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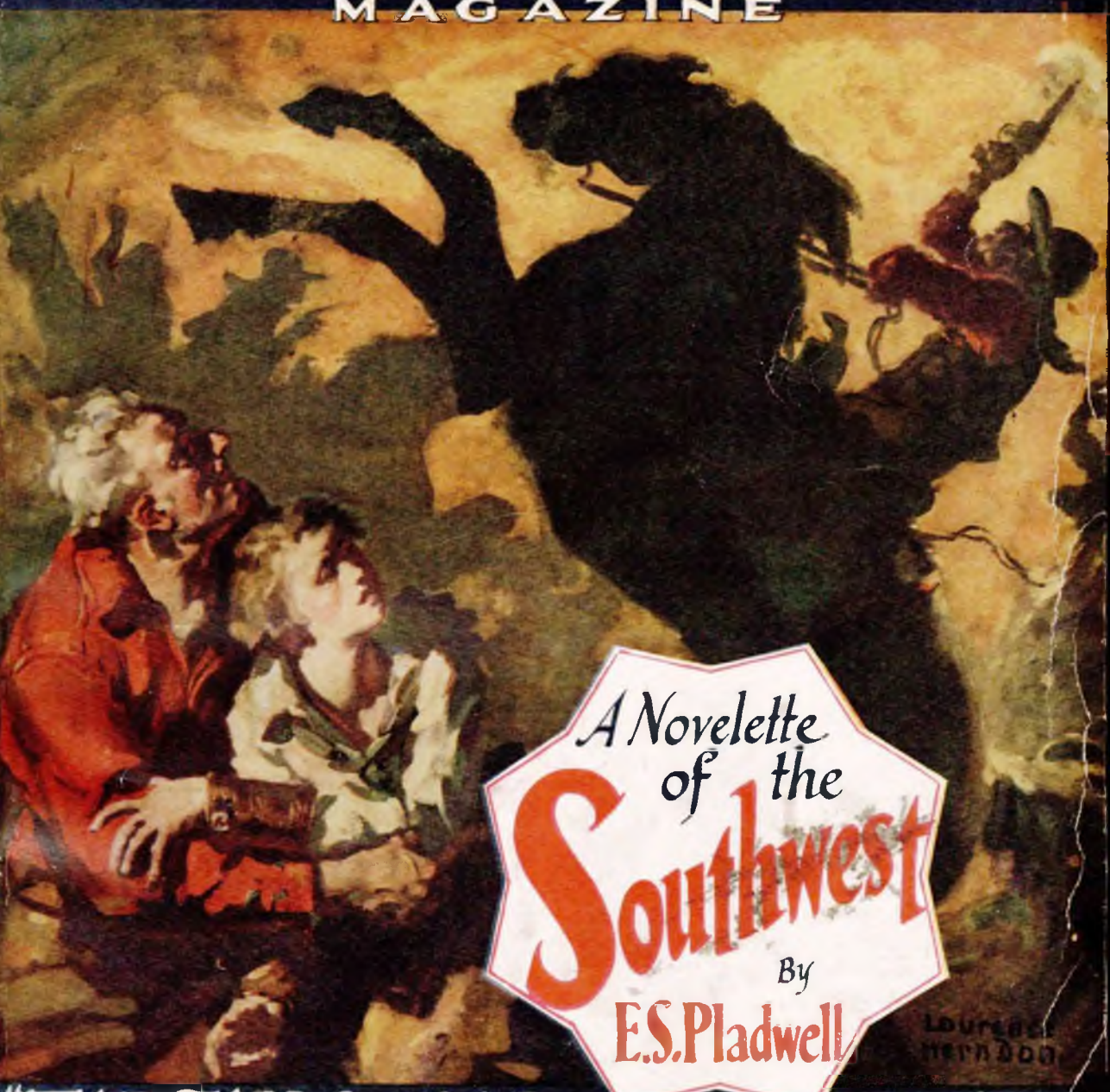
THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

N.S.E



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MAY, 1928

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Photo by Field Museum of Natural History.

COMING NEXT MONTH!

A splendid novel of adventure in one of the most interesting if least known countries of the world—Abyssinia—will be a feature of our next issue.

"Spears in the Sun"

By JAMES EDWIN BAUM

Historian and hunter of the Field Museum Expedition, and author of "Savage Abyssinia."

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 47 MAY 1928 No. 1

This World So Wide

FOR to admire and for to see—
For to behold this world so wide. . . . .

sang Kipling's rolling stone. And most of us wish, now and then, that we could be even as he. We can't of course; but we can play the next best bet—by enjoying the really fascinating vicarious journeys offered you in a magazine such as this.

