ludicrous expression of annoyance on his face, then turned back to his work. I got uneasy as more rocks and broken glass showered around us.

"Come on, Earl!" I yelled. "Let's go."

"Just one more shot," he replied.

That "one more" was almost our undoing. Some of the mob, now that the building was ablaze inside, took time to look around and noticed us. They didn't want to be photographed—pictures might aid the Government identify the agitators. About two hundred of them raised a shout of anger and rushed us.

In the melée that followed I lost sight of Earl. I was busy trying to save the box of exposed film; I knew our attackers would try to smash his camera and beat us up, and I played the only card I held against that mob—my ability to speak Spanish. I shouted out that we were *amigos* of Mexico and Mexicans, but that we had to get pictures—that was our job. I spewed this out in half-sentences. Perhaps the fact that I *do* like Mexico and Mexicans lent sincerity to my voice. At any rate a few cool heads in the mob saved us. We were allowed to walk away with the camera and film—provided we stayed away.

But Earl had been severely mauled. I had got off with a few kicks and blows while he had been given the works. A photographer can't very well defend himself. He has to protect a camera costing two hundred dollars or more. Earl had shielded his camera with his arms and body, and miraculously, it was undamaged. But he was so beaten up he could hardly walk; I had to help him to his car a couple of blocks away.

THERE we had a cigarette and he rested for a couple of minutes. Then he locked all the exposed film inside his car. He looked back toward the mob.

"Say," he said, "let's get up on a roof across the street from the *palacio* and we can see the whole show."

I helped him limp along. We went around the block in back of the mob, entered a deserted patio and climbed a ladder to the roof. Then we walked across several rooftops until we were on a one-story building directly opposite the blazing *palacio*. The mob below us was yelling and cheering as flames and smoke mushroomed up into the sky. The fire department rushed up a pumper truck, and the mob seized it and drove it away.

All of a sudden we heard a crackling thunder of gunfire. Charging up from two directions came scores of *Federales*, firing their Mausers. The mob screamed and began to scatter, but here and there pistols appeared in the hands of agitators and the street became a swirling mass of running, shooting, shrieking humanity. Above the noise I heard another sound repeatedly—the close, vicious whine of bullets ricocheting off the parapet where Earl and I stood. The *Federales* apparently had orders not to shoot directly at the mob, and as they charged they fired up at a forty-five-degree angle—right at our roof!

As soon as I realized this, I flopped down behind the parapet. But not Earl. He was busy working his camera at full speed, leaning over the parapet. I begged and swore at him, trying to get him to take cover. Nothing doing. He was out after pictures. So I just lay there, listening to the whine of the bullets and watching Earl doggedly operate his camera.

AND when it was all over and the *Federales* had matters under control, he really had some pictures: Shots of the soldiers charging, of the mob breaking, of men with guns in their hands at the moment of firing—he had the whole story in film. And when he finally limped up to his car to speed back to our office, he had my all-out respect for him and all of his kind who do their work on the front line.

Battle in the Sand

A tank action in the desert is in many ways like a naval battle

As told to ALLAN A. MICHIE

WAR on the flat desert sands of Egypt and Libya is unlike anything experienced in World War I or II. It is more like a large scale naval battle fought on land. Because of the open, endless expanse of sand stretching far away it is often possible to spot the enemy a dozen miles away. From then on the opposing mechanized columns maneuver for position like warships, dart in long enough to send their shots into the enemy.

The action described in this story is typical of the fighting now going on across the face of North Africa. Two strong columns of some eighty German and Italian tanks, armored cars and motor-trucks ranged about in the No-Man's-Land between Egypt and Libya until they were met by British forces. Backed up by R.A.F. planes working in perfect cooperation with the ground forces, the British forced the Axis columns into a helter-skelter retreat. At the end of the engagement the Axis columns had lost a dozen tanks. The British lost no vehicles.

Operating far out in advance of the main British desert force was a platoon of forty-five men. This platoon, hopelessly outnumbered, staged the first attack on the advancing Axis columns. It was commanded by a young captain, a modest twenty-seven-year-old native of Bisley, near London. He belongs to the famed King's Royal Rifles and has been in the regular Indian Army for eight years.

This is his story:

AT dusk one night we moved forward across the sand to a point on the main desert track from Fort Capuzzo leading southeastward along the escarpment, the high, cliff-like rise along the Mediterranean shore. There we established a listening-post. We parked our thirty-hundredweight lorries and my stripped-down Morris car behind a slight dip in the sand and scooped out a few holes for the men to hide in beside the track.

There are no real roads running out into the desert, except the main tar-macadam affair which parallels the coastline, but there are certain well-marked tracks. We've always found that Jerry prefers to travel along them. He doesn't like to get away from something he is familiar with.

When the desert is quiet we usually spend two weeks in forward positions and then two weeks back at our base camp, halfway back to Alexandria. Strangely enough, the men prefer to be forward in action and so do I. We get bored hanging around the base camps. From our forward positions we send out small parties every night for reconnaissance far into the enemy's territory. Supplies are brought up to our secret headquarters forward every night—petrol, water and food. We manage to get a hot meal brought up about every other day and our regiments generally manage to send us little odds and ends from the NAFFI—toothbrushes, shaving soap, tinned fruit—which we buy.

We always try to get into our advanced reconnaissance positions soon after dusk. This particular night started off quiet enough, but along about midnight we strained our ears and listened. Every now and then we could pick up a faint rumbling sound which was suspiciously like the noise of tanks. I couldn't get my ear on the exact direction of the sound, however, so I sent out a patrol of half a dozen men on foot and told them to head north for a mile or two and then sweep around our position in a circle until they contacted something.

It was almost two A.M. when they left and we waited anxiously until al-

most five before they stumbled back into the post. They reported hearing vehicles moving along the road to the north but they did not get close enough to see whether they were tanks or just motor lorries. I decided that it was more likely that a column of enemy tanks was moving down between us and the escarpment, headed for the British positions along the Libyan-Egyptian frontier.

As soon as it became light enough to see, I spotted the tail end of a long column of tanks bearing off on our right and slightly to our rear. They couldn't see us because our trucks were hidden well down in a dip in the sand.

I called up our base on the wireless truck and reported the enemy column. I received orders to remain in our position and warn the rear of any further advances by the enemy. We didn't have long to wait.

About ten miles behind the tanks came a column of some twenty motor-trucks and armored cars coming down from the north right along the very track we were covering. The trucks, I could see through the glasses, were Opals and German-built Fords. Some were loaded with mixed German and Italian infantrymen and others had what looked like French-type 75's mounted on the back.

MY nine vehicles were well arranged to cover the oncoming enemy. We had two anti-tank guns mounted on thirty-hundredweight Fords and on the other lorries were men with Bren guns and Tommy guns and rifles. Our trucks were dispersed along the track about 150 yards apart. As usual, the trucks belonging to my anti-tank gun commander and my platoon commander were drawn up fairly close to mine so that I could pass along orders. As soon as we go into action these two officers always draw their trucks up next to mine to get instructions and then, after they have placed their men in position, return to my truck in case new orders are necessary.

Usually I perch on top of the wireless truck and keep my glasses on the enemy, but that morning I decided to get down and have a real crack at them. We held fire until they were about two thousand feet away. They didn't see us and kept coming on straight down the track. Then I let fly with a Bren gun right into the leading Opal truck. It jarred to a halt, and so did all the others behind it, as all our guns opened fire.

Our fire stopped them and they backed away hurriedly behind a slight rise and stayed there for at least ten minutes. When their first trucks nosed cautiously in sight again I ordered a quick withdrawal. They apparently thought that we had retired for good.

I headed for a deep dip in the sand some miles further on, however, where I remembered spotting a good place to hide some days before. It was slightly to the west of the track. We hid our trucks in a bit of dead ground (a dip in the sand, invisible from a few hundred yards away) and waited. When the enemy trucks were about fourteen hundred yards away we ran the anti-tank guns and the lorries onto the crest of the ridge and began firing. They were taken completely by surprise again.

One of the Nazi armored cars was hit immediately and burst into flames. Another was badly holed and a truck was hit and set alight. For at least five minutes we waited expectantly for enemy fire in reply but none came. Then they managed to get some small field-guns onto the ground and start shelling us. Their fire was very inaccurate, however, and my men hardly paid any attention to it. Every time one of us scored a hit on the enemy the men cheered and whistled.

Our wireless had broken down and it was impossible for me to contact my rear base for further orders. I decided to withdraw again for a short distance and then make another attack. We jumped into the lorries and shifted gears. Just as we got going into top speed, however, a German shell hit the rear of one of our Fords, blew up some Bren gun ammunition, tore through a pile of bedding and blasted one of the men out of the front seat. Unfortunately, he landed on his head. We halted for a second and got him in the back of the truck, but he died three hours later when we returned to the base.

We moved ahead by jumps and stopped occasionally to try to repair the wireless truck, but every time I ordered a halt I could see the enemy column coming closer. I turned steadily due west, away from the track, and as soon as I knew the enemy couldn't see us I moved back in close to the track again and halted. Because we were stripped to the lightest load and were also willing to head out into the desert sand, we had much greater speed and mobility than the German-Italian column.

I led the trucks in behind a large sand dune and intended to surprise the enemy column once more. This time they surprised us. Just as we were pulling to a halt, the first enemy armored car nosed around one corner of the dune.

I'd had no orders from the base for more than two hours so I decided that it would be costly to stand and slug it out with the heavily armored Jerries. I ordered a hasty retreat. I felt that the best thing to do was to keep moving backward, harrying the enemy all the way.

We put on a burst of speed so as to put more miles between us and the advancing Axis column. Just as we rolled up over a large ridge in the sand I saw two German twenty-five-ton tanks between us and home.

It didn't look too good for us for a moment. Then, through the glasses, I saw that one tank was stopped on the desert track. The other was heading away from us rapidly and was already out of range.

We swung one lorry around so the anti-tank gun could get in line with the Nazi tank stopped ahead of us. The gun blazed out. Then a second truck swung about and joined in. In half a minute the Jerry tank was holed a dozen times.

Suddenly we saw five men run from the far side of the tank. We opened up with Tommy guns and they wheeled around quickly and threw their hands up in the air. When we rounded them up we discovered that they had been repairing a broken tread on the far side of the tank when we came upon them.

The tank was a Mark III, one of the largest employed by the Germans in Libya. The German crew men were all youngsters, about 19 on the average, and they seemed quite happy to be captured. One of them kept saying, "Where are your tanks?"

I said, "Wouldn't you like to know?" —and pushed them into the back of one of the Fords with a guard over them.

Just then a second German tank nosed over the brow of the sand ridge. Our anti-tank guns were on it in an instant and one hit brought it to a halt. I could see the enemy column plainly visible in the north, however, and they were bearing down on us rapidly. It didn't seem wise to hang around any longer so I gave the order to retire without waiting to round up the crew of the second tank.

We could have stayed and harried the enemy column all day but I still was unable to repair the wireless and I had no idea what orders the base had been trying to send us. Actually, I learned later, I had been instructed to retire some two hours before. However, it was a good thing that our wireless was out of whack and that we didn't get that message. If we had withdrawn two hours earlier we would have run smack into the main German and Italian tank column and been caught without a chance.

OUR whole running fight had covered about forty-five miles over a three-hour period. We know we knocked out one tank and one armored car definitely, and damaged one tank and a truck. Certainly many of the other Axis vehicles in the column had been hit by our small arms fire, but I didn't claim them as damaged when we finally reported back to our headquarters.

Drawn by E. P. Cousc

Lee Jonathan's voice was low, grim: "I will shoot if you move suddenly, Ehrhardt."
Shirley Dayl spun quickly. "Lee!" she cried. "What are you— Be careful, Lee!"
But Ehrhardt didn't move. "I had hoped you would not be able to join us, Jonathan."

NO COLOURS OR CREST

There's a legion that never was listed . . . . That carries no colours or crest—
"The Lost Legion"—Rudyard Kipling

A novel of the Secret Service in war-time America

by Francis M. Cockrell

Who wrote "Weird House"

AS soon as Lee Jonathan got into Los Angeles, he telephoned the ad in, and then took a cab out through Hollywood and on out the Boulevard to Tommy Wells' place. It was about nine o'clock when he arrived there. Tommy lived on a hill halfway between Hollywood and the ocean, and when the taxi turned into and up the drive, the spreading white house had dots of yellow light all over it which winked at Lee through the trees.

He paid the driver and the cab went on, and he put two bags down by the door and rang the bell. Presently there was the sound of steps, and the door was opened by a neat young Filipino who stood looking blankly at him for a second until Lee said: "Howard!"

The Filipino's smooth brown face broke suddenly into a delighted smile, and he said, "Mr. Jonathan!" and Lee grinned too and shook hands with him. Lee Jonathan was a tall, rather blond young man, with quiet gray eyes and a somewhat longish face.

Howard picked up the bags and came in with them after Lee. He said:

"Mr. Thomas does not know that you are coming, I think?"

"No," Lee said, "he doesn't even suspect it. What's going on, a party or something?"

"A little party," Howard said. "They are in the bar now."

"I guess it wouldn't hurt anything to change my shirt," Lee said. "This suit is pretty wrinkled too."

Howard nodded and started down a hall to the right. "I put you in your old room if you like that."

"I like that fine," Lee said.

It was a large room at the end of that wing, with its own bath; and as Lee got out of the clothes he had traveled in, Howard began unpacking his bags.

Howard let out a little startled, "Oh!" and Lee looked around; the Filipino was staring at the heavy .45 automatic which had dropped from the folds of a suit and was lying on the bed.

"Oh," Lee said. "It's—uh—a friend gave it to me. I—" He stopped. There was no reason he had to make an excuse to Howard for having a pistol in his bag. "It's all right," he said. "It's on safety."

"Oh, yes, sure," Howard said, not too easily. "I press these few little wrinkles," he said, shaking out the suit. "Be very quick."

The bar Howard had referred to was a long playroom, really, with one end wall a motion-picture screen, and the bar at the other end. There were a good many tables between for cards, backgammon, or chess, and one for table-tennis and one for pool. The room would accommodate thirty people very easily, and there were nearly that many there now, scattered around in little groups talking, mostly.

Nobody noticed at first when the door opened from the flagged terrace that lay between the playhouse and the swimming-pool, and Lee Jonathan stepped in and stood there for a moment.

Then Tommy Wells' eyes, passing over him, stopped suddenly and came back with a jerk—and Tommy let out a yell and ran across the room.

"*Lee!* When did you get here? Where have you been? Hell, this is wonderful!"

He had Lee's hand, and they were hitting each other on the shoulders, and others whom Lee knew gathered to say hello.

When it quieted down a little, Tommy led him to the bar to get him a drink, still wanting to know where he had been, how he had got back, what he was doing, and everything, all at once.

"WELL, I just came back," Lee said. "It seemed a good idea. You know how I am, will-o'-the wispy, flitting here and there every five or ten years." The bartender set his drink up, and he raised the glass with a little gesture and nod to Tommy and said: "Well, here's to now."

"He was in Java the last time I heard from him," Tommy said to the man standing on the other side of Lee. "He never writes. That was two years ago."

"Well," Lee said, "there wasn't anything to say."

"This is Eric Wilben," Tommy said, and the blond, very slender fellow on Lee's left held out his hand. "We've just been looking at his last picture," Tommy said. "You should have got here sooner. It was swell. He just finished it. He's a director," he added.

"I wish I had seen it," Lee said, and Wilben smiled—and perhaps to turn the talk from himself introduced the man next to him, Charley van Renneker.

"He did a small part," Wilben said, "but it was quite important, and he made it very real. I think he will be a well-known actor soon."

Van Renneker said: "There is nothing to acting when there is someone to tell you the exact right thing to do." He was a trim chap, with nice shoulders, mild blue eyes, and a pleasant smile which came easily. His eyes grew serious. "You have been in Java recently? I hear the news and wish that I were there, but"—he shrugged—"I suppose there would be little I could do to help. I was no help in Holland, certainly. I know nothing of the military."

"How about you?" Tommy asked Lee. "Are you in the Army yet? Is that why you came back?"

"No," Lee said.

"They won't let me in," Tommy said disgustedly. He was an engineer with Crither Aircraft, in Santa Monica.

"I guess it would be kind of silly to come back here from Java to join up, at that, wouldn't it? Say, how did you get back, anyhow? Wasn't that quite a trick?"

After a second Tommy looked up, and then followed Lee's eyes; and when he saw the girl in the doorway, all he said was, "Oh!"

LEE had been conscious of nothing else within the room after he had looked up to see Shirley Dayl standing in the doorway through which he himself had recently entered, standing very still, with her brows drawn together just a little bit above eyes which stared straight into his.

And he knew then he had been waiting for this: that no matter whether he had let it come into his mind or not, all the time since he had started, he had been waiting for it; not hoping for it, not dreading it, just waiting for it.

He stood a little straighter, and then she was coming across the room directly toward him. Her gown was white, and her shoulders were beautifully tanned, and her skin had that look of aliveness it had always had; her eyes were as dark and as bright as they had used to be.

He moved from the bar to meet her, and she put her hands on his arms and stood on tiptoe, and her intention to kiss him being entirely obvious, he lowered his fair head toward her dark one to make this possible.

All she said was: "Lee! Oh, Lee, you're a kind of shock, you know." She bit her lip a tiny second, and looked at Tommy Wells. "You rodent, why didn't you tell me he was coming?"

Wells grinned. "I didn't know."

She looked back at Lee again and grinned suddenly herself, because they were standing there alone, with almost everybody looking at them, and Shirley knew he hated it. "Come get me a drink," she said, and they moved to the bar.

She hadn't changed at all; he couldn't tell it if she had. Her smile and frown were as quick and intense as they had ever been; she was as warm-hearted, as impulsive; she became as excited and vehement about anything that interested her.

And presently, with Shirley by his side again, with Tommy there, with people around and everything pleasant and loud and gay again, Lee Jonathan slid back four years in time. Those years just went away, just vanished, and it was lovely for a while, though in the way a dream is when you half-know you'll wake up pretty soon.

And they came back all right; Shirley brought back the recent past herself. She asked him things. And then she brought back the present too. They had gone outside to walk around a little bit; it was a warm, clear night for winter in Los Angeles. They walked along the flagged terrace beside the pool, which looked very quiet and mysterious in the moonlight. They went on around its end.