Just consider: In this one issue you may make an airplane flight from England to Afghanistan with one of the Free Lances in Clarence Herbert New's remarkable story; may take an adventurous sea-voyage with that splendid old salt Captain Dingle in "Captaincy;" may experience thrills aplenty with Tarzan in the African jungle; may visit Paris with H. Bedford-Jones in "The House of Three Cows" and London with Bertram Atkey in "Miss Brown's Jewels;" may spend adventurous days in Arizona by means of E. S. Pladwell's "The Holocaust;" may journey in a Dyak-borne hammock through the dark forests of Borneo with Culpeper Zandtt, or ride to battle in the Sahara with Warren H. Miller's "A Soldier of the Legion."

And next month you may experience at least equal delights—and again with thoroughly competent guides. Most notable of all will be a unique and exciting journey to that strange land Abyssinia in "Spears in the Sun," an extraordinary novel by James Edwin Baum, who was the historian and hunter of the recent expedition sent out by the Field Museum of Natural History.

Amazing folk, the Abyssinians—black Semitic or Hammitic Christians, who claim descent from the Queen of Sheba. Their country is a huge, almost inaccessible highland in northeast Africa, that supports a great quantity of game; and yet the Abyssinians have never developed the bow-and-arrow, though they are able horsemen and enthusiastic fighters with sword and spear.

We wish most strongly to urge you to read this story "Spears in the Sun," in our next issue; it's the most unusual thing offered by any magazine in a long time.

With it will appear the first of a fascinating new group of South Sea Island stories by the inimitable Beatrice Grimshaw; another fine sea-story "Gone to Hilo" by Captain Dingle; another vivid Foreign Legion adventure by Warren H. Miller; and many additional tales of conspicuous merit—stories both of these interesting United States, and of those picturesque far places which so intrigue the imagination.

—*The Editors.*

Drawing by Paul Lehman

DAVE ENGLISH, DESPERADO

IN December, 1862, nine miners, including the poet Joaquin Miller, laden with gold-dust, were journeying towards Walla Walla. They were followed by six known desperadoes, led by the notorious Dave English. A blizzard sprang up; by nightfall they were lost, and the man English alone of the two parties kept his nerve. He halted the outlaws and shouted to the miners: "Come up to me!"

They obeyed. "There is just one chance," English announced, "and I'll shoot the first man that doesn't do as I say." Under his direction they cut the saddles from the horses, grouped the beasts in a circle, and English shot them. He then had miners and bandits wrap themselves in their blankets and lie down close together, protected by the warm bodies of the horses. English knew they must not allow themselves to be overcome by the drowsiness which attacks freezing men. "I'll shoot the first man who fails to answer when I call him," he declared. And he himself tramped all night around that strange huddle of freezing men, from time to time calling the roll.

With the dawn the sky cleared and English was able to determine their position. One man had died, but he got the rest to their feet and led them into Walla Walla. In gratitude the miners offered to share their gold with the bandits, but English refused his portion. . . . . Four months later he was hanged for a highway robbery.

Rivers of Doubt

By WALTON GREEN

A colorful tropic romance—the lively tale of an American's great adventure with a fair barbarian, an emerald mine and an able enemy —is here vividly set forth by a skillful writer new to these pages.

Illustrated by William Molt

PORTO PINA is a pocket-handkerchief harbor on the southern shores of the Caribbean. Since the dawn of recorded history only three things of consequence have happened to Porto Pina. The first event was when Columbus landed there on his second voyage. Now, it is true that Caribbean ports where Columbus landed are as numerous as New England houses where Washington spent the night. Only, in this instance Columbus left behind him several bronze cannon freely embellished with the Royal Arms of Spain. These cannon, stuck muzzle down at the four corners of the Plaza, have served as traffic posts for some several centuries since that time.

After the cannon episode nothing really startling occurred for four hundred years or so. Then came the second great event in the history of Porto Pina: the Mogul Banana Company selected it for a port of call.

The Mogul people put a gas-beacon on the headland at the entrance to the pocket-handkerchief harbor; they built a modern steamer dock across the blazing shingle and out into deep water; they covered the wharf and its approaches with long sheds of corrugated iron; they replaced several irreplaceable buildings in the ancient town with the same unlovely material.

Then they ran a toy railroad twenty miles into the back country, and planted the whole region to bananas. They bought up vast moribund Spanish estates and turned them into huge banana plantations. They subsidized, hypnotized and capitalized the resident population. They spent money by the bucket and got it back by the barrel. They were the first and the last word in economic penetration, and they were the benevolent despots of a tropical state. A middle-aged gentleman in Wall Street would frown, and make up his mind, and send a cable; and a youthful agent in Porto Pina would frown and send for the newest general and tell him the revolution couldn't come off till after the rains, anyway.

Social and diplomatic precedence in Porto Pina is definite, and in this order: Mogul Banana Company agent, British consul, American consul, German person who runs the American bar, visiting generals from the capital in the interior. The order of political influence is equally definite: First comes the Mogul agent. There is no second.

THE third notable occurrence in the annals of Porto Pina was the arrival of the steam-yacht *Dora* of New York.

On a soft and sunny morning in January the German person arose early to open his bar. He always arose early, because two-thirds of his customers, which is to say the British consul and the American consul, did their morning drinking early. The German person looked across the harbor and saw the high white cutwater of the *Dora* as she poked her nose around the headland. Then he got busy.

Ten minutes later the diplomatic, commercial, social and financial representatives of the community—meaning the four white men before mentioned—had assembled on the Banana Company wharf. And the great public—meaning the three hundred and eighty-odd mestizos, Caribs, Jamaica negroes and their vari-tinted get—stood massed in silent groups upon the broad shingle, gazing seaward.

The *Dora* was one hundred and sixty feet of American-designed, Clyde-built lux-

ury. The owner's suite in her spacious deckhouse was nothing short of a well-found bachelor's apartment. In a large brass bed in the sleeping cabin of this suite Curtis Imric, the owner of the boat, lay asleep.

The *Dora* let go her starboard anchor, and the rattle of the chain in the hawse-pipe awakened young Imric. He groaned obscurely and turned over. He did not wish to begin the day. He wanted to lie still and listen to the pleasant morning shipboard noises. He wanted to listen to the decks being swabbed down—to hear the soothing, abrasive *swish-swish* of holystone on teak, punctuated by the occasional splash of a bucket of sea-water.

Imric was unhappy. That may seem a curious frame of mind for the owner of a colossal sea-going toy which carried twenty men from captain to cabin-boy to wait upon him. Nevertheless he was unhappy. Decent men who take the easiest way are not usually happy—while they are still decent.

The automatic ship's clock abaft the chart-room struck seven bells; Curtis heard the steward drawing his bath in the adjoining room. He groaned again and rolled out of bed. He must face a new life and a new land.

A FEW minutes later, with his morning self-hate somewhat mitigated by the cold tub, Imric sat at breakfast on the after-deck. He was dressed in a fresh suit of pajamas, and his bare feet were thrust into Chinese slip-slops. His appearance was notable. His features were irregular and abrupt, and quite lacking in that Attic continuity of line which forms the basis of collar-ad beauty. There was a menacing immobility to the overlarge mouth and sardonic lips which failed to match the short and pugnacious nose. The ears were well modeled, but just one size too large for that particular head. All the features, in fact, were too large for the head, so that his face looked assembled instead of molded. He was an undeniably ugly man.

But it was an aristocratic and exciting ugliness, the kind of frankly unmitigated ugliness that men rather like and trust, and that women sometimes love to the point of unreason.

But what Imric's face lacked in beauty, his body almost made up for. His frame had a muscled and dynamic assurance that gave distinction to the most commonplace movement. His personality was unique. He suggested an ugly, able, scrappy, flea-bitten army officer who had left the service, made a lot of money in Wall Street, and seen a little too much of New York during the process.

Curtis ate his breakfast dispiritedly. The sight of a sliced banana on his fruit-plate aggravated his discontent. The banana had come from this locality, he reflected, perhaps from this very port. It seemed outrageous to have carried the thing three thousand miles to New York and back, and then to serve it to him in the harbor of its origin. His steward had no tact, no sense of humor. He pushed the plate away, and gloomily regarded the shore with its watching crowd. Then he sent for Captain Runker.

THE Captain strolled aft, and sat down uninvited. Captain Runker was about as much like the usual yacht-captain as a cow-puncher is like a valet. He was a Nova Scotian who prided himself on two things—on his seamanship and on his talent for sassing his owners. He had sassed Curtis steadily and affectionately for twenty years—ever since he taught him to sail his first knock-about. There was an enduring comradeship between the two men.

"'Morning, Cap'n Ben," said Curtis sourly. "Is this hole-in-the-shore the tropical paradise you promised me?"