"Did you like it, Lee? In Java, I mean before? You used to just sit in the shade, I suppose, and they'd bring you tall, cool drinks and—sort of take care of your needs, I guess. The beautiful native girls, I mean. Do they wither so quickly, Lee, the way I hear they do?"

He laughed. "That's silly. There isn't anything like that. You must not know anything about the Dutch. You don't go on the beach in their colonies, you bet. You have to post passage-money home even to come in at all, and if you don't suit them in any way, then home you go. And a sugar plantation down there is big business; it's scientific."

"But that's all wrong," she said. "That's not romantic. Are the movies all in vain? Haven't they seen any movies about Java in Java? Then they'd know how to act." She gave her head a little restless shake. "Oh, that doesn't matter. I'm just talking nonsense; I'm really just making sounds, Lee."

Beyond the pool they passed onto the lawn with the first faint touch of dew upon it, so that it glowed a dull gray-silver in the moonlight. Across it they found a bench besides the tennis-court and sat there, and Lee got out cigarettes and offered them, but she didn't take one. He lighted one himself, and for a while they just sat there silently.

But there was a question he had to ask, and finally he asked it. He tried to do it somewhat casually.

"You didn't marry him?" he said. "You didn't marry Marvin Richards?"

She said, "No," softly. She hesitated a moment; then she said: "I knew that when you were gone. I knew I didn't want to. I don't guess I ever meant to, inside. But I—thought I meant to." She fell silent again, but he didn't speak, and after a little she murmured: "Four years is a long time, isn't it?"

He said: "Yes. It is."

"Long enough, Lee?"

"I don't know," he said. "I thought it was."

"So did I. I was sure." She moved her hands apart in her lap and then folded them again. "I guess I'll take a cigarette, at that," she said.

He held them out, while she took one, and then struck a match and brought it up. She kept her eyes on it while she puffed, and then on the red glowing end of the cigarette while she spoke.

"Do you ever think back about it," she asked, "and wonder if maybe I was silly, or you were? If maybe we did the right thing, if— Oh, you know—*if*."

He said a little huskily: "Hell, yes, I know. I do it all the time."

After a second she murmured: "Lee, why did you come back?"

The smoke he had just drawn into his lungs he held there for a second before he let it slowly out. Even then he didn't answer right away. He had almost forgotten. There for a little bit the rest of the world and its people and its wars had slipped out of his mind.

"I just thought," Shirley said, "that maybe you had come back, partly maybe, to—see me. But—there wasn't any reason you should have, of course."

He wanted to answer that; even if he hadn't come back to see her, that didn't have anything to do with the way he felt, now that he had. And he began an answer, too, even if he wasn't quite sure where it was going.

"Well, maybe so," he said, "but just the same that—"

But he didn't get to finish it. Shirley stood up suddenly and said: "Let's go in, don't you think? I'm a little chilly now."

So he said: "Well—all right. Of course." And he stood up, and they started back across the lawn again. And he didn't say any more. He guessed maybe that was the best way to leave it anyhow, everything considered.

CHAPTER TWO

AFTER they took a few turns in the pool and had tried a dive or two, Howard brought them huge thick towels and bathrobes with their orange juice, and they had breakfast outside there on the terrace beside the pool, in the warm morning sunlight, with copies of the three morning papers for each of them.

Looking up from the one he was reading, to put sugar in his coffee, Tommy Wells looked at Lee for a minute and said: "Jonathan, you look pretty okay, sitting over there."

Lee had his paper opened to the classified advertisements, and the one he had telephoned down from San Francisco was there, all right, among the Personals.

> Amy Y. Am back in town and anxious to reach you. Are you busy? Burt Z. G923.

He had read it, and he folded the paper now, and dropped it beside his chair.

"If you want the truth," he said, "I feel okay. I don't think a touch of this soft life now and then hurts a thing. Slip me that marmalade."

"How did you and Shirley make out last night, if I'm not prying?" Tommy asked. He held out the marmalade. "Or if I am, and it doesn't bother you? What did she have to say?"

Lee spread marmalade on some toast. "Oh, nothing much. You know, we just talked about—old times and—stuff. We just—" He let his voice trail off.

"Look, chum," Tommy said, "she's a swell gal—we both know that; but don't let it get you down again, do you hear?"

Lee just said: "That was four years ago." But after he had lighted a cigarette, he said: "Has she been very—interested in anybody lately, you think?"

SHRUGGING, Tommy said: "She's been going around with Charley van Renneker a little bit—you met him last night; but I don't think it's more than friendship. Still, how should I know what a woman is thinking?"

"He seemed like a nice guy," Lee said.

Tommy nodded. "Yeah, he seems to be all right. He's a refugee. He had it pretty tough, I guess; his wife and three children and his mother were all killed by one bomb in Rotterdam. He lives with Wilben, and Wilben gets him some bit parts. I guess that's his only living. Wilben's a refugee too, for that matter. German. His old man was a professor, I think, but he wouldn't say uncle for the Nazis or something, so he died in a concentration-camp. Wilben managed to get out in '37." He gave a little grunt. "The world sure is in jolly shape these days, isn't it?"

"*Jolly* is the word, I guess," Lee said somberly. Howard came with hot coffee, and Lee watched his cup being filled again; and after Howard had gone back into the house he said thoughtfully: "Tommy, have you got a derringer?"

Wells looked up at him questioningly. "A *derringer*?"

"You know—they're very small. And it ought to be as flat as possible."

"Sure, I know what they're like," Tommy said. "But why?"

"I just thought I'd like to have one," Lee said.

Tommy looked annoyed, but didn't say any more. "All right, all right. We can take a look pretty soon."

And a little later, when they had finished their coffee, he rose, and Lee followed him around the playroom and through the four-car garage to the target-range which was built along the back of it. They had spent time here together once, on rainy days. Tommy Wells had a good collection of target-pistols and a fair variety of others. He opened the case at the end of the range now, and got one out for Lee.

"Something like this?"

It was a short pistol, very small and flat, as Lee had requested, with two barrels, one above the other, and no cylinder, of course, or other carrier for more ammunition. The two shots in its chambers fired, it must be reloaded to fire again.

Lee said: "Exactly like that. Have you got some ammunition? I'd like to see how it throws."

Wells got it for him, and switched on the light above the target at the other end of the narrow room.

Lee stood at the rail and fired and reloaded five times,—ten shots,—and then they went and got the target and brought it back to look at it.

Tommy Wells said: "Well, you haven't got rusty, I'll say that much."

"It's not bad," Lee said. "For two barrels, it's all right."

He cleaned the pistol and dropped it with a couple of cartridges into the pocket of his bathrobe.

"Thanks, Thomas."

That was too much for Wells. "Damn it," he said exasperatedly, "what *is* this? When you show up from Java in some mysterious fashion, with no warning at all, and it's some vague business you won't talk about, I let it go. If you don't want to talk, okay. But now you start borrowing little pistols! *What the hell is going on?*"

"Oh, it's highly confidential," Lee assured him. "I couldn't breathe a word. International complications," he said darkly.

"Sure," Wells said heavily, "you're going out to shoot spies. With a derringer and two cartridges!"

Lee grinned. "That's right," he said, "but you must remember that though my real name is Secret Agent Size 42, I am perhaps even better known as Lethal Luther, because I never miss. You see, I don't need many bullets."

"Very funny, very funny," Wells said disgustedly. "All right, nuts with it! Let's go." He shrugged and turned away. . . .

At eleven o'clock that morning Lee Jonathan telephoned the newspaper. No message or letter had come for him then, and none had come when he tried again, at one.

He called the third time at two. The same girl's voice said, "Just a minute, please," again. And then, presently, he heard her saying cheerfully: "Yes, a letter has just come in, sir."

"Oh," Lee said, and a queer sort of breathless, half-surprised feeling crept over him. "I'll—I'll send for it."

And the feeling didn't go away, even after he left the telephone and went back into the living-room to wait. Because it was true. A letter was there, and if it were from A.Y., then everything the red-haired man had said was true, and Wooten had been right in believing him.

He hadn't believed it himself, Lee knew; he didn't now.

Not until the boy had shown up to ring the bell and hand him the envelope, not until he had ripped it apart and quickly read the note it contained, could he believe it, could he realize that this was all real: that even when he had been borrowing a pistol he might need, he hadn't really believed just an ordinary guy like himself could get mixed up in a thing like this. Oh, he had believed in a way, with his mind, of course; for he knew Hendrik Wooten would not likely be wrong on a thing like this. But he hadn't felt it.

He felt it now, all right; he got the idea now: it was no dream, no fancy; it wasn't just something to crack wise about to Tommy Wells; this was as real as war or peace, as life or death, as his own breath and the heavy beating of his heart, and he was in it irrevocably. A shakiness came over him, and with it the disturbing feeling that he had suddenly become, somehow, a stranger.

He read the letter again, and then a third time, memorizing it, then burned it. He wouldn't go to the restaurant until he had seen A.Y. Ten o'clock tomorrow morning, the letter had said; he didn't see why it couldn't have been tonight. He didn't like the idea of waiting now.

Besides, it left him with an empty evening, and he was not sure he ought to fill it in the way which had come to mind, though he knew he would try to. He didn't plan to, wasn't even sure he wanted to; but he knew right then, right away, that he was going to see Shirley Dayl that night if he could.

And it turned out that he could.

CHAPTER THREE

THE roadster was still running sweetly; it sighed along on the level and purred over the hills; it had twelve cylinders, and there was nothing you could ask that it couldn't do in a sort of offhand, casual way. Lee had used it a lot before, when he had first come out to visit Tommy Wells.

Tommy Wells had come to L.S.U. in the last two years that Lee was there; they had been in the same fraternity, and roommates in their senior year. Lee's father had died that year, not long before commencement, and Lee had learned then that the plantation he had thought they owned had been in hock for years; that his father had managed the money to complete his education, heroically, al-

most to the penny; and somewhat pathetically, also, there being little for him to do with the education then. He was an educated farmer with no farm, a trained, scientific planter without a plantation.

When Tommy Wells had said to come and spend the summer with him in Los Angeles, he had done it; there had been no reason not to. His mother had died when he was much younger, and he had no other family. That was when he met Shirley Dayl, while he was staying with Tommy and traveling with people to whom money was simply stuff you wrote a check for when you needed it.

It was Shirley Dayl who had held him to Los Angeles while summer became December, and who had sent him, finally, out and away to a succession of places whose end was a bar in Singapore, where he managed to get pretty tight before the evening ended, conscious in its late stages of only the round, spectacled eyes of the round-faced little man to whom he had attached himself, who continued to stand beside him, chatting earnestly and quite pleasantly. It was his introduction to Hendrik Wooten.

That had been four years ago, and he had thought that in that time he had forgotten Shirley Dayl, that he had cured himself of her. He hadn't, of course. It had taken no more than a look and two words to make that plain last night, and he had thought of her too often and too vividly today, for right now there was no place in his scheme of things for her, or even for thoughts of her.

So he knew even then, he suspected, that it might be a mistake for him to be seeing her tonight. Later, of course, finally, he wished that he had never laid eyes on her at all, or thought of her or even heard her name when he came back this time.

But that was later by days, and tonight it was all right—at first. It was even swell, in fact. Everything that she had ever held for him she still held, and a little more. He knew that while he watched her coming down the stairs into the hall where he was waiting for her. The way she walked, the way she held her head, the look in her eyes that he could believe was there for him.

They did some of the things they used to do: they ate steamed clams in a little joint on the end of a pier near Santa Monica; they took a trip in the moonlight on the boat with big blue sails; and when they came back, they tried some of the rides on the amusement pier again, and danced there, and finally they drove back into town and danced at the Coconut Grove.

They didn't talk about each other or about the past; they just let themselves be happy and the night be fine, while they did these things which they had done together when they were happy once before.

It was after two o'clock when they turned north from Sunset into the winding climb which would take them up to Shirley's house. Shirley's head was resting on his shoulder then; her eyes were turned up to the stars.

"Lee," she said, then stopped and after a block began again: "Lee, do you think we made a mistake, maybe? Do you think it might—have worked?"

Lee said: "Which way?" He was silent a moment, guiding them around a curve. "I guess I don't," he said. "It would have been tough probably, even with everything just right. And it wouldn't have been."

He turned into the half-moon drive and stopped before the long stone house; he switched off the motor and the roadster's lights, and everything was quiet, and dark, except for the soft yellow glow from a lamp above the door.

She held her hand on the door a moment, and then it fell back to her lap. She said: "Then—then we've lost nothing, I guess. We haven't missed anything. That's something, I suppose."

He put his hand behind her and turned her toward him, and he knew then that he shouldn't, but there was no way to stop; he kissed her carefully and long and hungrily.

And after a moment, when he could say it almost calmly, he replied: "Well, maybe only that."

She held her hands tight together in her lap, looking down at them. "Damn it, Lee, you shouldn't have done that. It's no better than it was; it's not a bit."

He said glumly: "It's worse."

After a long time she said slowly and very soberly: "All right, Lee. I give up. Do you know what I'm saying?"

"No," he whispered. "No, I don't know." But he did, and it held him breathless while she went on.

"You know," she said. "We'll do it your way, Lee. Any way you say. We'll spend it any way you like; or I'll give it all away; or we'll farm clear off to hell and gone from anywhere, if you say so, and never see a town again. It's up to you. We'll just drive off now, like this, and we won't stop until we stop in Yuma, or Las Vegas, or Mexico. I don't care. Do you? Oh, Lee, I—I feel so queer!" She moved abruptly into his arms, clinging to him tightly, as if she were afraid of something he could protect her from.

And it was agony; because there was nothing he could do. Nothing but sit there wretchedly and wish he hadn't come tonight, or that he hadn't let her say that, had stopped her somehow. But it was too late now for—

She stirred a little. She looked up, her eyes searching his face in the dim light, and he wanted to look away but he couldn't quite.

"Lee—Lee, don't you understand? I'm asking you to marry me. I'm in the mood; if you want me, let's be going." She stiffened. Her voice was touched with uncertainty, then edged with panic. "Of course if you—"

"Honey," he said. He was slow because his throat felt so tight. "Shirley, listen—you've got to listen, do you hear? Tonight—well, Shirley, there's something that I've got to do. I can't—"

"Don't bother, please." Suddenly her words were precise, and her voice very cool and well-controlled. She sat stiffly apart from him, with one hand on the door. "Don't bother to let me down easy, if you don't mind, Lee. I'm grown up now. And something simple and direct is sort of neater and cleaner, don't you think? *Sorry, Shirley, but things are different now.* Fumbling for excuses seems so paltry, Lee. It's—"

He broke in. "Shirley!" His hand gripped her arm, shaking it. "Shirley, shut up, damn it! I tell you it's not that. There's something I've got to finish first. But it's something—"

She pulled from his grasp and opened the door and got out. "Never mind, Lee."

"Ah, Shirley, don't do that. You don't understand. It's something I can't—" She was running up the steps. "Ah, darling, don't be like that. Can't you wait just a—"

But she was on the porch, and she didn't stop or pause and then the door of the house came shut behind her softly, with a final sort of *click*, and she was gone.

He sat there looking at the house, and his voice said, "—minute," in conclusion, but he didn't know it had, and after a time he turned and released the brake, and the car moved gently off down the slope, gathering speed gradually.

Chapter Four

THE morning was gray, and a very light, chill rain was falling. The hotel was on Sixth Street, right across from the restaurant, perhaps twenty blocks west of the main business district of Los Angeles. It was a six-story building, neither impressive nor dilapidated, with a drugstore in one corner of its first floor.

Lee went into the drugstore from the street a little after ten and climbed onto a stool at the fountain and ordered a drink. At exactly seven minutes after ten by the clock over the fountain he got down, bought a package of cigarettes while he paid for his drink, and then went into the hotel lobby through its entrance from the store. There had been an impulse to let his eyes wander about and see

if he could guess who it was that must be watching him, but he hadn't done it, because it couldn't possibly do any good.

He took the elevator with two other people and named the fourth floor after they got off at the third. He walked back down to the second floor and when he had come to the end of the hall at the front of the building it was still empty and he tried the knob of the last door on the right. It turned and he stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

The room was empty; he stepped to the bathroom and looked in and it was empty too. There were two chairs near the front window, between the bed and the dresser, and he crossed over and sat down in one of them. The entrance to the restaurant, on the street-level one story below, was directly opposite the window.

LEE looked away from the window and ran a hand through his hair and turned his eyes on the door. There wasn't anything to do right then but wait and watch the door, and wonder what kind of person it would be who came through it finally.

This was really the beginning now. He felt a little empty, rather unsteady. Everything looked very ordinary and the dull color of the day,—the fine rain,—only emphasized that: the hotel was no different from a thousand modest cousins and the restaurant was as standard as the hotel. But the ordinariness was no help; it only served to make him feel somewhat silly, maybe, or melodramatic, or something: it didn't make him feel a bit less scared, or whatever it was that he was feeling. He wasn't sure just what it was but he would have been glad to have it something else.

It was nearly ten minutes—it seemed an hour—before he heard someone coming down the hall. He rubbed his cigarette out on the window-ledge and sat very still, listening and looking at the door.

The footfalls ended right outside. After a few seconds the knob turned, and then the door opened and closed quickly, and Charley van Renneker was standing there leaning back against it, looking at Lee.

Lee came half out of his chair, frowning, and said, "Hey!" under his breath, and then he stopped and settled back again uncertainly. "What the hell," he muttered, "are you—are you—"

Van Renneker nodded, and his eyes were bright, and he spoke a little breathlessly. "That is right. I am A.Y. You can understand it was some surprise for me too when I saw that it was you. I am expecting another Hollander, like myself. Not someone like you."

Lee gave a small laugh that had no mirth in it. "It's crazy, isn't it?" Then he said: "The man who would have come is—dead. And another, who is also a Hollander, could not arrange for the passage immediately. So I have come."

Van Renneker said: "Oh, I see." He came slowly across the room and moved the empty chair an inch or two and sat down in it.

Lee said: "Well, I'm glad it is you. Somebody I know. I—it seems nicer."

"Yes," Van Renneker said, "I am very glad too." He looked at Lee seriously a moment. "You do not mind, I hope, that I wished to have one look at you before—before this. It is simply that I—that—"

"Hell, no," Lee said. "I don't blame you. I'd probably have done the same thing in your place. If I'd thought of it," he added. Then he said: "I'm—pretty green. Should we—identify ourselves, or something? I guess just the fact we're both here does that, though, doesn't it?"

"I should think it would," said Van Renneker, "though I am not familiar with these things myself."

"You're not, huh?" Lee rubbed his cheek a moment. "That makes it fine, doesn't it?" he murmured. "A couple of amateurs. Just dandy."

"I know." Van Renneker looked troubled. "I do not like it."

"Well," Lee said. He looked around and then across the street. He didn't know just what to say. "Well," he started, "this room is a good place, isn't it? You—you haven't—happened to turn up—you haven't found him, have you?" That angered him, faltering on that name, on saying it out loud, and he went ahead and added it right then. "Ehrhardt," he said. "Karl Ehrhardt." But he wished his voice had been a little steadier.

Van Renneker slowly shook his head. "No. No, I haven't, and I have been watching all I can for some time about ten days. But as you say, this room is a good place." From a drawer of the dresser behind him he got a small pair of field-glasses and handed them to Lee. "You see, you can examine closely everyone who enters or departs."

The glasses made the front of the restaurant seem only a few feet away. Lee could read some of the menu pasted in the window. You could see a man's little finger quite clearly, if you could get a look at it at all.

After a moment he put the glasses down and got the pack of cigarettes from the window-ledge and offered them to Van Renneker, and then took one out himself and held a match for both of them.

They got started talking then, and it didn't take very long: it became plain very quickly that neither of them could add anything to the meager information each already had.

The man whose name was Karl Ehrhardt, though he would not be using it, of course, was in this country, in Los Angeles, right now. He had been located as here only very recently, but it was almost certain that he had been here about a year, and possibly a little more. The description they had of him was quite general: medium height, medium weight, dark hair, blue eyes, in his thirties.

"Hell," Lee said, "that could be you, or Tommy Wells, or almost anyone, for looks."

And Van Renneker added: "And he could bleach his hair or change his height with special shoes."

There were but two definite things with which to work: Karl Ehrhardt went to the restaurant across the street sometimes; he communicated with others through some waiter there. And the first joint of the little finger of Ehrhardt's left hand was missing.

"It's so damned little," Lee said. He shook his head worriedly. "Well, with two of us at least we can cover absolutely everyone that goes in the place, every minute it is open; and one of us can be over there most of the time and check on the little fingers of all the ones that seem even faintly possible."

VAN RENNEKER didn't answer for a moment. He put out his cigarette. "I think I should remind you," he said then, "to be very cautious in all of this, but most especially while you are in the restaurant."

"I know," Lee said slowly. "I know. But we haven't time to be too cautious. Your man, you know, whoever it is that puts the finger on these guys—I don't know anything about him, I guess he would be in the Gestapo, wouldn't he, or Intelligence?—anyhow, at the same time he found out Ehrhardt was here, he found out, too, that he had almost finished. It can't be long. Not more than a week, we figured. So I guess maybe we'll have to take a chance or two."

"I know that there is not too much time," Van Renneker said with an unhappy, serious look. He got another cigarette and lighted it. "But—but you must remember," he said, "that this man—how—dangerous he is. I urge you to consider that it is certain that his waiter will be watching for such things, and that if you spend much time in the restaurant, trying to get a look at the little fingers of other customers, this waiter is sure to become aware of it; and then—" Van Renneker spread his hands in a little, limp, hopeless gesture. "It is hardly possible to defend oneself

against a person one does not know at all, when there is no way to tell how or when he may attack."

At length Lee Jonathan said slowly: "Well, yes, I guess that's—true. We'll have to be as careful as we can. Maybe with two of us, it won't be so bad; we can split up the time in the restaurant that way."

Van Renneker looked away, and when he answered it was a shade too casually: "I am afraid I shall not be able to help you for a time. I am sorry, but there is some business. . . . The friend I live with, Eric Wilben—I have promised him I would go and look at some place for location, and make pictures of them for him. I should do this; he has been very kind to me."

Lee was staring at Van Renneker uncertainly; tight wrinkles had stretched across his brow, and now smaller ones sprang out from the corners of his eyes.

"But look," he said anxiously, "you don't get it! There's a war going on. Hadn't you heard? And this guy—he's not just another Nazi agent. We've only got a little time, and if we don't find him, why then—*don't you see?* I mean, making pictures for a friend, something like that, why, it's fine, I guess, but—but with a thing—like this—you—"

He stopped then. His voice trailed slowly off because of what he saw in Van Renneker's eyes. He knew it was no use going on. He didn't know what to do, but he knew there was no use talking. Still, he made one more try.

"I—thought you were in Rotterdam," he said. "I thought your family—doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Van Renneker was pale, and his answer was a whisper: "Yes. Yes, it does." But that was all he said, and his eyes would not meet Lee's, and in a moment his face became stiff and expressionless.

"I am sorry," he said. "But I should not be of much help to you anyway, I fear. I said I was no good for this; I told him before I came here. I have done what I can, but I am glad that you are here so I can turn it over to you. This is not my kind of work, that is all. Also," he said, looking down and continuing to flip from the end of his cigarette ashes which were not there, "also I am a little bit afraid, I think. I am sorry," he said again.

Lee didn't say anything. He stood up slowly and moved past Van Renneker without looking at him, and put his hands on the edge of the dresser for a moment. Then he turned and took a couple of steps to the bed and lay down on it and looked up at the ceiling.

"In that case," he then said carefully, and his voice sounded odd to him, far away, "would you mind trotting along now? Would you mind getting the hell out of here?" His fingers had curled into tight fists, but he made them straighten out again, and put his hands underneath his head and went on looking up. It wouldn't do any good to get mad; fury and shouting wouldn't help. "It might not be a bad idea," he said, "to make it—sort of quick."

Van Renneker was on his feet, moving hesitantly toward the door. "I am sorry. I am simply not good for this, that is all. Please be careful. Please do not die carelessly and uselessly. You—"

"Get out!" Lee Jonathan said and it was a whisper, but the words had a harsh edge to them like a scream, and there was danger in the tone, and Van Renneker got out.

Lee heard the door close, heard the footfalls fade down the hall. After a long moment he got up slowly and went back to his chair and picked up the field-glasses and turned them on the door of the restaurant and looked through them blindly for a minute, as if he had done it in his sleep.

He was alone. Van Renneker had gone; and he, Lee Jonathan, was all alone. He hadn't meant to be; he hadn't thought he would be, but he was. Oh, he had known A.Y. might not be much; Wooten had told him that. That's why he was here, of course. But he had thought he would have A.Y. to help, a little bit; that he would have him for company, at least. But he was gone.

And Lee knew why. It wasn't because he was only a little bit afraid. Van Renneker was terrified!

Suddenly Lee's arms dropped and the glasses fell into his lap, and he said aloud in a little jerky, hollow way, "Huh-huh-huh!" in a sort of laugh which held no merriment.

He had had a cold chill. He hadn't known that people really had them, but he knew it now. Over his whole body the skin had twitched suddenly, in an instant, like that of a horse who wishes to disturb a fly, and he had felt it go cold, the whole surface of it, at the same time.

And then it was gone, and he was as limp and nerveless as a dummy, and he didn't blame Van Renneker for getting out.

Because Van Renneker was right. There wasn't a chance to identify Ehrhardt before Ehrhardt, through whichever waiter was his man, found out that he was trying to. And then—well, even Wooten had told him about that to start with. *"Never for one second forget this: if you do not identify Ehrhardt before he does you, it—will be fatal."* How the hell could he forget it?

He swallowed once, and his eyes fell for a moment and rested on the back of his right hand, which lay limply in his lap. It seemed bloodless; against the paleness of its skin its blond hairs stood out sharp and almost dark, and dotted all between them were countless tiny drops of sweat.

Chapter Five

FOR the rest of that Saturday, through Sunday and Monday, Lee Jonathan moved almost entirely in a state of tenseness, of breathlessness and fear, because he spent a great deal of time in those three days in the restaurant.

After that he spent most of his time sitting at the window of the hotel room, knowing that at any minute Ehrhardt might be finishing what he had come to do and that there was nothing he could do about it, nothing he could think of to do, but go on sitting there with the field-glasses, or sitting in the restaurant across the street trying to get a look at some man's little finger. That was a terrible way, a hell of a way to spend your time, he found, and there began to grow in him a sort of panic at his own helplessness, his impotence.

And still, in spite of all these things, he thought a lot about Shirley. Especially after Tommy Wells mentioned on Wednesday having seen her the night before with Charley van Renneker. He hadn't seen Van Renneker again himself; he didn't want to. And he didn't think about him much.

But he thought of Shirley Dayl, whether he wanted to or not. Memories of all the fun they used to have and all the things they used to do came creeping back, and the memory of the quarrel they had which went in a circle, endlessly, because she had three million dollars and he didn't have a dime.

He would have married her, though, anyhow, his way. But he couldn't do it hers. He had suggested farming, which would have been a productive, satisfying work of the kind that was right for him, and she could have provided the capital quite properly for that on any scale, he thought, since it would earn a fair return. It would mean living on the land, of course, seeing to it properly, but he had thought they'd have a good chance for happiness that way.

But she said she would die of boredom tied down to a farm or ranch eleven months or more a year, and she didn't see why he couldn't handle her affairs. She paid people to do that now. Or he could have a job in some enterprise which she had money in. Then he would be working all right, but the work wouldn't have to interfere with living as they pleased.

But that was the **one thing he** wouldn't do: he wouldn't be a phony, **making a pass at work** he didn't like and

wasn't good at, knowing himself he was a fake and knowing other people knew it too. Rather than that he'd live on her money frankly and openly and not work at all; at least that would be honest with himself, whether he liked it or not; and he even offered in the end, desperately, to do that, but she said he would never find it bearable and he felt that she was right.

So on it went: she said he was silly and stubborn and he said she wanted to make him an imitation of a man; she said he didn't love her and he said she was blind and unreasonable. Then finally she said condemningly that Marvin Richards didn't have to retire to the wilds to find *his* destiny; perhaps she would marry him—and that was when Lee had said all right, go ahead. And he had gone away after that without seeing her again, because while he knew it had been just another quarrel, it was another in a succession which had gone on for months and he was weary with them and couldn't see an end.

But none of that mattered now; that was done and gone and what mattered now was what she had said the other night and what he had not been able to tell her in reply, and the look on her face as she drew away from him, as she got out of the car and turned to run away from him up the steps and into the house.

These were the things that he kept thinking about, whether he wanted to or not, until he knew finally that he had to see her once more, right then, if only for an hour, a minute, any time. Those were the thoughts that brought him to his feet this Thursday night, at eight o'clock—which was an hour before the restaurant would close—and took him out and down the hall as deliberately as if it had been his intention all along.

Well, maybe it had been; he didn't know.

When he left the hotel, before he went to the parking-lot where he had left the roadster, he first made certain that he was not being followed. In the roadster, on the streets, he made certain once again that the roadster was not followed. This had become entirely routine with him now: he did it every time he left the house, the restaurant or the hotel and he tried to keep a sharp watch behind him all the time he drove. . . .

Shirley wasn't home. He hadn't telephoned. He didn't want to talk to her, or try to, on the telephone. He wanted to see her, face to face, to touch her hand if she would let him, while he talked to her.

He drove out to Tommy Wells'. He would simply call at intervals until the maid or butler said that she was home, and then he would go over there again. It wouldn't matter how late she came in. All that mattered right then, all that was essential, was that she would come in, some time.

When he came into the house from the garage, Howard appeared from the direction of the kitchen with a yellow envelope in his hand.

"Telegram has come while you are gone," Howard said. He held it out. "Maybe I bring something?"

Lee Jonathan said, "Oh," and took the envelope. "No, I guess not," he said. "Thanks, Howard."

Howard's smooth brown face broke briefly in a smile and he bowed a little bow and went away. Lee opened the message.

Well, he would not see Shirley Dayl that night. He wouldn't telephone; it wouldn't matter what time she got in.

The message was from San Francisco:

WILL TELEPHONE OR VISIT YOU TONIGHT GOOD WISHES
TYLER

For *Tyler* was Hendrik Wooten's middle name. Somehow he had been able to arrange his passage after all, and Lee would be here waiting when Hendrik Wooten came, of course.

He wandered into the library and sat down. He wondered if Shirley would have let him talk to her; he wondered, if she had, what she would have said.

He had been in the library about twenty minutes when he heard the crunch of tires in the driveway. He got up and went out to stand on the steps as the taxi stopped and its short, round passenger got out.

His body was round and his face was round, with round cheeks and, behind the thick lenses of his glasses, round blue eyes. In his movements he seemed neither hurried nor halting but even while he stood in repose, telling the driver to wait for him, he gave an impression somehow of being on his way to some place special.

He came up the two steps to Lee Jonathan and smiled at him while they shook hands, and his eyes smiled when his face did, but at the same time they did not lose a certain grave look they had, as if they saw always somewhat beyond the moment.

Lee took him inside to the library.

"We can talk in here, all right. Tommy's working, and the only servant here is the butler, and he won't come unless I ring. Is there anything you'd like? A drink or anything?"

"No," Hendrik Wooten said, "I will not have anything right now, thank you."

"It's damned good to see you," Lee said again. "How did you manage it?"

Wooten didn't answer that. He said only: "I have come directly from the airport. You have seen A.Y.?" And when Lee nodded, he asked hopefully: "You have identified Ehrhardt, located him?"

Lee said disgustedly: "I'm not even close. I've been alone, for one thing." He told about Van Renneker's quitting the minute he had showed up himself. "But I'm pretty sure Ehrhardt hasn't been there. It's not a big restaurant, and most of the customers are regulars. I checked all of them the first two or three days, and after that I just watched from the hotel and went across when a new one came along that might possibly be Ehrhardt. But it never was. You know," he added, "you hardly ever see a man's left little finger; even when you're trying to, it's not easy. I was afraid the waiter would catch on to what I was doing, but I guess he hasn't: I'm pretty sure no one has followed me."

WOOTEN watched him quietly as he talked, and now when he stopped, Wooten remained silent a moment longer, his expression thoughtful. When he did speak finally his voice was possibly a trifle softer.

"This man Van Renneker—" he said. "I believe that I would like to see him for a little bit." He nodded slightly. "Yes, I think I should see him as soon as possible. You could bring him to me?"

"Sure," Lee said, "if I can locate him. I think he's been out of town, but perhaps he's back by now. I'll get him if he is."

Hendrik Wooten nodded. After a second he said: "It might be best if you are not entirely definite about exactly who I am. Merely something to the effect, possibly, that I have just come from Batavia and wish to talk to both of you. You understand?"

Lee rubbed the side of his cheek a moment, gazing at his friend.

"All right," he said. "I'll remember."

"Good," Wooten said. "I will count on you. In the meantime there is a thing I must do also. I will not be long. I have reservations at the Hotel Etruria. I will be Kurt Terlig, there. And Lee—" He stopped and was silent again, not nervously, not moving at all, just sitting there quietly, looking past Lee's head.

In a moment Lee said: "Yes?"

Hendrik Wooten let his breath out slowly and turned his thoughtful gaze toward Lee. His expression was entirely sober now.

"Lee," he said, "I do not know what it is, but I know that there is something about this business which is very —peculiar. And I also know that there is very little time.

There may be—none at all. That is why I came—the way I did. Remember, there is no question of it; there is not *one second* available for wasting. And so, if it should happen that the man Van Renncker does not wish to come, I should like for you to bring him, nevertheless. I should like," he said, "for you to—insist. Do you understand?"

After a moment of returning Wooten's gaze thoughtfully, Lee said: "No, but that doesn't matter. I'll bring him, if I can find him. You don't need to worry about that. I understand that much." He didn't need to understand any more right then. He understood Hendrik Wooten, he knew the man through and through, knew the careful way he thought and made his judgments, and that was enough.

He stood up. "I'll get going, then, if that's all," he said.

Wooten rose also, his eyes on Lee, and he touched Lee's shoulder lightly as Lee walked with him to the door.

"I will not try to tell you," he said, "how satisfying it is to associate with you, Lee." He paused at the door. "I know you will be there as quickly as you can. Till then—" He gave Lee's shoulder another gentle tap and went down the steps.

Lee watched him get into the cab and watched the red ball of its tail-light grow smaller down the drive.

There was nobody like that little guy, that earnest kewpie-doll!

As happened so often when he saw him approaching, or watched him go away, Lee's mind flashed back to that first moment, that morning in the hotel room in Singapore when he sat on the edge of the bed with his head throbbing and his eyes stinging in the light, and realized, as the round little man in the bathroom came into focus, that he must be the little man he had talked to so long, and probably so idiotically, the night before.

He had referred to the night then in some apology, naturally assuming it was in order, but Hendrik Wooten said cheerfully: "It is of no consequence," pausing in his shaving to look Lee's way. "We must all become drunk at times, no?"

Lee had told him later, at breakfast, that it was risky to pick up a drunk and offer him a job this way, out of a clear sky with nothing at all to go on except that he claimed to know a little about sugar.

But Wooten had only smiled tranquilly. "I am no fool," he said. "From your face I know what you are like inside; and that is not changed, my young friend, by a little drinking and wandering about because something has disturbed you for a time. I can find other young men as well trained as you, or probably better, for Java, but that is not most important. It is—well, you will see: you will be good and you will like it."

And that had turned out to be true, certainly. Lee learned new things rapidly, and found that he could adapt what he knew from experience and college in Louisiana to new conditions quite readily, and he liked the work and didn't mind the heat. But above all he liked Hendrik Wooten and enjoyed working with him. Well before the first year had gone by, Lee knew that he could depend upon Wooten utterly and trust him implicitly, in any way.

Chapter Six

THE street was in the western section of Hollywood, a narrow street with large trees on either side which made it a sort of tunnel by meeting overhead. Eric Wilben's apartment was the entire second floor of a big stone house which was not far from the Boulevard.

A light showed there as Lee came down the little street, and parked. He had not telephoned before he left. Van Renneker might not like the idea of coming with him and there was no reason for giving him a chance to avoid that if he should want to.