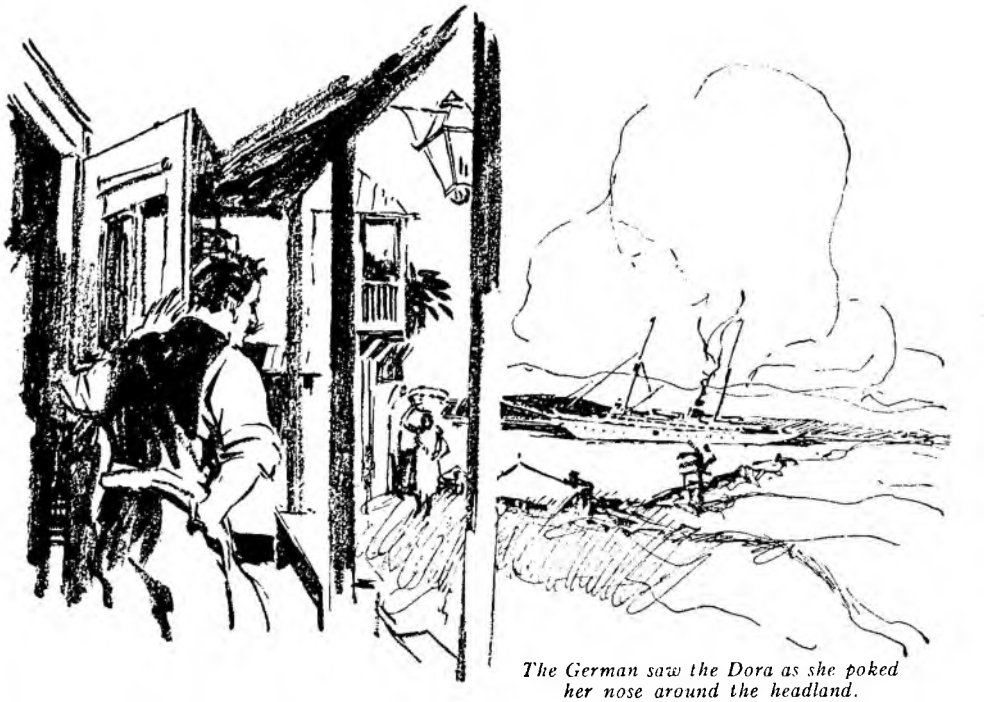
The harbor was a beautiful one, and Curtis knew it. But their code forbade enthusiasm.

"It sure is, Mr. Curtis. The bay aint much to look at, but the back country isn't bad. And say, Mr. Curtis, what are the orders from now on? The spiggotty officers will be alongside most any time, and I got to tell 'em where we're clearing for."

"That's what I want to talk to you about, Cap'n Ben." Curtis paused to light a cigarette. "As a matter of fact, we're not going to clear for anywhere. The *Dora* is going to stay right here until I sell her to one of these spiggotty governments."

"I see," said Captain Runker gently.

"The point is this," continued Curtis: "I'm broke. I'm dead broke. I've got this boat and a few thousand in cash with me, and I've got creditors for a million looking for me in New York. I'm not going back, Ben. I'm going to pay off all hands and ship you home, and then I'm going to stay here and live along on what I can get for the *Dora*."



The German saw the Dora as she poked her nose around the headland.

"I see," repeated Captain Runker unemotionally. "And them creditors in New York can whistle?"

"Exactly. That Wall Street gang crooked me out of every penny I had, and nearly a million besides. They can go to hell."

"I see," assented the Captain. "Wasn't it you telling me a couple of summers ago after you'd made a big clean-up that it was only the guys who failed who cussed out Wall Street?"

Curtis frowned but made no answer. Captain Runker moved to the rail and spat, needlessly but profusely. He was not exactly a yacht-captain. Presently he reseated himself.

"All right, Mr. Curtis: least said, soonest mended. I been kind of figuring on something like this from the sudden way we left New York. But you'll have to keep the boat in commission for a few weeks; she'll sell better that way. You got enough cash to hold onto the crew for a month, say?"

"Yes," said Curtis.

"All right, Mister. Then you and me will kinder mosey round and see if we can find a gold mine or a oil-lake or somethin'. I know this country some. I made all these here fruit-ports them two years I went mate on a banana boat. There's any amount of riches back in them hills, Mister. There's thousands of square miles no white men and damn' few spigs ever been to. The fruit people and the oil people have only scratched the skin of the country, like."

"Are you trying to tell me you're going to stay down here with me, Cap'n Ben?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Curt. You can shake them Wall Street fellers, but you can't fire me just because you're broke. I aim to hang around awhile longer."

IMRIC said nothing. He knew that any suggestion of gratitude would offend the Nova Scotian. But his ugly face softened for an instant.

"Very well, Ben, suit yourself. Now, when will these port officials be aboard? I want to get ashore."

The Captain walked to the rail again.