Lee got the heavy automatic from the door-pocket of the roadster, by his side. He had worn a shoulder holster since his second day in town, but it was strange to him, and uncomfortable, so he carried the pistol in the door-pocket while he was driving.

He put it in the right-hand pocket of his topcoat now, rather than in the holster, and then got out and crossed the street and climbed the outside steps to ring Eric Wilben's bell.

Wilben opened the door.

"Hello," Lee said. "Is Charley van Renneker here?"

"Oh, hello there! Why, no, he is not, I am sorry. He has been looking at location places for me. I am not sure when he will be back. Won't you come in?" Wilben said. He stepped back from the door. "How about a drink?"

"Well, thanks," Lee said. "But—I guess I'd better not. Is there any way I could locate him, do you think?"

"I am sorry," said Wilben, "but I do not know of any. There are so many places he might be."

"I see," Lee said. "Well, thanks. I'll come back later, maybe, or call him up."

"I think now he will not be back tonight," Wilben said. "I am sorry. But when he does come, I will tell him you wish to get in touch with him."

"Well," Lee said, "well—that's fine. Uh—thanks. Good night."

When Lee got into the roadster, he started it and switched on its lights and drove off down the street. At the first corner he turned left, then stopped and turned around.

Then he came back onto Wilben's street, on the same side as the apartment, now. He drove quietly, close to the curb, and this time his lights were out. He stopped the car before he got to Wilben's place, where it could not be seen from the windows of the apartment but from where he himself could see the steps which led up to the apartment, and the driveway past the house. There might be no need whatever of all this, he knew; there very likely wasn't; but he didn't *know* there wasn't, and it could do no harm.

He sat low in the seat, so that he would not be apparent to passing cars or people, but there was little traffic on the street. He had a long wait; in fact he was almost ready to give up, when the coupé came.

It was after one o'clock when it came up the street in the direction the roadster faced, slowing as it passed, and it turned into the driveway which led back past the house.

In a moment a man came out along the drive and mounted the steps to the apartment and went in.

A minute or so later Lee Jonathan went up the steps again and pushed the button and heard the ringing of the bell inside.

Wilben came to the door. "Oh," he said when he saw Lee. "I'm sorry. He's not back yet. I guess there's no chance of him until tomorrow now."

Lee didn't go. He stood a moment, thinking. "This is kind of urgent," he said. "I believe I'll come in and wait, if you don't mind, just on the chance that he might show up tonight."

"Well," Wilben began reluctantly. "I am afraid that will hardly be—" But by that time Lee had moved calmly past him and was inside. "Well," Wilben said, "all right. If you feel you must, of course."

It was plain he didn't like it, but didn't want to seem rude. He closed the door and followed Lee through the little entrance hall into the living-room. It was a large, handsome room, carpeted entirely in a steel blue, with pale gray woodwork, and furnished with an expensive but severe simplicity.

"Please sit down," Wilben said. "Would you like a drink?"

"Well," Lee said, "thanks. I think I would. I'm sorry to have to—" He stopped.

A door opposite the entrance hall had opened, and now Van Renneker was standing in the room.

He was smiling apologetically. "It is you," he said. "That is all right. It is late, and I did not know what might be—you understand. I asked Eric to say I was not at home."

Van Renneker moved to a chair and sat down.

Wilben said with relief: "Now that this is settled, I think I shall go to bed, if you will excuse me. It is late."

Van Renneker said: "Of course, Eric." And Lee said: "I'm sorry I had to bother you."

"It is perfectly all right," Wilben said. "Do not apologize. It was no trouble. Good night, now."

He left, closing behind him the door through which Van Renneker had entered; and Van Renneker looked at Lee questioningly.

Lee shook his head. "I haven't found him," he said. "I don't think he's been at the restaurant. But that's not why I am here," he added. "There's a man here, from Batavia. He just got in. I guess he's one of the—organization, whatever it is. He wants to talk to both of us. Can you come now?"

Van Renneker said regretfully: "I am sorry, but it is quite late, and I am tired, and I must go early again in the morning. I think I had best stay here."

"I think this may be—pretty important," Lee said

"I am sure you would not ask me to come at such an hour," Van Renneker said, "if it were not. But I do not see how I can do it now. I owe Eric a great deal, and it is the least I can do to do what he asks me as well as I am able. Day after tomorrow—"

"But doesn't he know about this?" Lee asked. "Couldn't you tell him? If he's a refugee from the Nazis too, I should—"

"No, no," Van Renneker breathed. "I tell no one. I trust Eric implicitly, but if I should be wrong it would mean my life, that is all. You do not understand these Nazis, I am afraid."

"But this wouldn't take long," Lee said. "And—there's no risk."

Van Renneker looked down silently at his hands, which he folded together tightly and unfolded again. "Day after tomorrow," he said softly, "or after that, any time. It is only right now—" He looked up at Lee and gave a little shrug that pleaded for understanding.

Lee was standing then. His hands were resting in the pockets of his coat.

"I am sorry," he said. "I don't like to insist, but I'm afraid I'll have to. I'm afraid you'd better come."

Van Renneker's eyes were on Lee's face. They flicked for an instant down to the position of his hands and came back up again.

Lee's expression remained quite wooden.

Van Renneker smiled nervously. "Well," he said, "well, all right. I suppose I can, if you think it so important. But I do not like to." He shook his head and rose. "I will get a coat."

He went through the door Wilben had used.

After two or three minutes had gone by, Lee took a step toward the door, but as he did, it opened and Van Renneker came back through it, putting on a light overcoat as he came.

They went out, and Van Renneker tried the door to be sure it was locked behind them, and then they went down the steps together. Van Renneker suggested that he follow Lee in his car, but Lee said it would not be necessary—he would be glad to bring him back; and Van Renneker did not press the point.

They went along the walk to the street and turned down toward the roadster. Lee stayed just a half step or so behind Van Renneker. He paused a moment when they came to the car, while Van Renneker put out his hand, opened the door and put his foot on the running-board. There came a soft, swift sound behind him. And then—

Chapter Seven

A SHADED lamp stood on the low table at the end of the sofa and threw a bright light down onto the face of Lee Jonathan, who lay there quite inert.

A little below waist-level it struck the bodies of Van Renneker and Wilben, who stood near the end of the sofa, leaving them somewhat in shadows above that. They ceased talking as Lee stirred faintly, and moved to chairs which faced the sofa and seated themselves.

In a moment he stirred again, and moved an arm above his head and twisted partly on his side, making a small unintelligible sound. He still had his topcoat on, and it was bunched up around his shoulders in folds and wrinkles.

He brought the hand down from above his head; then his eyes opened uncertainly, blinking several times, and he lay there looking dully at the two men watching him.

He frowned with a vague, rather unhappy look and mumbled: "Hey—hey, what the hell? What—what—" When he tried to move his head, his frown deepened, at pain this time, and he said, "Ooo-wow!" softly and touched the back of his head gently.

But he went on looking at Van Renneker questioningly. Van Renneker stared back at him with eyes which were full of nervousness and fright. His face was pale.

"We were very lucky," he almost whispered. He licked his lips. "I heard them strike you and turned, and I—I suppose I cried out. It startled them a moment, and I ran, and Eric had heard and was coming, and someone raised a window and called, and they ran to their car and drove away." He wiped a hand across his brow and drew a long breath, shakily. "Very lucky," he said again.

"I had not yet undressed," Wilben explained. "I came in a hurry, calling. It was all the noise, I think, that sent them away."

Lee was still frowning, harder now, and he tried to sit up a little, but he couldn't quite make it, and he held himself propped on one elbow. "You mean—Ehrhardt?" he said. "It was—his people?"

"Who else?" said Van Renneker. "The waiter has become suspicious. I told you that." He folded one hand into the other, clasping it tightly. "What am I to do now? They have connected me with you. Now it is not safe for me to go out, to stay here, or anything. I should never have taken part in this," he said distractedly. Sweat stood on his brow. "I will tell your F.B.I. Maybe they will protect me, maybe they will allow me to stay in prison. Do you think so?"

"Maybe so," Lee mumbled. "Maybe we'd better. It might be enough to go on." He didn't say any more right then. He tried to sit up again, and made it this time, but his head hurt, and he bent forward and held it in his hands. In a minute it cleared a little, and he said: "I didn't think anyone had ever followed me. I'm sorry." He sat up a little straighter. "We'd better get going, I expect."

Van Renneker gasped. "Now! After this? When they will be watching? You are mad!"

"I don't know what this is about," Wilben put in, "but it would seem very foolish to go after what I have seen. I would not do it."

Van Renneker said: "No! No, I cannot. It is madness."

Lee's head went on hurting, and thinking and moving were an effort still. He just continued to sit there staring at Van Renneker for a moment, feeling sluggish and slow and stupid. His hands fumbled their way down into the folds of his topcoat, into the pockets. They were empty.

The trace of a frown crossed Lee's face, and Van Renneker said: "Your—gun; it fell from your pocket. It is on the table behind you. If you go, you may need it. I hope not. And I cannot come with you. Not even if you would shoot me now, to make me come, I cannot do it. I will not."

Lee turned slowly and picked up the pistol and turned back with it again. His head was clearing, but he still felt very confused, as if there were something wrong, something phony about all of this. For a long silent moment he sat there gazing down at the pistol lying in his hands.

And as he did, there appeared in his mind a small fragment of an idea which immediately exploded into a possibility which made him almost start visibly, catch his breath audibly. But he didn't quite. He just sat there very still a second longer; then he shoved the gun down into the pocket of his topcoat and stood up.

His mind said to do that and he did, and it required no acting to make it seem that he was still feeling shaky; for he was.

"Well, if you won't," his voice said to Van Renneker, "then you won't, I guess, but I should think that—"

Suddenly his knees buckled, and he fell forward; and when Van Renneker said, "Oh!" and reached out to help him, he caught Van Renneker's wrists and held them for a moment, steadying himself on his knees.

Then he pulled himself erect and let go of Van Renneker and muttered, "I guess I'm a little woozy, yet." And he stood there swaying just a trifle, with his left hand up to his forehead, shielding his eyes.

HE HAD to shield them; he had to have a moment while he tried to subdue this combination of sick emptiness and terrible excitement which threatened to make him start any second trembling uncontrollably. It was true; *it had been true all the time!*

What had gone wrong, what had become of A.Y., he didn't know; but not three feet away, concealed behind the pale face and fear-filled eyes of Charley van Renneker, was a man as cold and deadly as any man can be. For he had seen the neat false tip on that little finger from six inches away; and Van Renneker was Karl Ehrhardt, with no chance of a mistake at all.

Slowly he let his right hand sink into the pocket of his topcoat. He tried to make it seem this had no significance. His fingers touched the gun.

And then he caught himself in time: he left it there unused.

Instead he made himself bring his left hand down from his eyes and say, "I think I'll be—all right, now," while he looked at the other as dully as he could.

The way his heart was pounding and the queer clammy feel he had, he was sure it must be obvious that he knew the man was Karl Ehrhardt as if the name were written on his chest in letters six inches high.

But Ehrhardt only continued to look at him in the unhappy manner of Van Renneker and said, "Perhaps you had best sit down," so he went on, of course.

He gave what he wanted to be a short, indifferent laugh, though it sounded only jittery and scared to him, and he said, "You'd better get under the bed, I guess," and started for the door as deliberately and calmly as he could. "No wonder Holland was a push-over."

And Ehrhardt said only: "I am sorry, but I am not the right man for this, that is all. I cannot help it."

"Sure," said Lee Jonathan. "Nuts!" he said, and held his breath and went on out the door.

And Ehrhardt let him go.

He shut the door and went on down the steps and on out to the street. It was awfully hard to keep from breaking into a run. He walked to the roadster and got in and turned on the lights and drove up the street, past the house, so Ehrhardt would see if he were watching.

He turned the corner and stopped immediately and took the clip out of the automatic. It was empty, and he shivered just a little as he loaded it again, for he had come within a breath of trying to use the gun on Ehrhardt, of not realizing in time that it would be fatal, that Ehrhardt would have let him have only an empty gun, to see if he would try to use it, if he were suspicious.

He dropped the pistol into his pocket and drove on around the block hurriedly, almost recklessly. He switched out his lights as he turned again into the street the apartment was on, and parked some yards short of it in the dark shadows of the trees. This time he left his motor running, idling very quietly.

He got out and hurried up the street, on grass at the edge of the sidewalk, making no sound. Ehrhardt would be leaving quickly now, at any time; for Ehrhardt would never have let him go when he might be suspicious, or become so, unless he would never need to appear as Charley van Renneker again, and was certain there was nothing Lee could do to hamper him before his work was done.

But if he could get into the garage before Ehrhardt came down, now that he had a loaded gun again, he might be able—

But he couldn't. When he was almost directly in front of the house, the door opened at the second floor, and someone came down the steps while Lee pressed against a tree and didn't move.

The man turned back along the drive. Lee couldn't be sure whether it was Ehrhardt or not.

The yard of the house was mostly open, but near the sidewalk, about ten feet from the drive and across it, there was a thick bush, taller than a man, and Lee slipped quickly up the parkway and pressed himself into that bush now.

There was time for nothing else. The sound of the motor starting came even as he reached the bush.

The automatic was in Lee's hand now, and he brought it higher, setting himself solidly, comfortably, his right foot ahead of his left.

The car was backing out along the drive.

He felt terribly tight inside, and there was something quite horrible and unreal about this, but he saw that his arm, curiously, was entirely steady.

The coupé's tail-lights came into view and moved past, and it was Ehrhardt. He was clearly recognizable in the glow of the headlights reflected from the house, leaning out of the window, looking back and down as he guided the car along the drive.

He was a perfect target as he moved before Lee, ten feet away and entirely unaware of him. His head floated gently past like a target duck in a shooting-gallery, the bridge of his nose riding steadily on the pistol's sight.

And there was still no trembling in Lee, no nervousness; everything was exactly the way he had planned it, had meant for it to be.

Except that nothing happened. Except that he simply didn't pull the trigger, and the coupé backed on out into the street and turned unhurriedly and drove away.

Lee just stood there for a second, and all he felt was a small, queer surprise, a sort of stupid wonder. For he had absolutely meant to shoot Karl Ehrhardt then.

But he stood a second only; then he was dashing toward the roadster and there was no time for worrying about what he had done or why. He couldn't let that coupé get away. Ehrhardt was gone and he had let him go—and no matter where he went or what might happen when they got there, he had to follow him if it were possible.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOUTH they went, through the night. Once on a stretch of boulevard where traffic was thick, the roadster came close enough behind the coupé to make its license legible, but after that, it did not hang too near.

For as they left Los Angeles and moved on in these small morning hours, the traffic thinned and finally almost did not exist. So now the roadster's lights began to change: when the coupé was hidden by a curve or hill the roadster's lights would change to yellow fog-lights or dim parking-lights, and sometimes it ran with none at all.

Thus the driver of the coupé could have no indication that a single car was following him persistently. And if Ehrhardt suspected it, Lee Jonathan could detect no sign of this in the manner of his driving.

They came onto the shore road presently, and held it down the coastline for an hour or so; wispy fog swirled about them now and then, with the sound of the surf on their right at times, and occasionally its white foam faintly visible.

Then they swung inland. Shortly the road began to climb and twist, and after a time it was not so wide or well paved as it had been at first.

The country became much less inhabited; few dwellings were visible and rarely a filling-station or other business place. Lee drove entirely without lights now, for here there was no other traffic whatever; and even changing lights behind Ehrhardt would probably seem suspicious to him now.

Then where a bedraggled little filling-station and store stood in a Y of the road, the coupé veered from pavement onto gravel. Lee almost missed that. He topped a rise barely as the coupé's tail-light twisted to the left, in the last part-second of its visibility.

The gravel road climbed too; much of the time it ran along the mountainside, and there was a sharp drop on the right that varied from a few feet to several hundred yards. This road curved a good deal too, as it climbed, and it was harder to keep his eyes on that darting, flitting dot of red, trying not to come too close, trying not to lose it, and watching intently for turn-offs when it was not visible.

He didn't see the truck; that is, he didn't see it soon enough. Just as he rounded a sharp curve it came, abruptly, its lights flooding him blindingly; suddenly there it was, with a rush and a roar, lunging from a side road to his left, fearful and paralyzing, barging out of the night not five yards away, so that it might catch the roadster broadside and fling it out into the darkness, to bounce and roll down a hundred yards of mountainside.

But it didn't catch it squarely. Lee's foot came down on the throttle, and he swung the wheel hard left, and the truck took him a little back of center because of that. And the roadster spun instead of turning over.

It slid shudderingly, and gravel shot up before it in a wide spray; then Lee felt the wheels go out over nothing and hang there while the truck lumbered on down the road, around the curve.

He shut the motor off. He did it very gently; he was afraid to shift his weight, almost afraid to breathe.

The rear wheels stopped spinning in the air, and everything was quiet. Extremely quiet! He could hear and feel the pounding of his heart.

The roadster was resting on its undercarriage, and any move might send it plunging down the mountainside, or its own weight might take it any second.

After a long moment, very gently, he began opening the door beside him; very lightly he twisted in the seat and put a foot outside and slid it down past the running-board to touch the ground; very gradually he transferred his weight to it, and then suddenly stood back.

And he had only time to let his breath out and in the next second catch it with a gasp again and spin around, for he had heard the gears and motor of the truck. It was coming back.

Below the curve it had turned around, and now it was coming back, and Lee Jonathan was at the front of the roadster, pushing against it with all his strength. For if it were here when the truck came around the curve, the men who had tried to kill him would know they had not done it, and that might make things pretty dangerous.

But it wasn't balanced so delicately as he had thought. It didn't give. He dug his feet into the soft earth of the roadside and got his body almost horizontal, with his knees bent, and then he tried to straighten out his knees.

He succeeded then. The roadster went over and out of sight, and as it fell, the truck's headlights stabbed out into the darkness past the shoulder of hill the road curved around right there, and he had time only to scramble half over the edge himself and crouch behind a too-small bush, clinging to it and hoping it would not give way, and that if the truck stopped, the bush would conceal him.

The truck was around the curve then, and its lights were on him full, and it did not seem possible that he would not be seen.

Then the truck stopped, and two men got out and came around in front of it, halting not eight feet from where Lee clung, and stood looking at the spot where the roadster had gone over.

He could see the men's feet clearly, and suddenly he grew rigid as stone and didn't breathe at all, for he was staring at his own footprints—they were right in front of those two men and not three feet ahead of them; they were deep in the soft earth and stood out very plainly in the truck's bright lights; it seemed to Lee utterly impossible that the men would not notice them.

But they didn't, for the simple reason that they were too close, that they didn't look down at their feet. They only stared for a moment more at the place where the roadster had gone over, and then muttered something to each other Lee couldn't catch, and turned back to the truck again.

Lee slipped the automatic back into his shoulder holster and got a grip on the bush with both hands and tried to get his feet set solidly. He was ready when the truck's motor roared.

As it passed him, as he was in darkness once more, he gave a pull on the bush and a hard lunge up the bank, but his last step on the hillside was not on solid ground. His foot shot down beneath him and he sprawled forward, half on the road, half hanging over the bank.

He didn't quit. He went on clawing, and he scrambled out onto the road and ran up it after the truck; and he gained on it until its tail-board, over which he could climb easily, was not more than six feet from him.

Then it began to pull away. Almost as he was reaching out, it drew away a little bit and then a little more. And there was nothing he could do but run until his whole chest ached and his head throbbed with pounding blood and the truck was gone beyond any hope of catching it. Its tail-light disappeared around a curve.

He dropped down in the middle of the road. It was still dark, but above him the stars had begun to fade.

THE twilight of dawn came, gray and quiet and slightly misty; gradually it extended Lee Jonathan's range of vision, but there was nothing new to see: the hillsides and the valleys, gray and lifeless-looking, the twisting road ahead and back of him.

He had seen no light since the Y in the road, and that was about six miles from where the truck had hit him. As he walked back now, three times he passed lanes which turned off from the road; but he followed none of them, for they had not been used much recently, and he saw no telephone lines anywhere.

Finally, in sunlight, tired, dusty and somber-looking, he came to the store and filling-station at the Y, and there a telephone line led in.

The place was not open yet, but he banged on the door and peered in and called.

In a moment a voice somewhere replied, "All right," and presently a door in the back of the store opened, and a man came through the store to the front door and opened it. He was a rather beefy fellow in overalls, red-faced and sleepy.

"I want to use your telephone," Lee said.

The other yawned and pulled the door wider and stepped aside. He gestured toward the phone and stretched his arms sleepily.

"Break down?" he asked.

"Yeah."

Lee put in a call for Kurt Terlig at the hotel in Los Angeles, and after holding the line some minutes, he was informed that Mr. Terlig was not in.

"Shall I keep trying to call you later?"

He thought a moment. "All right," he said. "Call me if you get him."

He hung up, and turned to the counter and bought a pack of cigarettes.

"I broke down, up the road a bit," he said. "Do you know anyone I could rent a car from for a while?"

"Well," the man said, "maybe from my son when he gets here. He'll be along pretty soon now."

Lee gestured with a match as he shook it out. "Where does that road go, anyhow?"

"Oh, it goes on through the mountains," the man told him, "but it aint much of a road."

"Many people live up in there?" Lee asked.

The man shook his head. "Not for quite a spell. A few on the other side."

"What are those roads that lead off from the highway, though?"

"Oh, them's fire-roads, mostly. And then there's some cattle run on this side sometimes."

"I see," Lee said. "Well, I think I'll wait outside here where it's warmer."

The man nodded and started for the rear of the store again; and Lee went out into the sunlight and sat on a bench there near the point of the fork in the road. When the store-owner's son came with the car, maybe he could find out something by going back up that gravel road. It was a thin chance, but he didn't see anything else to do. He would like to get in touch with Hendrik Wooten, but he couldn't go back to town, or wait to hear from him, when he knew Ehrhardt was up that road somewhere.

But he didn't have to worry about Wooten—for Wooten got in touch with him. When he had been sitting there for fifteen minutes, Wooten simply came driving up the paved road from the coast and stopped when he saw him, and said, "Hello," quite calmly as Lee ran out to the car.

"I couldn't get in touch with you," Lee said rapidly, excitedly. "Damn it, I had the guy. How did you know where I was? How did you get down here?"

"I AM here looking for Ehrhardt," said Hendrik Wooten. "Do you mean that you know who he is? And that he came this way?"

"Hell, yes!" Lee said bitterly. "He 's just Van Renneker, is all—just the guy I thought was A.Y. all the time while he was going cheerfully on with his business, and I was looking for him in that damned restaurant." He was in the car by then, and he slammed the door and pointed. "Up that way. Did you know him? Did you know that?"

Wooten put the car into gear and turned it up the gravel road.

"I found it out," he said. "Tonight! After you left Surabaya, a letter came to the address from A.Y. It said he thought he had identified Ehrhardt, but that he was afraid Ehrhardt might have become suspicious. He didn't know what to do. He said he would put everything he could learn, as he learned it, into letters for Benjamin Zenziger from Arthur Young, General Delivery. I did not understand what you told me of A.Y. when I first got here, b: I did not think it could be anything like this. But I got those letters from the post office while you went to bring A.Y., and they named Ehrhardt as this Van Renneker definitely. They also named this route; and so, when I had not heard from you by four this morning, I came on this way alone."

Lee said softly, half to himself: "That's how Ehrhardt knew, of course; that's how he could be A.Y. He caught A.Y. and found out—" He stopped. "I guess that was—pretty tough on the guy, maybe?"

"I'm afraid it was," Wooten said. "But he knew the risk he took. And he did not reveal the letters. We may hope," he finished quietly, "he did not suffer too much before he died."

"I guess," Lee said bleakly, "I guess there's not much chance he—didn't die."

Wooten didn't answer because there was no need, and Lee tried not to think any more right then about this man he had never known, who had been hurt and killed because he was willing to embark upon a job for which he had known well he was not competent, simply because he knew it was a job which should be done.

"He should have reported to your Federal Bureau of Investigation, of course," Wooten said, "for he had sufficient information. But I suppose he was waiting to hear from the red-haired man. Perhaps," Wooten said heavily, "I should have reported to them myself, but—the only passport I could arrange in time is fraudulent, you see. If they had delayed while they investigated me, there might have been no one looking for Ehrhardt at all; and under the circumstances, for I could not tell them much definite, they would have been entirely justified in some delay. I was afraid to risk it. But the letters from A.Y.," he said, "are in an envelope addressed to them, and it will be mailed from the hotel if I do not return tonight."

"Hell," Lee said angrily, "I had him! I had him cold."

HE told Wooten what had happened at Eric Wilben's apartment.

"I couldn't make it to the garage in time to try to take him," he said, "but I could have shot him, and I meant to. I knew what it might mean to let him get away." He suddenly struck a match furiously, and held it to a cigarette and then blew it out with smoke.

"I knew that damned well," he said grimly, "and—and I didn't shoot. That's all. I just didn't shoot."

Wooten said quietly: "Do not regret too bitterly. It could have been the same with me or anyone. He was a sitting bird. I understand. Besides, I think it is better that you did not kill him then. Be sure that German has his plans arranged so that they would have been carried out, whether you had shot him or not. But now, if we can find where he has gone, we may be able to prevent that."

"Yeah," Lee said moodily, "*if* we can find him! We've only got a whole damned mountain-range to look in, and no idea what he's trying to do, or anything."

"It is not quite that bad," Wooten told him. "A.Y. learned two things which may be of help to us. Ehrhardt sometimes met other men in a small park near the restaurant, and A.Y. was able once to hide where he could overhear them. He heard enough to make him think that aircraft plants are the objectives, so our guess seems right on that; but the main things are that he learned that somehow a number of motor-trucks are part of their plan—at least nine, he thought—and that he followed Ehrhardt on this route a number of times. He was afraid to follow too closely or too far, but he could go ahead of him as far as he knew the way each time, and he had reached the fork back there when his last letter was written."

"Then—hey!" Lee said with a new excitement. "Then maybe we can turn him up, at that. If it's a place he's come to that often, if that many trucks are there, then there'll be a traveled road leading in, for one thing, and there aren't many of those, up through here."

Wooten had been nodding as Lee spoke. "Yes," he said, "that is true. I will not be surprised if we should find this place."

They rode in silence for a hundred yards or so.

"I guess," Lee said then, "that A.Y. found it, finally. I guess maybe the last time down he—followed Ehrhardt right to it."

"Yes," Wooten answered softly, "I think perhaps that is what happened to A.Y."

Chapter Nine

THEY stopped for a moment at the point where the truck had hit Lee, though they didn't get out; and after that, they carefully examined each side road they came to. None of them showed any signs of either heavy or recent travel until they had come over a rise and down a bit into a high wide valley.

There a little road wound off to the right across the flat, through green brush and trees, straight for a steep wooded ridge. There was no sign of the road's destination, or sign of people anywhere that they could see; but it plainly had been in some use recently.

They decided to investigate it, and turned in and drove along through cheerful morning sunlight. The day was so gracious, the country so peaceful, it seemed quite impossible that the road could lead to anything not entirely innocent. They came to the ridge after a bit more than a mile, and the little road curved left there to follow along beside it; but before Wooten had made that turn, Lee Jonathan said, "*Wait!*" in a quick, queer tone; and then when Wooten stopped, he sat for a moment staring all about him with a gathering intentness in his eyes.

He spoke very softly. "I've been here before," he said.

In a moment he went on. He wasn't looking at Wooten, and his voice was rather toneless, but it was well controlled.

"A girl I know," he said, "has a fishing-camp down here. She doesn't use it, but it was part of the estate her father left her. She lends it to her friends sometimes. This road goes along beside the ridge five miles and swings around its end, and comes back that much more. It's a valley over there too, very narrow, just a cañon, with a stream through it that's full of trout. There's a lodge there. That's all," he said. "That's all the road leads to."

Said Wooten, "It is well traveled for a road like that," and Lee nodded and said: "Yes."

After a moment he pointed to the right. "An old boy who was a sort of caretaker and guide used to live down there about a mile. There's a trail from there that goes up the ridge and down the other side. It takes an hour or more, and it's tough climbing both ways," Lee said, "but you can get a sort of bird's-eye view."

So they went that way, of course. Wooten turned right along a trail which was rough and unused and had almost disappeared.

They drove without speaking, and after the mile which Lee had mentioned, they came abruptly on a shack which stood half hidden in some trees. There was no sign of habitation; the door was open, the shack empty.

They parked their car and started up the foot-trail behind the shack.

It was as steep and tough as Lee had said it would be; brush had encroached on the trail, almost hiding it at times, reaching out and grabbing at them, scratching them, tearing their clothes. But they stood, finally, on top of the ridge, just over it, looking down.

The ridge was quite steep on this side too, and at the bottom the cañon in most places was barely wide enough for the stream they could see in sparkling patches here and there through the trees, and for the little road that ran along beside it. But it widened in one place, right below them on their side, and the lodge stood there in a small comfortable space of level green.

It all had a toy look from where they stood, the stream something for a garden, and the building of the lodge a house for dolls. But Hendrik Wooten had field-glasses with him, which brought the bottom of the cañon considerably closer. He looked through them for some minutes before he handed them to Lee.

Even with the glasses Lee saw no sign of life; and no sound came up to them.

He said: "Well, there it is. There's a sort of shed roof for cars to park under, back against the hill where we can't see it, but there wouldn't be room for but a few we couldn't see. I don't see how there could be a place for many trucks down—" He stopped, and his eyes half closed and a wrinkle came between them in his brow.

He looked at Hendrik Wooten. "Maybe there is," he said. "There might be. There's a cave, or there used to be, anyhow, and it was pretty big, I recall. It's in this ridge, back of the house." He frowned again. "And there's another thing: I think there's an opening in it up high. I think there may be a peephole we can use."

Hendrik Wooten was looking down at the building and the stream, and he gave a little nod. All he said was: "You should go first, I believe, if you know the trail."

They started down. . . .

It was difficult going. Though there was a good deal of green brush, enough for concealment most of the time, much of their trail was very steep, and frequently they had to trust their weight to the brush, which never seemed too well anchored in the loose soil of the mountainside.

It took longer than it had to come up the other side. And when they were finally down near the camp, they had to proceed even more slowly still, careful not to dislodge loose dirt or rocks which might tumble down to betray them.

Once on a week-end here four years ago the party had explored the cave, and a glow of daylight had shown high on a wall. Lee Jonathan remembered coming out and climbing up the hill with Tommy Wells to look for the opening, and they had found it.

Remembering, he stopped now, and Hendrik Wooten stopped back of him and waited silently. Lee looked around. They were only about thirty feet above the roof of the lodge now, at one end of a sort of shelf. It ran off to their left, widening to several yards and becoming nearly level at one point, like a giant's toe-hold cut into the steep mountainside.

Below them the lodge lay a little to their left also; and making his guess from that and what he could remember of the cave, Lee turned and moved along the shelf, and Hendrik Wooten followed him. Very carefully they moved, in deference to ears that might be listening below.

Presently Lee stopped. The bank to their left had been almost perpendicular; but here, at about the level of his head, it went beyond that and sloped in a little bit. Tall bushes grew against it, and he parted them; and waist high, the bank sloped in more sharply still and made a little recess there, just as he had remembered it.

He moved softly between the bushes, and Hendrik Wooten followed him and lay down on his round stomach beside Lee, facing the bank and half under it, and he wriggled forward gently when Lee did, carefully, until he too was well into the recess, and his eyes came to the edge of the opening and he could see suddenly the whole brightly lighted cavern forty feet below.

They lay very still. Neither man spoke.

IT was an incredible scene to come on suddenly, here inside a mountain, at a remote fishing-camp: There were men down there, a dozen of them, and there were trucks in a double row; and down one side of the cave ran a long workbench with vises and tools on it. At the cave's end, against the wall, there was a pile of small lumber from broken boxes, and on some of them they could read the lettering. Powerful gasoline lanterns hung well above the whole scene and bathed it in a strong white light. The men moved about among the trucks, obviously preparing them for something, and there was a smell of paint in the air.

For several minutes Lee and Hendrik Wooten lay there looking down, counting and estimating and memorizing, and then slowly and together, without speaking, they wriggled back from the opening again. Together they stood up and came out through the bushes and moved on several yards back up the shelf.

Even then Lee spoke in a whisper, and his eyes were large.

"Do you know what it is? Have you any idea what's going on?"

Wooten shook his head. "No. But that is a fine machine-shop, and work has been going on for a long time down there. There are fifteen of those trucks, and there must be a huge amount of dynamite, to leave that pile of torn-apart packing-cases by the wall."

"Yes," Lee breathed. "Yes, tons of it, easily."

Wooten was frowning. "I think perhaps each truck will be a tremendous bomb on wheels." Then, a bit impatiently: "But that does not matter now; we do not have to know. We have something to say now that is definite, and it is time for us to get out of here and report to your Federal Bureau men."

"Yes," Lee said. "The sooner the better. We'd be chumps to try anything ourselves. Of course," he said, "I may just feel that way because I'd be—pretty scared; but—"

Wooten shook his head emphatically. "No! For only the two of us to go down there, unless it were the final, only chance, would be sheer insanity." He moved aside for Lee to pass him. "Let's be moving."

Lee nodded, and they moved off along the shelf, and presently turned up again and began to climb.

They stopped once, a little less than halfway up, at a point from which they could see the house below them clearly, and the stream at that point and the road beside it. It looked deserted and quiet and innocent.

Then Wooten touched Lee's arm and nodded, and Lee turned to the left and saw a toy car on a toy road, crawling toward the lodge. They watched it silently. Hendrik Wooten brought up his glasses and followed it through them.

It was an open car, with the top down. A woman was driving it. Lee could tell that much. There was a sort of unreality about it—the only moving thing in their whole range of vision.

It came finally into the little space before the lodge and stopped, and the girl opened the door, and a man came down the porch steps from the lodge to cross the grass and take her hands as she descended, and Hendrik Wooten gave the glasses to Lee Jonathan.

He didn't need them. He knew the girl; he knew the way she waved, the quick grace of every movement, the way her head was held—a dozen other little things he could never mistake or forget.

The glasses only brought her closer, showed him the smile on Shirley Dayl's face and on Ehrhardt's as he took her hands and held them, as they stood that way a moment, talking and laughing a little, then turning toward the lodge with their hands still touching. They went inside.

Wooten said: "That is the girl?"

Lee Jonathan said woodenly: "That's the girl."

PRESENTLY Wooten said tentatively, "Well—" and made a movement to go on. But Lee didn't turn, and Wooten waited, and after a little Lee said, half to himself: "I guess just one of us could call the F.B.I. all right—as good as two."

Wooten did not answer, and the next time Lee spoke to him: "You don't mind, do you—going on alone?"

He answered then. "No," he said slowly, "I do not mind. But I should like to suggest that it is possible you do not owe this girl anything if she has allied herself with Ehrhardt."

Lee looked down a moment at the glasses in his hand, and then turned and handed them to Wooten. "No," he said, "I guess maybe I don't, if she's done that."

"And they are certain to have the place well guarded," Wooten said. "I am afraid you could not accomplish much, except possibly to die from getting shot."

"Yes," Lee Jonathan admitted tiredly, "I suppose that's right." He didn't move.

After a moment Hendrik Wooten took his hand and said, "Good luck to you!" Then he turned and started up the ridge again.

Lee Jonathan went down.

Chapter Ten

HE went slowly again, carefully again, stopping at each point from which the camp was visible, to watch it steadily for minutes at a time. He could see no movement anywhere. But people going from the cave to the lodge or back would be hidden from his view.

Once more at the level of the shelf he moved along it a few yards; and from this point, by crawling to its edge, he could see the near side of the lodge and some of the narrow space between it and the entrance to the cave.

The lodge was a dark-stained wooden building of one story, with a shingled roof. It lay entirely to his left. Along the side near the mountain was a row of small bedrooms; and in front of these, on the side that faced the stream, was a long living-room and a good-sized dining-room. The kitchen was on the end of the building nearest Lee Jonathan; and between it and the big sycamore that stood right below him was perhaps a hundred feet of open ground.

For about five minutes he stayed where he was, looking down—but nothing happened and no one came in sight. He went on. His descent was quite steep again, but there was still a little cover, and he could keep the big sycamore between himself and the lodge. And when he had come to it, he saw that it would have another use. It grew out of the hill itself, right at its base, and spread at a low angle toward the lodge. Twenty feet or more of the open distance to be covered he could make along a low limb of the tree.