"I see a couple of launches putting out from the wharf now. And there's another big launch coming from the westward—wonder what she can be? She's all duded up with awnings like a royal barge."

Curtis picked up a pair of glasses and swept the shore. While they had been talking, the harbor had sprung to life, and a flotilla of dugouts and *bancas* had surrounded the *Dora*. The water around the bow of the vessel was dotted black with the kinky heads of young negroes who were swimming about and diving to incredible depths for the coins which the crew were tossing overboard.

Captain Runker went forward. Curtis heard the creaking of the davit-falls as the starboard gangway was lowered, and then the sound of Spanish-broken English. Presently he heard footsteps; he looked up to

see a group of people headed by the Captain. Runker's eyes were puckered into the nearest thing to a smile that his leathery impassivity permitted. Behind him paraded an olive-drab gentleman who was laced and epauletted like the door-man of a second-rate apartment house.

But Imric saw neither the Captain nor the gold-laced person. For in the center of the group was a girl.

A VERY American-looking girl, short-skirted and dressed all in white down to the tips of her buckskin shoes. A tall, thin, weavy-looking girl who carried herself with a loose, athletic grace that was the very negation of the discreet Spanish bearing. An astonishingly handsome girl, darkly and richly colored and frankly sunburned. The sort of loose-limbed, dazzling, nowadays type of Anglo-American beauty to look for on the sands of Palm Beach—but the last girl in the world to expect aboard a man's yacht in the two-by-four harbor of a one-by-two banana republic!

Imric swung to his feet in astonishment, losing a slipper in the process. He felt horribly naked in his pajamas, and so he crammed his sun-helmet on his head. Then, realizing that he had reversed the usual order of hat procedure on meeting a woman, he pulled off his helmet and bowed. He felt confused, and undressed, and angry with himself for feeling anything at all. So he scowled and was even uglier than commonly.

The girl regarded Curtis intently, coolly taking stock of the way he met the situation. The gold-laced person babbled a string of guttural introductions; without taking her eyes off Imric, she made a peremptory gesture which silenced the Spaniard. Then, with a slow and aloof smile, she spoke to Curtis.

"Never mind your pajamas, Mr. Imric. I am quite accustomed to them." Her English was unimpeachable, but with a note of clipped arrogance that betrayed the Latin. "And forgive my coming aboard so unceremoniously, but it is my custom to welcome the very few strangers who come to this place. I'm Catherine Espinosa, and I own an estate of bananas in the back country."

"Say rather that the Señorita owns the countryside and all that is in it," began the gold-laced one, in Spanish; "say rather that all of us who are her slaves—"

"What is he saying?" asked Curtis, speaking for the first time, and remembering himself enough to push forward some chairs.

"He is being flowery in Spanish because he desires that I give him employment."

"I see," said Curtis, his equanimity returning. "I may need to be flowery in Spanish myself pretty soon. Will you have some breakfast? No? Some coffee, then? That's better. Well, Miss—er—now that you're on board, señora—"

"I am Señorita, not Señora, Mr. Imric. I have come to extend the hospitality of Porto Pina and to convey to you the invitation of my aunt and myself to visit us while you are in these waters. I trust Captain Runker will honor us too, if his remembrance of his last visit will permit. My aunt, who waits in my launch, especially desires that your captain come."

"How's this, Cap'n Ben?" began Imric. "You never told me you were acquainted in these parts."

"Hadn't time, Mr. Curtis. But you'd better go with Miss Espinosa. They have a real show place back in the hills. And if you'll excuse me, Mister, I'll go for'ard now. Will you be wanting the launch?"

"Yes," said Curtis absently, watching the curious long woman, who had seated herself at the table. "I'll be wanting the launch." And then, forcibly: "Yes, you may go for'ard—and take Señor Ponderoso with you."

THE Captain and the gold-laced Spaniard departed. The girl watched them indifferently, and then turned slowly to Imric and waited.