He climbed into it and moved slowly along the limb which pointed toward the kitchen, only partly hidden by the leaves, and able to see to either side himself. Ahead of him, almost at the limb's end, a clump of bushes stood below, and he could drop down and crouch behind them and be shielded there from any eyes within the lodge. Or from the eyes of someone in the entrance to the cave. As someone was now. For a man was standing there.

The road came past the end of the lodge and around a clump of tall bushes, and no one approaching from the front could see where it went into the hillside; even if someone wandered in here by mistake, so long as they kept him from getting behind the lodge, he would never suspect the presence of the cave. The entrance tunnel made a curve, and you couldn't see into the cave, but Lee could see the tunnel had been enlarged a lot to admit the trucks.

The man was standing in its mouth, leaning against the rock side, smoking a cigarette. The open space of eighty feet between the lodge kitchen and the bushes underneath the tree was right before his eyes.

Lee went out along the limb very slowly, watching the man. After a couple of minutes the man stepped carefully on his cigarette and disappeared around the curve of the entrance, back into the cave. Lee moved on gently the few feet to the point from which he would drop down behind the bushes, and sat there quietly for several minutes.

He could see two windows of the kitchen now. There was someone in it; he could catch a glimpse of movement in the windows now and then. Whoever it was would almost certainly see him before he could cross the open space from the bushes to the kitchen's small screened porch.

If he could wait for night and darkness, he could probably make it to the lodge and get inside without too much difficulty. But he couldn't wait for night; he couldn't even wait for noon. If there were any point to his coming down here at all, he had to get into the lodge and do it now. Wooten would hurry, and he would telephone from that

little store. It might not be more than a few hours before he got here with the agents from the F.B.I.—and before the shooting started.

So he would simply have to hope the man in the kitchen would not look from the window for a moment, and no one would come to the entrance of the cave. He glanced toward the kitchen and then turned his eyes on the entrance of the cave. He leaned slowly forward.

He caught himself just in time.

The door of the little screened porch had opened and slammed shut with a bang, and a man was coming out across the yard, across the open space, straight toward Lee Jonathan. He was in shirt-sleeves and wore an apron and a small white cap, and he carried a garbage pail and spade. He came on around the bushes and set the pail down and began to dig a hole. Bent over, digging, he was not visible from the lodge or from the entrance of the cave. Standing up, he would be.

Gently, Lee Jonathan took the automatic from his shoulder holster and held it in his hand. Very carefully, silently, he got his feet in under him. He was sitting on his heels, on the limb. Slowly he began to lean forward again, farther and farther.

He dropped from the limb straight down without a sound. At the instant he touched the man's shoulders, he struck with the pistol-barrel and then the two of them lay motionless on the ground, one limp, one tense.

Lee Jonathan rolled slowly off the man, and remaining crouched, removed the cap and apron and put them on himself. He took off his own coat and his shoulder holster, and stuck the automatic in his belt over his right hip, so that it would not be visible to anyone by the cave or in the lodge, as he approached it.

He parted the bushes at the top enough to see that no one was in sight. Then he picked up the bucket and the spade, and stooping a little because he was taller than the other man, he walked out into the open toward the kitchen.

A man came around the curve of the entrance to the cave, and sitting down on his heels, lighted a cigarette. Lee Jonathan saw that from the corner of his eyes. He didn't look right at the man, but with a tiny sane part of his mind, he wondered at the terrible compulsion that he felt to do just that.

He fought it off. And he made himself walk calmly, too, without haste. This was very hard to do, and coupled with the excitement and fear which filled him, it made him break into sweat suddenly, with a queer, cool feeling over all his skin. But he did it, anyhow, because he knew his chance was thin enough to start with, and hurrying or showing his full face to the man would only make it worse.

He reached the lodge. As he did so, the man at the cave called suddenly, "Hey, Max—" but Lee Jonathan just opened the screened door to the little porch and went on through as if he hadn't heard, and set the pail and spade down there by some cans of gasoline, and moved on into the kitchen.

There he could draw a deep breath quickly and stand so that he could see through a window the man who had been sitting in the entrance to the cave. The man was standing now, and looking toward the kitchen porch. For a long moment he didn't move at all.

Then he turned and went back into the hill.

But it gave Lee Jonathan no breathing-space. For even as he turned from the window, there came to him the sound of someone walking, coming toward the kitchen, down the hall.

He threw a look around him and there was no place to go except a little pantry, unless he wanted to go back outside or through the door to meet the man who was coming down the hall. Nor could he close the pantry door; it was opened back against the wall, and a water-cooler stood in front of it.

So he stood inside the pantry looking upward at a shelf of canned goods, and he had his left arm raised to the shelf also, which partly hid his face. His right hand held the automatic close against his leg.

The man came into the kitchen and passed three feet from Lee and spoke to him casually—in German.

Lee didn't understand or answer him, but the man only bent over a little by the cooler to draw a glass of water, and Lee turned softly and brought the pistol-barrel down hard upon his head, and reached out quickly to guide his fall so he wouldn't turn the cooler over and make a lot of noise.

He tumbled the limp form into the pantry, then quickly pulled his own shoes off and moved out into the hall.

Down it on his left were three doors to the row of five or six small bedrooms; and on his right a few feet ahead, an open doorway to the dining-room. The living-room was beyond that, with a door into the hall itself, and a double open doorway into the dining-room.

Lee Jonathan stood a moment listening, and voices came to him from the direction of the living-room. He slid quietly into the dining-room and moved silently along its wall to his left, keeping close against it. The voices became more distinct, from the living-room unquestionably now.

He turned the corner of the room and edged along the end wall. He held himself very flat against it as he neared the doorway, and increased gradually the amount of living-room visible to him.

He stopped when his angle of view had widened to take in the two people sitting on the long sofa which faced the porch and front of the house, away from him.

Then he took a careful breath and slid soundlessly around the edge of the doorway, and stood within the room with his back against the wall. He had made it. He had been incredibly lucky, but that didn't matter. He was there, and that's what counted.

His voice was low, but plainly audible:

"I will shoot if you move suddenly, Ehrhardt."

Shirley Dayl spun quickly; her eyes widened with amazement, growing bright, and her lips came apart a little bit.

"Lee!" she cried. "What are you— *Be careful, Lee!*"

Ehrhardt didn't move at all, and his voice was entirely matter-of-fact.

"So you were able to join us. I had hoped you would not make it. Well, come in, Jonathan."

He turned his head then, unhurriedly, and brought his eyes to bear on Lee. They were calm and contemplative, and he in no way resembled Charley van Renneker, even though he smiled a little now—a different kind of smile.

"EHRHARDT," said Lee Jonathan, "get up slowly and keep your hands in front of you, in sight. The three of us will go out the front door and over to Shirley's car. She will drive. You will sit in the middle. If we do this quietly and successfully, and come out onto the highway safely, I will not harm you myself in any way. If something goes wrong, I shall kill you."

Shirley Dayl had been trying to interrupt him, trying to make him listen to her, looking from one of them to other distractedly, fearfully; and she tried again now, beating on the sofa with her fists to make them listen.

"Lee, don't be a fool! Stop this; there's nothing wrong. Put down the gun! You're—"

But the two men simply went on talking to each other softly, as if she were not there.

"Come in," Ehrhardt said again, "and sit down. There is no need for dramatics. Shooting me will accomplish nothing. There is a man on the porch with a Thompson machine-gun. He would be here immediately, and others after him, and you and Miss Dayl would be killed instantly, of course. That would all be rather pointless, wouldn't it?"

"It's no use talking," said Lee Jonathan. "Get up; we're getting out of here. Ehrhardt," he finished softly, "I'm not bluffing."

"Lee, stop it! Oh, you fool!" Shirley was kneeling on the sofa now, leaning across its back. *"Listen* to me, Lee, do

you hear? You're acting like an idiot. *There's nothing wrong, I say!* Can't you get it through your head that—"

But he didn't reply or even glance her way; he didn't even seem to hear, and neither did Karl Ehrhardt.

"I hope you will understand," Ehrhardt said gravely, "that I am not bluffing, either. I shall let nothing interfere with the execution of my plans. You may be sure that no matter what happens to me, they will be carried out exactly as arranged. Shooting me cannot possibly do more than to cause you and Miss Dayl to die also. Therefore I shall not comply with your directions, and furthermore,"—he lifted a small whistle which hung from a cord around his neck,—"in a moment I shall blow this. The man on the porch with the machine-gun will come immediately. You will, of course, have an opportunity to shoot me before he comes in. Whether you do or not is a decision you will have to make. I shall now blow the whistle."

And with no further pause, with no dramatics, he raised it toward his lips.

Lee brought the pistol slightly higher, aiming carefully.

"*Lee!*" The cry was frantic, and Shirley Dayl was really frightened then. "*Lee, stop! Oh, don't! You don't understand!* You—" She spun around and scrambled to her feet and took a step to come around the end of the sofa toward Lee Jonathan, to grab his arm, to shake him, to make him listen somehow.

But she stopped.

For the whistle had sounded, and the pistol was in perfect alignment with Ehrhardt's head, and for a breathless instant there was no trace of sound or movement in the room: Shirley Dayl had frozen with her eyes wide and bright, her hands at her breast gripped fiercely into fists; Ehrhardt continued to gaze calmly beyond the pistol to the man who held it.

Then Lee Jonathan slowly let his arm come down. His eyes turned for a moment on Shirley Dayl, and then he looked away again. His shoulders sagged. But he didn't know what else to do.

Shirley Dayl gave a little whimpering moan then, and twisted to sink onto the sofa over the end of it, burying her face for a moment into her hands.

A man with a machine-gun was standing in the front door of the room.

Ehrhardt said: "Believe me, you have been intelligent: you would both have died. And now," he added, "if you will please give your pistol to Otto—" He indicated the tall, square man in the doorway.

Lee looked at the man a moment dully, then handed him the gun.

"You will not mind if he searches you," Ehrhardt said, and Otto deftly patted Lee Jonathan's hips and around his belt and under his arms, and Ehrhardt said then: "Won't you sit down?"

Lee moved to a chair and sat down in it with his elbows on his knees, and put his head between his hands and stared down at the floor.

Shirley Dayl said with a little catch: "Lee, oh, Lee, you scared me so!"

He didn't move. It made him feel stupid and inadequate and immature, having to have a demonstration before he could get the idea through his head. He could see now that he couldn't sensibly have expected Ehrhardt to do anything except exactly what he had done, that the kind of man who would be doing the sort of job Ehrhardt was would never endanger its success to keep from being killed. But he hadn't expected it at all.

"Lee," Shirley said, "it's all right—really it is. You just don't understand. There's nothing wrong."

He looked up then, and looked at her long and rather carefully. "Nothing wrong," he said half to himself. "Do you know what's in your cave?" he asked.

"Of course," she said. "The refugees. That's what I say, there's nothing wrong. Oh, maybe it's not just legal, Lee, of course, but it isn't *wrong*. You know that."

Lee frowned uncertainly. "Refugees?" he said.

"Of course," she said. "What else?"

And he knew then from her face that she had not the slightest notion what the score was, and that helped an awful lot. He hadn't really been able to believe she knew; but just the same, it made a mighty difference to him, to be absolutely sure.

But she would have to know sooner or later, of course, and there was no good in postponing it. "Well," he said slowly, "some trucks, for one thing. Fifteen of them. And for another, tons of dynamite."

Her face grew blank. Her eyes went from Lee to Ehrhardt. When she spoke, it was very carefully.

"I didn't know about the trucks," she said. "Or the dynamite. Is it true? What are they—for?" Then she drew a little breath, remembering, and said in a quick murmur to herself: "Ehrhardt—he called you Ehrhardt—what—why did—" Uncertainty came into her eyes.

Ehrhardt said rather gently: "It is true that things are not entirely as—I represented them, that I have deceived you. I regret that it was necessary for me to do so."

She didn't move or say anything; unblinking, her eyes held on Ehrhardt's bland face; gradually, mixing with the uncertainty, fear came into them.

Chapter Eleven

THEY sat together on the sofa, and they were alone in the room finally. They could talk; by keeping their heads close together, they could speak in voices which would carry no more than a few feet.

It was after lunch then, but Shirley was still subdued. He had known her to be hot and intense a lot of times, even violent maybe, but that was about ordinary things. This was different. She was very quiet about this, very sober. Her face had gone deathly pale when she first found out how things stood, and after that she would not look at Ehrhardt or speak to him, but she gave no other sign of how she felt.

Ehrhardt had had lunch brought to them in the living-room at the same time a number of men were eating in the dining-room. The man who served them, with his white cap on again, was the man Lee had dropped on from the tree, and he doubtless knew who Lee was, but he gave no indication of that, or showed any curiosity about him.

After lunch, after all the other men had left the dining-room, Ehrhardt went out himself. Before he left, he told Lee and Shirley that for their comfort he would not have them bound, but that for their safety they must understand it would be fatal to try to get away. He had given orders to shoot if either of them stepped outside the living-room, and there were several to see them besides Otto, who still sat on the front porch with the machine-gun by his chair. So of course they couldn't leave.

But Shirley seemed much less concerned with that, or any danger to herself, than she was with other things: with what Ehrhardt meant to do, first of all, and whether Lee thought he could possibly be stopped; and she was terribly relieved when Lee told her about Hendrik Wooten, that they could expect the F.B.I.

Then she wanted to know how Lee came to be down here at all, and how he had got mixed up in all of this to start with, and he told her briefly the little that he knew. It had started with the red-haired man.

HE had no name; that is, he gave none. He came to Hendrik Wooten in Surabaya, and Wooten had never seen him before, but he knew Wooten: he knew his present and his past, and he had known Wooten's father and brother, in Holland; both of them had died in the invasion. He had told Wooten only a little, in general, but Wooten gathered this: the red-haired man was one of

a small, secret group of men, mostly Dutch, who had a member somewhere high in the Nazi Intelligence or Gestapo; he would identify and locate for them special agents, men of an absolute inner circle, intrusted with work of the highest importance and secrecy—men such as Ehrhardt. And the business of these Dutchmen was, one at a time, and with no warning or explanation, to kill off these agents.

The red-haired man told Wooten a little more than that, in particular. He told him he was on his way to Los Angeles, if he could make it, and that Karl Ehrhardt was his man; the one man they had here, A.Y., was not thought capable of dealing with a man like Ehrhardt.

The red-haired man told Wooten what he knew of Ehrhardt, and he gave him the number of a mail-box in Surabaya which might receive mail from A.Y. It had taken him a long time to get to Surabaya—Japan and the United States had not been in the war when he started—and with the whole Pacific involved, he had thought he might not reach Los Angeles. He wanted Wooten to take over if he didn't.

He came to Hendrik Wooten with this fantastic story, with no identification and with no support at all for what he said—and Wooten listened to him and believed him.

The red-haired man sailed; he had his passport and his visas and everything in perfect order. Three days out the ship he took was sunk. And Wooten took over, as he had agreed he would.

It seemed at first there was nothing he could do. The fact that he believed the story did not mean that others would. He talked to four men in Intelligence; he made a nuisance of himself. It wasn't that the tale was too fantastic; nothing can seem fantastic to Intelligence today. It was simply that there was too little to go on, to work with, to justify urging from Surabaya that men be assigned to this in Los Angeles.

It would have been complicated and might have been a very long process for Wooten to arrange to come himself, but Lee could come immediately, if he could get leave; and Wooten knew Lee's Colonel personally. He convinced this one man, finally, of the urgency of this mission, and he was able to arrange an indeterminate leave for Lee. It was all flagrantly and highly irregular, but nevertheless, not too long after that, Lee Jonathan was in Los Angeles.

Shirley's eyes were large. "It all sounds so strange," she said. "And you—setting out to kill a man. It's—"

She shook her head.

"It's war, is all," Lee said. "But mainly I was just trying to locate him, to get anything at all that would be enough to report to the F.B.I. Of course I knew if—" He paused a moment. "Last night I—meant to kill him. Only"—he gave a tiny shrug—"I didn't." After a moment he added: "It was lucky, maybe, since we found him again. And that was lucky too."

She looked at him suddenly with a frown between her eyes. "Your—you said, your Colonel? What, I mean, are you?"

"It wasn't much of a surprise out there, you know," Lee said. "All the time, we could see what the Nipponese brother was doing, you see, besides hear what he was saying. We knew it was bound to come. I'm in the N.E.I. Air Force. I joined up a year ago."

All Shirley said was, "Oh," very softly, and then in a moment, still softly: "I'm—glad I haven't known that—these last few months."

She was silent briefly, not looking at him. Then she said: "I guess it's true that he's been doing this—getting ready—for a long time, all right."

It had been fully a year ago that she had met Van Renneker—the Dutch refugee who had lost all his dear ones and all his property in Rotterdam, and was taking it so bravely, trying to help other refugees. There were so many, he had told her, who were men of science, of high intelligence and ability, who should not be lost to the world, and who had no place to go.

There was an underground route, he said, by which sometimes they could get out of their occupied countries, and a way to get them into Southern California, if he could just conceal them for a time, once they were here. Not for good: only for short periods of time, while it was arranged for them to come in legally, or to enter Mexico or some other country legally. They needed only a stopping-place for brief sanctuary.

He had been down to this camp once with Wilbur and Tommy Wells, and had seen the cave, and he suggested it to her. She was not to be connected with it at all. He insisted that he lease it and pay her a small fee, and that she never come down to it herself, so that no matter what might happen, she could never be implicated in anything.

"I don't know," she murmured, looking down at her hand, which she had put in Lee's. "I was a fool, I guess. But he made it sound so logical and I—I felt so sorry for them. It seemed such a very small thing to do to help."

Lee said: "I know; sure. I would have believed it too. We just haven't the right background, the experience for this kind of thing. We can't adjust our minds to it."

"Maybe that's it." After a moment she said: "Of course, even I had enough sense to know he shouldn't go on with it after we were in the war, but I didn't have enough sense not to trust him implicitly when he said he had stopped. Until yesterday, I realized I'd better come down and make sure. And all I accomplished was to ruin things for you—make you come back, and then tie your hands to keep from risking any harm to me. Oh, I'm such an idiot!"