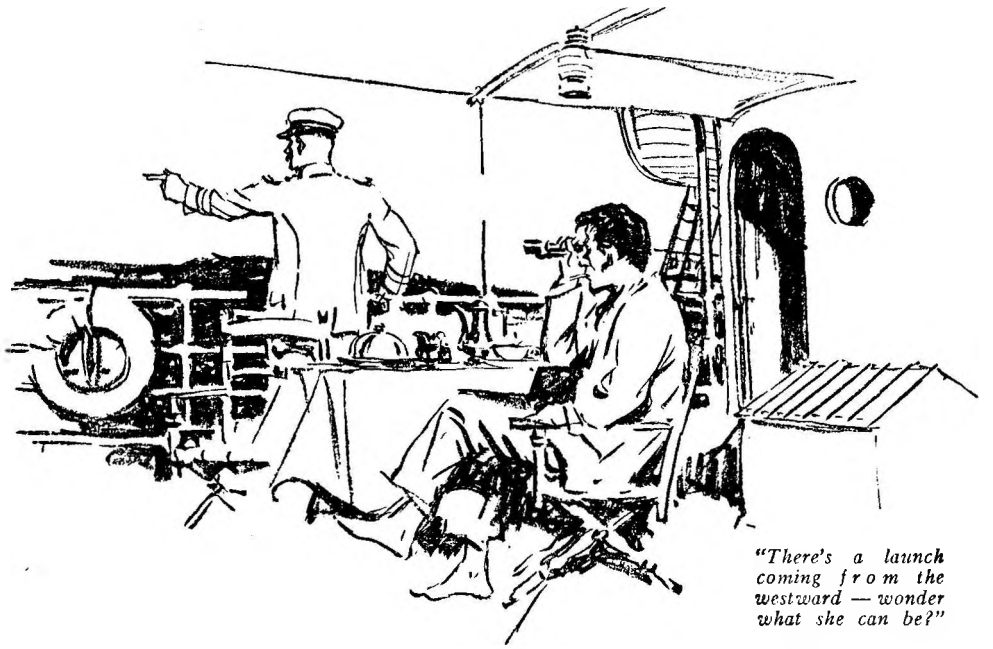
"Now," began Curtis commandingly, "who the devil are you, and why are you in this outlandish place?" He felt excitement mounting in him—the old domineering impulse to subdue the new and the strange; and this superb creature was new and very strange.

"Why have you got an American body and French clothes and Spanish eyes?" he went on with intentional effrontery.

"Because," she answered coldly, perfectly alive to his tactics, but her breast rising and falling with answering excitement, "because I am something of all three of those things. I am part French and part Spanish, and I have lived much in the States. It is only last summer that I have seen you on the piazza of the Coldstream Club after you have been playing polo, though you have not remembered that.

But I have not forgotten you. Your face is not one to be easily forgotten." The thrust was too obvious to provoke a retort. Experience, moreover, had taught him that when women began to comment on his ugliness, a situation was in the making.

"Very well," said Curtis decisively. He threw away his cigarette and came close to the girl. "I shall accept the invitation—of your aunt. And you shall dismiss your own launch and I will take you ashore as soon as I have changed my clothes."



"There's a launch coming from the westward — wonder what she can be?"

"I think not, Mr. Imric. It is not I who am accustomed to take orders in this country. If you will escort me to my launch, I shall be grateful. My aunt and I leave Porto Pina at three this afternoon. Our track-car will be at the small station near the Plaza at that hour. Your captain will bring you there. In the meantime, señor, remember that a good horseman does not rush his jumps. *Adios, señor.*"

WELL in advance of the appointed time, Imric was waiting for Captain Runker at the little 'dobe station. A banana train was being shunted about by diminutive wood-burning locomotives. The small engines attacked the big canvas-topped cars with terrierlike ferocity, sicking themselves on with shrill screeches of their toy whistles.

Drawn up to the platform of the station stood the track-car. It looked for all the world like half a Pullman turned into a colossal automobile bus. It was difficult to believe that so large a vehicle could be propelled by gasoline. It had a glassed-in observation platform in front of the driver, and an awning-covered platform in the rear. The main part of the car was a small drawing-room on wheels; there was a leather lounge, a dozen easy chairs, a couple of tables and a very up-to-date radio receiver in one corner. Back of the driver's seat stood a miniature pantry with an electric ice-box and an electric stove. Young Imric was not unaccustomed to luxurious methods of making life complicated. But this was too much for him. He turned to Captain Ben, who had that moment come up.

"Look here, Skipper—who is this tropical princess we're going to visit? And where did she get that gasoline palace?"

"Made for her over in Long Island City by one of them fancy automobile companies. Some bus, aint it, Mister?"

"But what does she want it for?"

"Runs up and down the line from her kingdom to Porto Pina—does it in two hours—takes two days by river. She's a princess, all right—you've said it."

"Go on," commanded Curtis. "I want to know."

"Well, Mister, it's kind of funny. Nothing like it at home. She's the big bug of

the place, owns hundreds of square miles of land, and has thousands of people working for her. Father was Spanish and mother French—both dead. She was rich before the banana company come, and she wouldn't sell out to 'em. The Mogul people aint no fools—so they played in with her, taught her how to make a hundred bananas grow where one grew before. She's a right smart woman, Mister, for all she's so darned young and soft-looking."

"Soft-looking!" growled Curtis, remembering the morning. "I hadn't noticed it. And when did you visit them, Ben?"

"Sent up with papers by the Mogul people when I was mate on one of their boats. I made a big hit with the aunt, Mr. Curt. She's a pretty little thing, the aunt is." He grinned reminiscently. "Here they come now, sir."

THE pretty little thing proved to be a tall and powerfully built Spanish woman of forty. If she had escaped the middle-aged spread which is the heritage of female Spain, she had nevertheless achieved their hirsute afflictions—for she sported a generously defined black mustache, and the makings of a not unpromising beard. But she was a handsome great animal at that, and her harsh grenadier face broke into a grim smile as she caught sight of Captain Runker. The Captain was a very small man; she out-topped him by a foot and outweighed him by five stone. Curtis watched the meeting, and his ugly mouth twisted into the first real smile of many days.

Then he caught sight of Catherine Espinosa. Again he experienced the curious mixture of physical attraction and spiritual revolt which he had felt at their first meeting. He started toward her; but she bowed rather vaguely and moved past him to speak to the chauffeur. Curtis, piqued, threw his luggage aboard and followed the Captain and the duenna into the car. The car started, but the girl did not return. Instead, she seated herself beside the tobacco-colored villain who drove the car, and talked vivaciously to him for the greater part of the trip.

The car rolled out of the lovely clay-tinted deadness of the town. A hundred yards from the last building they were lost in the jungle; the transition was as abrupt as from Broadway to the Sahara. Curtis filled his pipe tentatively, but the duenna aunt looked away from the Captain long enough to frown. Curtis scowled back and took himself and his gloom to the rear platform. He could not make out the girl, or the country, or the track-car or anything. He was restless and dispirited; the beauty of the country they were coming into scarcely touched him. . . . .

They had crossed the flat llanos of the foothills, and were corkscrewing over a minor watershed on trackage that clung precariously to the muddy hillsides. The coffee-colored brigand drove with obvious skill and no less obvious daring. He flung his great upholstered machine around hairpin curves with compelling and sickening assurance. The sensation was like riding a Fifth Avenue bus over a scenic railway.

They rushed down hillsides and plunged into tropical forests that apparently had no openings; the bright ribbons of steel thrust themselves into dense walls of green, and the car lurched in after them. So thick, and so close to the track grew the rank foliage, that at times they were actually in a tunnel cut from solid vegetation, with vines and creepers meeting overhead in a mass so thick that the outside sun could scarcely filter through. The car roared and echoed as if in a masonry tunnel, and always the clearance at the sides and overhead seemed but a few inches.

Curtis sat somberly on the rear platform and smoked. But his self-centered gloom could not long hold against the cumulative beauty and strangeness of his surroundings; he yielded himself to the exotic spell of the moment, to the drugging queerness of new sights and sounds and smells and feelings.

What did the past matter, he thought, New York—anything? This was a different world, a smooth, lenient world that took no account of yesterday or tomorrow, but judged a man by the joy of today. Yes, by the Lord—hereafter he would take life in his stride, and let the costs abide the event.

He emptied his pipe and put it away. The pipe grated on his new mood; it was too Northern, too robust. From his pocket he drew a packet of Havana cigarettes he had bought in the plaza. The pungent, musty fumes of the heavy Cuban tobacco filled his lungs and coursed through his blood and seemed to attune him, heart and head, to the land and to its spirit.

Ahead of him, in the car, the little Captain and the big aunt were hotly engaged in telling one another funny stories in a

Soldano rose and began to whirl the cat with the stiff-armed whirl of the trench fighter throwing hand bombs.

patently limited Anglo-Spanish vocabulary. Curtis shared the orthodox American belief that a true sense of humor is confined to the continental limits of the United States. He couldn't account for the hilarity with which the gaunt Spanish woman greeted the sallies of the Nova Scotian. But they were having a great time, and he lazily and uncritically enjoyed their enjoyment.

FORWARD of the drawing room, through the passageway that led to the driver's seat, Curtis could just catch a glimpse of the grandly languid head of the Espinosa girl. His pique was gone by now. In his new mood of tolerant acceptance, he was deeply content to watch the girl and to let his facile imagination play about her, and about the sights and sounds and smells of her country. How long this mood would hold he did not know. But he cherished it while it did last, for it asked no effort, and it brought forgetfulness. Damn the girl, let her ignore him if she would, for surely she had not brought him into the hills for the perverse pleasure of snubbing him. It was her land. *Festina lente*—let her set the pace.