He whispered! "Hush! Forget it, darling. It'll be all right." He pressed her hand. Then he said in a different, in a not quite casual tone: "Honey, when the shooting starts, why, you just duck into the fireplace, understand? Right away. It will—"

"What about you?" she said quickly. "You will too, Lee! Lee, you won't do anything crazy, will you?"

"Don't worry," he said. "I'll be right there beside you."

"All right," she said. "That's all right, then."

They were silent for a few minutes; he slid a little lower on the sofa. She sat staring into the cold stone fireplace.

At length she said: "Lee—when do you think they'll get here? The G-men. They should be pretty soon, shouldn't they?"

"Yes," he said. "They might. They could come any time now, I expect, but don't worry if it isn't right away."

"All right," she said. "I won't."

His head was resting on her shoulder then, and she turned her own head a little, gently, so that she could see his face. And she touched his cheek lightly and smiled just a little, and he could see a protective, tender look come on her face because she knew he was tired.

He grinned back at her, and in a moment she turned toward the fireplace again and settled his head on her shoulder more comfortably. He was glad he hadn't pointed out that Ehrhardt would almost surely try to use them as hostages when the men came from the F.B.I., and that this meant it was entirely likely they wouldn't live to see the finish of this thing. Because there was nothing they could do; anything they tried now would only make it certain they would die—instead of merely probable. It could do no good to tell her. She would find out soon enough.

Chapter Twelve

INNER began in twilight, and darkness had come when it was over. A number of men ate in the dining-room, but again Shirley Dayl and Lee Jonathan were served at a table in the living-room, and Ehrhardt ate with them this time.

He was still quite matter-of-fact, even friendly. He talked a little of what he had been doing, of the difficulties he had encountered, of how many months and how much

care it required to gather together fifteen trucks and a huge quantity of dynamite and attract no attention in doing it. It was plain that he enjoyed talking of these things to someone to whom they were not an old story; but there was little of the braggart in his tone—though there was an evident pride, a satisfaction at having achieved his end despite the many obstacles.

But it was a one-sided conversation. Lee's replies were few and brief, and Shirley Dayl would still neither look at Ehrhardt nor speak to him, though he seemed to understand this and in no way resent it.

When dinner was over, he said he would excuse himself for a bit and went outside and down the front porch steps.

SHIRLEY moved quickly close to Lee and murmured: "It's getting late. Shouldn't they be here by now, Lee? When will they come?"

"It should be any minute now."

"You don't think anything could have gone wrong, do you? You don't think they wouldn't believe him?"

"No," Lee said. "They might not believe him at the F.B.I., but they would investigate anyhow; they wouldn't take chances on a thing like this. Don't worry about that; if he got in touch with them, they'll be here, never fear."

"If he got in touch?" She drew a breath quickly. "Lee, do you think he mightn't? Could something go wrong?"

He hadn't meant to say that, but all he could do then was pat her arm and say, "No, of course not," because obviously it was almost certain that something had gone wrong. This would all have been over long since, if something hadn't.

"But Lee—" She stopped. Steps had sounded on the front porch, and now Ehrhardt came in again.

"Perhaps you would like to see the cave," he said. "I think you may find it interesting. We have only to wait for a small time now, and I should be glad to show you."

Lee said, "Yes," and Ehrhardt nodded pleasantly and held open the door to the porch for them.

"I should remind you possibly that I am armed, and that there will be someone at all times near by with a machine-gun."

Lee said: "Don't worry."

In the yard they went around the house and skirted the bushes and came into the entrance of the cave.

Though it had been straightened some, it still made quite a curve before it brought them out into the high, brightly lighted space of the cave itself.

They paused just inside, and Shirley gasped.

Trucks stood before them in a long double row in a strong white light that came from shaded gasoline lanterns which hung well above it all. There was still an odor of paint in the air, and empty buckets were lined beneath a long workbench that ran along one side of the cave.

There were some men who stood by this bench talking quietly, and others who played cards on an upturned packing-case; none of them showed curiosity when Ehrhardt brought Lee and Shirley in. Everything was very neat and clean; everything looked somehow entirely—ready.

Ehrhardt said, "If you will come through here—" and Lee and Shirley followed him down between the lines of trucks.

"For each of the five major aircraft plants in this area," Ehrhardt said, "we have three trucks which are exact duplicates of those used by companies which deliver parts or fittings to them, or which enter their grounds regularly for other reasons." He indicated three they were passing. "Such as these, which duplicate those of the contractors who are building an extension on final assembly at the Crither plant in Santa Monica. These from the Sierra Aluminum Casting Corporation go to Brownden in San Diego. And so on. Each truck contains a little more than one ton of dynamite, and has been converted into an effective demolition bomb. Each has a timing device which will set off a detonating cap exactly two minutes after it is tripped."

They had come out at the other end, and Ehrhardt paused. "Do you begin to understand?"

Lee said slowly; "Yes. I think I do."

"In less than an hour now," Ehrhardt said, "the first group will leave. The order will be such that all will reach their plants at exactly one o'clock this morning. The first driver in each group will be one who has been entering his particular plant in an identical truck frequently over a period of several months, and will be known by sight to the guards. His papers and those of the two men following him being perfectly in order, they will of course be admitted; and if the guards glance into the trucks, as they usually do, you have seen that the contents will appear quite normal and innocent."

Ehrhardt nodded toward the line of trucks. "In each case a company has been selected whose trucks will be able to halt naturally in the final assembly department or quite near to essential dies or jigs," he said. "The destruction which will result there from these exceedingly severe explosions will stop production completely for at least four months in each plant, and in some of them for probably a good deal longer.

"The drivers, of course," Ehrhardt added, "once the trucks are parked, have only to trip the timing devices and make an excuse to leave the trucks for a moment. Two minutes will not be long enough for anyone to become suspicious, and in the confusion after the explosions, the drivers should have no difficulty getting out of the plants, though that is of minor importance, naturally."

He paused, regarding Lee pleasantly, ready to explain further anything Lee might not understand, but Lee just looked back at him silently. He had no questions. It was all very clear. Ehrhardt would make no slips, and if these trucks went out of here tonight, then everything would happen just the way Ehrhardt had said it would, and Lee was as sure of that as Ehrhardt was.

Shirley was saying something, and he looked at her. She was pale, and it made her eyes seem blacker and larger than they really were.

She spoke slowly, with a little difficulty. "But the others in the plants," she said. "When the trucks explode, it will—kill hundreds of them, won't it? They won't have any warning at all."

"Primarily," Ehrhardt said, "there will be a destruction of aircraft and their production. Obviously some people will die, but as you point out, they will be hundreds, not the thousands who would have been killed by the bombers we shall destroy, or the many other thousands who would die otherwise in war if these aircraft were allowed to prolong an insane and hopeless resistance to the Reich and its new order for the world."

"All this time," Shirley said unevenly, "when you were telling me about the homeless refugees, and how you hated the Nazis and hated force and hated violence, you—you were doing this. Oh, I—you—you—" She choked on the words.

"Miss Dayl," Ehrhardt said stiffly, and a faint color rose in his neck, "you may believe it gave me no pleasure to deceive you. You may also understand that the deception of you or a hundred young ladies like you, in this or any other way, is a matter of the utmost triviality compared to the success of the enterprise it is tonight my good fortune to conclude." He stepped away from the bench. "We shall return to the house. Please go first."

LEE turned aside, and Shirley passed in front of him, and they went down between the bench and a row of trucks until Lee slowed and then stopped, near the end, before a box on which a man was sitting who had been hidden from them, when they entered, by the first truck in this line.

The man's feet were bound to the box on which he sat, and his hands were tied behind him; his thin light brown hair was disheveled, and there were bruises and dried

blood on his face. He was not gagged, but he did not speak when they stopped in front of him, while Lee Jonathan stood for a moment staring down at him.

Neither did Lee speak. As Ehrhardt said to a man near by, "You may bring him to the house now," Lee turned away and went on toward the exit to the cave.

Shirley caught him. She had hold of his arm, gripping it fiercely, shaking it.

"Lee, who is that? Who's that man?"

He spoke then. "Hendrik Wooten," he said.

IN the darkness, crossing the yard, Lee Jonathan pressed close to Shirley Dayl and held a tight hand on her arm in warning while he whispered swiftly:

"If anything should happen, if you get a chance at all, get away. Get out and run down the road like hell. Remember, and be watching for a chance."

"Lee!" Her voice caught. "Lee, what are you—"

He jerked at her arm and cut her words off. "Be quiet! And don't sit anywhere near me."

They came to the porch steps then. Otto was sitting on them at one end, in the shadows, with the machine-gun lying across his knees.

The living-room was lighted by a gasoline lantern hung from the ceiling near the door, and Lee and Shirley passed under it first, with Ehrhardt close behind them, and following him Hendrik Wooten and the man who had been told to bring him in.

Lee stood by the fireplace, and Shirley sat on the sofa, and Ehrhardt stepped back from the door while Wooten and the man behind him passed. Ehrhardt nodded to a chair, and the man guided Wooten to it with a hand on his wrists, which were still bound tightly behind him. At the chair he turned Wooten around, pushed him down into it and then stood a little to one side behind the chair.

Ehrhardt looked at Shirley Dayl. He was calm again. "That is Hendrik Wooten," he said. "You may not have met him. He is the one who was not able to summon help for you."

Shirley didn't answer; she only looked at him a moment with smoldering eyes and then turned them away.

Ehrhardt looked at Lee. "Could you imagine I would take any chance at all of interference at this point? Wooten was picked up on the other side as he was going out. You would have been also, if you had been with him. Our guard concealed near the highway today was to let anyone come in the road, but no one was to go back out again."

There was the sound of a motor, and Ehrhardt glanced through the window toward the front, then glanced at his watch and nodded slightly.

"That is he now. He has just come in. The first truck will leave in fourteen minutes." He glanced at Lee again. "Will you sit down, please, Jonathan?"

It was a strange room. The air should have been electric, full of tension, but it wasn't. Only Shirley Dayl seemed tense, on edge. Otherwise the room was merely very quiet.

In the silence Lee Jonathan picked up a straight chair and put it down so that when he sat in it, the fireplace was behind him. He sat with his elbows on his knees, his hands hanging between them.

Ehrhardt looked around at them.

Then he smiled, almost apologetically. "Believe me, I do not wish to be offensive, but this has been a long, demanding task, and I cannot repress a feeling of satisfaction now that it is done. At any moment, through all this long time, the smallest mistake of any sort could destroy all the work and care which had gone before, because of course a plan of this sort can succeed only if there is never the faintest suspicion of its existence. And of course in these past few months, after your own country became actively involved in this war also, the difficulties, the chances of detection, were doubled many times." His eyes grew troubled. "But it was completely essential that your aircraft production be disrupted, particularly that of the heavy four-motored bombers." The troubled look remained in his eyes a moment longer.

"Well,"—he gave his head a little shake,—"we need not concern ourselves with this now. Our work tonight in these five plants will reduce aircraft production for the entire country by more than seventy per cent. By the time it has reached this level once again, in six months possibly, it will be too late."

He paused a moment and gazed at Shirley, but she would not look at him, and his eyes returned to Lee.

"I will tell you good-by now," he said simply. "You will not be harmed. Presently we shall bind you, and before morning I shall mail a note to Wells, telling him to come down here. You will probably be quite cramped and uncomfortable before he arrives, but it will be no more serious than that. Are you relieved?"

Lee Jonathan looked at him noncommittally a moment. "I'm surprised," he said.

"You should not be," Ehrhardt said with a touch of impatience. "The individual efforts of Miss Dayl, and of yourself, now that your attempt in this matter has failed, can be of not even infinitesimal concern to the Axis. And you are no threat to us as individuals; for eight days a submarine has been standing offshore waiting to take us off. We shall board it before dawn; and long before Wells can arrive, we shall be well at sea, quite safe. Besides, you are both young and not unintelligent; you may become quite useful citizens, once you realize that you have been the victims of an outworn and pitifully inadequate philosophy. Thus to harm you would be useless and stupid; and in the new order there is place for neither of these characteristics."

He nodded to the man behind Wooten's chair. "Find something to tie them with. In the kitchen possibly. We shall leave presently."

The man gave a short bob of his head that seemed almost a salute, and walked swiftly into the hall and down it.

Ehrhardt glanced at Hendrik Wooten then, for the first time since they had come into the house.

"Perhaps we should put Wooten in one of the trucks," he said. "It would be quick and merciful." He shrugged. "But I do not think so. Even for a thick-head, like him, in his middle years, there may be some hope. And if he cannot learn—there will be time later."

WOOTEN had not spoken since they came on him in the cave, and he did not speak now. He simply sat there and looked back at Ehrhardt without emotion, with a rather opaque, entirely tranquil gaze.

Lee Jonathan was leaning down, scratching his left ankle lightly with his left hand. He turned his head slightly, listening.

"Is that one now?" he said. "I think I hear one."

Ehrhardt glanced toward the window and then at his watch, and as he did, Lee Jonathan leaned lower, bringing his right hand near his left.

Ehrhardt shook his head and raised his eyes. "No," he said. "It is not time for seven minutes yet."

Lee was sitting with his elbows on his knees again, his hands together and hanging between his knees.

He said softly: *"Be quiet and don't move, Ehrhardt."* And as he spoke, he moved his hands, and in the right one there became visible the double barrel of a small, flat pistol which he raised higher, aiming at Ehrhardt carefully.

"I wouldn't miss at this range," he said. "I promise you. Go untie Wooten, Shirley. Quick!"

Shirley had already come to her feet, and she took a step toward Wooten then, but Ehrhardt stopped her with the manner in which he spoke.

Ehrhardt had only frowned a little when he saw the pistol in Lee's hands; there was no fear in his face at all, only a slight exasperation.

And now he said briskly, with a small impatience: "Miss Dayl, don't do that. I shall blow the whistle, and you and

Jonathan will be killed immediately. Why go through this again, Jonathan? Can't you see it's just the same?"

Shirley hesitated, looking at Lee questioningly, but he kept his eyes on Ehrhardt.

"No," he said woodenly, "this time it's different, Ehrhardt. . . . Shirley, hurry up!"

Chapter Thirteen

A SECOND passed, with the four people all motionless as stone: Ehrhardt watching Shirley Dayl, Lee Jonathan with the pistol aimed steadily at Ehrhardt, and Hendrik Wooten surveying the whole scene impassively.

Then in one instant, with a little half-caught breath, Shirley Dayl moved, and Ehrhardt raised his whistle. . . . Immediately Lee Jonathan shot him, and he stood with a look of rather vacant surprise upon his face, as if puzzled by the neat hole which had appeared above one eye.

In the next Lee Jonathan was yelling to Shirley Dayl, *"Get down!"* and swinging his aim to the door of the porch. And Hendrik Wooten was coming out of his chair with an amazing agility and speed for a man his shape whose hands were tied behind him, and darting across the room to put himself against the wall of the dining-room.

And Karl Ehrhardt, in a slightly spiral descent, wilted to the floor almost soundlessly.

That was all in a short second; in the next Otto was coming in from the porch with his machine-gun raised, and footsteps were pounding loudly down the hall—and Lee Jonathan fired his one other shot. Otto kept right on coming, falling into the room, firing into the floor—while Hendrik Wooten was driving his shoulder hard into the other man from the side as he came in from the hall.

That carried the man off his feet and sent him on into a corner, but not before he could throw a burst from his automatic toward Lee Jonathan.

So Lee had a left arm that was not much good and bleeding as he dived for the machine-gun Otto had dropped, then poured bullets from it briefly toward the corner into which Wooten had knocked the other man.

Shirley Dayl was running to Wooten then to untie him; and she got there before Lee did. But he grabbed her arm and shoved her toward the dining-room.

"Go on! Hurry! Through that window. Don't try to get your car, just run like hell! Get help!"

"Lee! You've got to come. You're hurt. You can't stay here and—"

He yelled at her savagely: *"Damn it, get out of here! Run,* you idiot! *Get help, and hurry up!"*

That did it, and she turned blindly, with tears in her eyes; she fled into the dining-room and scrambled over a windowsill and dropped into darkness. . . .

The heavy cord on Wooten's wrists was knotted too tightly for Lee to get anywhere untying it, but there was a knife in Otto's pocket, and Lee spoke rapidly as he cut his friend's hands free.

"I know where there's some gasoline," he said. "I'm going up the hill. I know the way. We wouldn't have a prayer to get out ahead of them. Try to cover me, will you? Try to keep them in the cave if you can do it, or to keep them occupied toward the front side if you can't."

All Hendrik Wooten said was, "Go on, boy," as he turned around and picked up the machine-gun; and as Lee went down the hall, Wooten slid through a window onto the far end of the porch and dropped from it and circled through the dark.

Shouts had come now from the direction of the cave. From the darkness Wooten answered them, and sent a burst of fire in their direction, then moved on quickly away from the house to his right. The long thin finger of a spotlight swung out through the night searchingly.

It had been dark in the hall and was dark in the kitchen, but Lee Jonathan had no quarrel with that. By feel, Lee found the can of gasoline on the little screened back porch, and all he wanted was for the darkness to continue until he could make it across the open space to the cover of the hillside.

The light was reaching past the house toward the front, away from him, when he left the little porch and started running for the hill.

The light must have come too close to Wooten, for there was a sudden burst of fire. The light went out; when it came on again, it was pointed toward the kitchen. The men behind it had drawn behind the rock shoulder of the entrance, out of Wooten's range. The light began to sweep across the open space from the kitchen toward the hill.

It moved quite slowly for a spotlight beam, but that was still far faster than any man could run, and it caught Lee Jonathan while he still had three steps to take.

But there was no shout or shot or other indication they had seen him, and the light went off and Lee began his stumbling, fumbling climb with the wild hope that maybe the light had not held on him long enough for them to see him.

It was a hope that lasted for a few yards only. Then the hillside leaped into brightness, and a spray of lead began.

Of course! They had crossed in darkness from the shelter of the entrance to the cave, to the shelter of the house, out of Wooten's range.

The cover was too thick for them to see him, but they knew that where he might be had certain limits, and they could play a stream of bullets from a machine-gun over every foot of that and be sure to get him finally.

But there was nothing he could do. Oh, he could keep on climbing as long as possible, and go slowly, and take care to move nothing that would reveal him accurately, and resolve grimly that they wouldn't know it when they hit him; but they would almost surely get him anyhow.

They did. It was only a few seconds after the light came on, and the lead began to thud into the hillside. There was a hard *spatting* blow against his right leg just above the ankle, and the leg gave under him. He clamped his teeth down hard and made no sound.

So he was crawling then. It was just as well; he made about as much progress as before. It was just more painful, that was all.

They'd reach him again of course, and again. He had too far to go, and they had too many bullets.

They didn't, though.

Suddenly there were two machine-guns chattering instead of one, and then the light went out, and the shooting went on in the darkness until abruptly there was just one gun again. Then none.

Only darkness and silence, and a leg and arm that were beginning really to give out with pain by then; for Lee Jonathan was climbing twice as hard, tugging the gasoline can after him, because he didn't have a bad chance now.

That had been Wooten, of course; he had got around the house. Divert them, Lee had asked, and he would bet the men below had found Wooten most diverting, sure enough, until they died.

HE was on the ledge when he heard a motor roar, and heard shooting start again. He thought at first they must have started up the trucks and Wooten was trying to keep them back; but then he heard a bang and a crash, and he knew it had been no truck.

It was Wooten again. That had been Shirley's convertible, or some other car which had been outside, which Wooten had driven straight into the entrance of the cave, into the shots from there, wrecking it and jamming it in the entrance, or rather, for the trucks within, the exit.

Lee Jonathan was at the middle of the ledge by then. He parted the bushes and dragged himself through them and crawled into the recess to the opening and gave a

quick look down. The lights were still on, with a knot of men just within the entrance and the trucks all there below him, all fifteen.

He pulled the gas can up beside him, and took off his shirt and soaked it first and then he shoved the can to the opening and tipped it forward, and fluid gurgled out and down onto the trucks below.

There were shouts suddenly, and he held well back out of range as the shots came and the lead whined past and clunked against the ceiling up above. The gas went right on pouring.

Then he yanked the can back empty, and got a match with his good hand and lighted up his shirt and threw it flaming through the hole, and took one look to see it land and see the flame leap wild and wide in all directions, high and bright with a swish and a hiss of sound.

Then he was backing out and crawling along the ledge and up the bank above.

He crawled the best he could, but he knew it wasn't any use, with fifteen tons of dynamite below.

He couldn't go fast, and it hurt him when he tried, and it made him feel kind of silly to be crawling so hard and having it hurt so much when he knew it wasn't any use. But he did it anyhow.

This was good-by, of course: this was good-by to Shirley Dayl, and good-by to Hendrik Wooten too.

He hoped that Wooten hadn't got himself jammed into that entrance with the car: but if he hadn't, he would probably get b'own up now along with the mountainside and everybody else. It was a shame, because somebody ought to come out of this alive, just to sit and think it over, later on. Someone besides Shirley.

But the job was done. Maybe they had done it sloppily, all right, and had to get themselves blown all to hell, but just the same, they had got it done.

It couldn't be long now; any second the fire would get to a detonating cap, and then *ka-whoosh!* Lee thought he'd kind of like to be halfway up the hill across the stream to watch this thing; because it was going to be the grandpappy of all explosions, sure enough, but he guessed—

There was a shudder of the earth first, a tiny trembling, the hint of a rumble, before that sickening, jolting upheaval of all solidity, before the horrible, monstrous roar from all sides at once, all-enveloping, drowning him—

Chapter Fourteen

THE little road was uneven and full of loose rocks and very treacherous going in the dark. She stumbled often, and twice she fell headlong, but she kept on running. She had run frantically at first, as fast as she could, but after a minute or so she had stopped that and begun to run carefully, and stopped to walk once for rest, so that she could go as far as possible as quickly as possible.

She had just started to walk a second time when the explosion came, when the earth trembled with the shock of it and the sound came down the cañon in a crushing roar, something alive and tangible that flowed around her and shook her as it passed.

She stopped, paralyzed, and took her breath in a sudden gasp and held it a long moment, and then her whole body gave a sudden little jerk and she was running back toward the camp again.

And she did run wildly now, stumbling blindly, but keeping her feet somehow. She ran blindly from tears in her eyes, and tears were wet upon her cheeks, but she was not crying. Or didn't know she was.

Crying was no good for this. Crying was for ordinary things: loneliness and grief and fear and things like that; crying would be silly now.

She ran toward darkness and silence; she could hear her own breath, drawn painfully; she could hear the gurgle of the stream beside the road. She could see nothing; there was no dot of light ahead.

She came to the lodge suddenly—to where the lodge had been, that is. There was now only a mound of loose dirt and rock which rose in a steadily steeper slope as it went back and up, out of sight, to where the hill had not been disturbed. Sticking out at the base was a piece of the porch, its roof sagging, and with a great jagged hole where a huge boulder had come through and halted with more than half of it sticking up above the level of the porch floor.

Down to the right fifty yards or more, and parked close in against the bank, there sat one car.

That was all. Dust hung over everything, drifting slowly, gently down.

There was no sound anywhere of any sort.

SHIRLEY'S throat tightened involuntarily, and she put her hand to it and drew her breath and tried again, and this time managed the call which she knew was too late, was useless now.

"*Lee! Lee,* where are you? *Do you hear me, Lee?*"

The words sank into the darkness and were gone; there was no echo, no answer. . . .

Then off to the left, up the cañon that way, a loose rock rattled and a voice said in the darkness:

"Miss Dayl?"

"Oh! Oh, *Lee*—is Lee there?"

But Lee wasn't there. It was Hendrik Wooten, and he struck a match, and she ran toward the light and came to him, and shook his arm and babbled questions about Lee Jonathan, and demands that Hendrik Wooten say where he was, produce him, right away.

He couldn't do that of course, and didn't; but after a moment when he had quieted her a little, he told her what Lee Jonathan had done and where he had been, and he told her they would look for him, but she was to realize that logically they could have no hope of finding him at all, much less alive.

She stood numbly while Wooten went and investigated the car which had not been buried. He came back in a moment with a flashlight.

They started up the barren slope. It was hard going; through the loose dirt and rock it was slow, and there was a lot of space to examine, and it got steeper as they went up.

But they stood finally at the top of all the loose stuff, with a sheer bank rising almost straight above them for maybe twenty feet or so, to where the hillside and its vegetation had not been disturbed.

They stood there quietly and alone, and after a moment Hendrik Wooten said: "The hill would blow out at the thinnest part, which would have been along the level of the opening, I believe, and at the entrance below, of course, which was plugged only with your car. I would guess that the wall of the cave below the line of the opening would fall back in partly, and that the wall and ceiling above would fall down and in, filling the space that was the cave. We are standing on it now." He paused a moment and then said gently: "I do not think we will find our friend. He would climb up, but I do not think he got far enough before the explosion came. We will look above, of course, but only if he made it that far and was knocked unconscious by some falling rock could we find him, I am afraid. Otherwise he would have come down, or called."

He came down then.

With the crackling of a branch and a little shower of dirt and gravel to announce him, Lee Jonathan tumbled toward them down the steep bank, head over heels, limp as a man stuffed with cotton, and Hendrik Wooten leaned swiftly forward and half-caught his falling friend, letting him land gently.

Shirley Dayl, without a word, with only a little moan she did not hear or know she uttered, sank beside him, touching him, moving him gently, feeling him, hearing his heart. . . . Hearing his heart.

THEY laid him on the porch; that is, on the small piece which was left of it. It was near the right-hand corner of the lodge, but the corner itself, about three feet of it, was gone as if it had been sliced away. It had been shot away, it was discovered later. Most of Shirley's convertible was found sunk yards into the hillside opposite, across the stream. It had been shot from the mouth of the cave like a huge shell shot from a cannon, and it nipped off the corner of the porch as it went by.

Hendrik Wooten had brought Lee down the slope, slowly and carefully, with Shirley going ahead, testing the footing, and holding the light for him.

They laid him out straight and level on the porch. He was bare to the waist and covered with scratches and bruises, but none of them were serious, and the wound in his left arm was not bleeding now. Wooten slit his trouser leg while Shirley went to the stream and got out of her slip and tore it into pieces, and wetting some of them, she cleaned the wound in Lee's arm, and his face and chest, while Wooten was busy with his leg. Presently Lee frowned a tiny frown of pain.

She gripped his right hand, which was in her lap, and she was sitting there with it held tightly in both of hers when his eyes came open uncertainly and fastened on her in the dim glow reflected from the flashlight Wooten had directed at his leg.

For a long moment she was all he saw, and it seemed to be enough. He murmured, "You," and then he said: "I guess I ought to ask where I am, but—I don't seem to care."

"*Oh, Lee, oh, darling, I—*" She had to stop and bite her lip to make her chin not tremble. "We're on the porch, or a piece of it. Everything else is buried, all the men and trucks and everything."

"Hendrik?" he said. "The kewpie-doll?"

Wooten had moved into sight then from behind her, and answered for himself.

"That is a nice remark, I suppose? Under the circumstances I let it pass." He smiled down at Lee. "When I heard the shouts and shooting," he said, "I knew your fire was started, so I ran on up the cañon, around a shoulder." He gave a little shrug. "I have no scratch." He started to turn back to Lee's leg and then stopped and said: "Talk to Miss Dayl now. Try to forget this leg belongs to you."

Lee looked at Shirley and grinned, but a second later he gritted his teeth suddenly, and it was a moment before he could speak. He swallowed once. "You talk to me," he said with a little rush, and she kept a tight hold on his hand and did.

"All right," she said. "All right. I will." She went on talking rapidly. "I love you. Oh, Lee, I love you so. Will that do? I don't know what else to say. There doesn't seem to be anything else that's worth talking about. . . . Or, yes, there is. This is so funny, Lee. I—well, you see I used to think that I loved you, but I thought you must not love me very much if you wouldn't have things my way. Do you know when I knew you really loved me, Lee, instead of just hoping, just wishing you did? It was there inside when you knew that shooting him would almost certainly mean death right away for the three of us, and yet you did it anyhow, just because there might be a thin chance of stopping him. That's not sensible, I guess, but just the same I knew it then. I don't know why. Maybe it was because you took my life into your hands so unquestioningly, as if you had a right to it; or maybe it was because by doing that you made it clear you thought I would want it that way, that you didn't have any doubts about me at all. I don't know. But I knew then that no matter what had ever happened, or ever would, that you loved me, because you just did it and didn't say a word, or explain or anything. Do you understand a little bit? Does that make any sense at all?"

Lee was conscious of Wooten with only one part of his mind. He was thinking of what Shirley had said.

"Yes," he said, "it seems to make some, though I'm not sure why. But I think it's true, I think I'd have hesitated maybe, if I didn't love you; I think I would have said something to you about it, anyhow. It's funny, isn't it?"

Wooten said, "Well," and straightened up then. He moved so that he could see Lee's face. "I think you will have to stay here," he said. "Your arm is not serious, and I have fixed the tourniquet so your leg will not bleed, but that leg is not so good, I think. The bone is hit, and I do not think you should be moved until a doctor has prepared you and you can be level in an ambulance."

"Okay," Lee said. "You're probably right."

"I will wake the man at the store and telephone from there," Wooten said. "I should call the F.B.I. first, I think, in case there should be a particular ambulance and doctor they wish to come, people they can depend on to remain silent if they should not wish this made public right away. But it should not be long before they come."

"That's right," Lee said. "They might want to keep it quiet for a while. And they could, if they wanted to. Some people must have heard the explosion, but I doubt if anyone could tell just where it came from. Nobody ever needs to know, I guess, if they don't want it known. Don't forget to tell them to pick up Wilben too," Lee said, "before he catches on that something has gone wrong. He's the one that conked me, and I expect he's in this up to his ears."

"Yes," Wooten said. "The large sums of money necessary for this would have cleared through him, if nothing else. He may even have furnished the money, as far as that goes. But it does not matter. I will go along." He turned away and then stopped and came back a step.

"There is one thing I must know," he said, "before I leave, or it will give me no peace. Where did you get that little pistol, please?"

Shirley put in emphatically: "Yes, where?"

"Oh," Lee said. "Well—well, you see, I had it against my leg, against my shin, kind of, on the inside. I made a kind of holster with a garter."

Shirley said, "Oh," and Wooten asked: "Do you mean you have worn it there all the time?"

Lee looked a little bit embarrassed. "Well," he said, "yes, I did. I was—sort of afraid I might need it, that I might—get in trouble some way, get caught. Of course I thought sure they'd find it if I did get caught, but—it didn't hurt anything to put it there, except it kind of got my leg sore after a while."

He paused a moment, frowning. "Damn it, they should have found it. Even if nobody but an amateur would try that, it couldn't hurt anything to look."

He sounded faintly annoyed, and a short, sudden laugh burst from Hendrik Wooten.

"I would not let that oversight disturb me too deeply," he suggested sardonically. He was taking off his coat. "Also we might be thankful," he said, "that you were not so positive they would find this little gun that you did not even bother to wear it."

Lee grined up at him. "Well, maybe that's a point!"

WOOTEN was handing his coat down to Shirley. "Put this over him," he said. "It would be unsafe for him to be too cool now. I will be quite comfortable, walking briskly."

Shirley took the coat and smiled at Hendrik Wooten, and then she turned and spread it over Lee's bare, scratched chest and wounded arm, and the idea of the dangers of temperature at this moment took her suddenly, and tears filled her eyes at the same time that she giggled almost inanely, and she leaned down quickly and kissed Lee Jonathan with no restraint whatever of technique or intensity.

Hendrik Wooten could move quite softly for a man his shape, and they were not aware of the exact moment that he left. It didn't matter much.

THE END

To You, Old Glory!

JIM BROWN was lost, as may easily happen during maneuvers; he was hot and exhausted and disheartened. He slumped down beside a pine tree and gazed out at the Pacific Ocean, whose sparkling flickers of white ran clear to Pearl Harbor and Australia and China. The breeze was cool; it made soft whistling sounds in the trees overhead, like distant voices singing among the pine-needles. Gradually the cadenced tones drew nearer—yes, they really were voices! Surprise thrilled him, when words began to come clear. . . .

"Listen to us, Jim Brown, private first-class! Listen to us, the voices forever marching upon these timeless waves of air. Once, like you, we pulsed to the greatness that lies in life and high emprise, in swelling achievement and the storm of armies; but now we bring you a message that we have learned through the strait door of death. If hatred and writhing fury be the ringing clarions of your universe, they are but penny trumpets here in ours, where the still small voice of brotherhood rolls and rolls in chasms evermore.

"Each of us in life had his own emblazoned flag, and honored it according to his own vision, small or great. Each of us had a different banner; yet difference lay only to the eye, and each stood for the same ideals in the end. This flag of yours but carries on our tradition.

"To each of us our banner was a bit of cloth, as yours to you; we were made of bone and flesh as you yourself. Yet within us were souls, as in you; and in our banner, too, was held a spirit that still lives on, doing homage to this your flag. What lies within this scrap of cloth, this cresset of the yeomanry of heaven?

"WE came with the old Raven of the pagan Vikings, emptying our blood upon your shores, claiming for our God's acre your forested hills and vinland slopes. Our ensign was the ravening bird of prey, men said; but to us it spoke of ghostly strength, of family and old friends left beyond the world's edge. Hail, Raven of Odin, bird of wisdom and of blood! Visible sign of invisible gods and forces, leading us on to stake liberty and life against the world's unknown!

"WE came with the Lilies of France, the golden fleurs-de-lis. No mere garden flowers, but granted us by heaven upon the oriflamme, the sacred banner of our ancient rulers; given as a token of beauty ineffable, of spiritual tenderness and of unearthly values, a memory to bear upon the crown of earthly monarchs. So blew our lilies by sea and shore and mountain, by arctic wastes and western isle, in smoke of council-fire and scalp-dance—golden lilies, uplifting hearts of men across the wrack of broken battle and foundered hopes.

"WE came, in the lightnings of the Castle and the Lion, proud quarterings of Leon and Castile, astride this noble hemisphere our galleons had discovered. Ours the might of regal hand beating across continents, subduing savage nations with pitiless majesty, sinking iron into the soil of valley and hill and islet—the red of iron and the red of blood together mingled to eternity. Up, Castile! Thunder, Leon! Conquer gloriously, daring all things; go down to death when ye must, but go victorious in pride and honor deathless, taking salute of the celestial legions as ye blow across the winds between the worlds, triumphant unto this last!

"WE came, with cross of red on field of white, St. George's cross; St. George who spoke of stars and kings, our leader. Aye, Cabot's hand lay on the oaken helm, but Tudor England trod the oaken deck, and the prayer of George of Cappadocia sped us to land with the gladsome whirr of gray goose quills at the end of English yards! The red cross, bandrol of the Christ, rood of Him who died upon the crooked tree, who fought the hard fight and died unvanquished—this gentle flag we bore to mind us ever how slight a thing is death, if the heart be unafraid and foursquare to all mankind, as the cross-flag blew foursquare to every wind of God! Amen.

"We came, oppressed, enslaved, seeking afar the tolerance we neither knew nor gave, searching the freedom men denied, as we in turn denied it. Yet our hearts warned us more truly, as did the flag we bore, with the red cross of St. George fielded by the white cross of St. Andrew. We streamed it at the *Mayflower*'s peak, amid doubt and stress and suffering; we planted it full sturdily into the New World earth.

"WE came from neither king nor prince to this new western earth; our standard boasted neither crown nor cross. We hoisted the colors of freemen, beggars of heaven—we of the young republic, the United Netherlands. Our freedom was bought with tears and anguished sweat, as it must be purchased with heart's blood over and over upon this earth.

"THUS we came, we who have spoken, and many another like us; we came, and our banners flaunted upon the forest shore and then were no more seen. We gave them, these flags of ours, to make your own. It is the heir of our inspired imaginings.

"Salute! Such were our banners of old; such is our flag and yours today. Salute, stripes and keen stars, keeper of the deathless verities! We, the voices of the dead, salute you, brave bit of cloth that holds aloft the hope of all the world! This scrap of fabric blowing in the wind, this colored napkin trailed upon a spear-shaft, this merest trifle of your equipage—why, what a blessed little thing it is, one of those little things that thunder ceaselessly upon the vault of heaven! So small as to be cradled in your hand, yet it flutters high above the venomed bitterment of earth, blowing ever higher and farther upon the glory of the coming day. . . . To You, Old Glory—Salute!"

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