The car slowed down and took a switch. They had left the main line and were on a spur track which ascended sharply and began to claw its way up the dark side of a mountain. For perhaps twenty minutes they climbed and lurched their way upward. And then, quite suddenly, they reached the top, and burst into the sunlight of an upland clearing in the saddle between two mountains.

Curtis drew breath sharply. Before him, smoothly and grandly, lay a vast valley of cultivation. As far as the eye could reach, stretched mile upon mile of ordered loveliness—brilliant greens and soft browns, splashed with profligate daubs of tawny yellows and arterial reds. In the dim far distance the tumbling, elephantine *massif* of some great Andean range reared its snow-capped peaks and drove their icy whiteness into the puffy grayness of the clouds.

The car came to a stop, but still Curtis looked. He was never to forget that first impression of man-made magnificence imposed upon a vast area of tropical jungle. The garden of a hundred leagues, he thought, the garden of a thousand black men bent to the will of a woman and a fruit company.

CURTIS heard a voice near him, a man's voice, low and deferential, the typical servant tone, nonintrusive and insufficient to break through his preoccupation. After a time he managed to connect the voice with a leaden-faced English person who

stood waiting beside the car. Curtis pulled himself together and apologized. It was a peculiar twist of temperament which made him habitually rude to his equals and thoughtfully courteous to subordinates.

"I'm Firkins, sir, and I'm to do for you while you're here," said the man. "Your luggage has gone up. If you'll follow me, sir?"

"Fine," said Curtis, descending. He found himself alone. The rest of the party had gone on ahead.

He was not seriously piqued this time, only amused at the casual way his hostess treated her guests once she had reduced them to week-end possession, so to speak. He followed the man through the quaint little plastered station which housed the car, and along a broad path striking the hillside. He had seen no sign of a house as yet. Then they rounded a shoulder of the hill, and for the second time Curtis drew breath involuntarily.

Halfway up the slope of the mountain, majestically commanding the broad sweep of the great valley of cultivation, stood the largest country-house he had ever seen. It was low and long and rambling and dazzling white, and its broken, many-elled roof-line seemed to meet and melt into every last volution of the green-massed background. No gaunt Long Island atrocity this, standing in overweighted magnificence on a peanut-sized suburban hill; no tinted rectangle torn from Como and outrageously dumped upon the dunes of Southampton: but a great and lovely house, its hugeness cunningly cupped and blended into the hillside by the hand of some draftsman of the gods.

The great house stood at the apex of a U-shaped fold in the mountain-side. Flanking it, and falling away from it on either side in craftily disordered echelon, were other buildings, a dozen or more in all. And directly in front of the dominant structure a series of spacious terraces fell away, tier upon tier, to the valley of a thousand blacks. In the distance, lazy and sullen in the tropic sun, lay a broad river, its course pricked out by the attenuated trunks and tufted tops of the great cocopalms which fringed its banks.

IT was a somewhat subdued Curtis Imric who followed Firkins into the house—not exactly subdued, perhaps, nor even abashed, for those were characteristics alien to his make-up. Mere luxury, mere magnificence, mere unmeaning use of wealth, was more likely to rouse his ire than any sense of awe. But here he had come upon a New York palace in a South American swamp, and he experienced a sheer, if grudging, respect for the audacity of imagination which had conceived the thing in its lovely immensity. He felt that he must revise his first estimate of the long slow woman who had come aboard his boat that morning and who had so carelessly snubbed him ever since then. Some hours ago he had made, as he thought, a choice—to yield himself to the spirit of the Southland, to let the pace be made for him. Now he knew that the choice had been forced upon him. And in this still newer loss of spiritual captaincy he experienced a supreme and enervating content.

It was in this frame of mind that Curtis lay on a couch in his room and permitted the man Firkins to minister to him. He was a keen judge of that rather shameful survival of medievalism, the perfect English bodyservant. Firkins, he had to admit, knew his business. But it was ridiculous to have that kind of servant in this kind of a setting; its Orientalism demanded turbaned eunuchs at the very least. Curtis Imric considered Firkins something of a let-down.

FIRKINS, who had finished the unpacking, now appeared at the door of the bathroom.

"What temperature would you wish your bath, sir?"

"Temperature!" exploded Curtis resentfully, remembering the broiling tropic heat outdoors, and noticing for the first time the grateful coolness of the room he was in. "I should like it about fifty degrees cooler than the weather."

"Yes sir—it's 98 today, sir. And shall I shave you, or should you wish to shave yourself?"

"Thank you," answered Curtis tartly, "but I'll shave myself; it's a habit I've got into lately."

"Very good, sir—the bath is ready now."

Curtis threw off his clothes and entered the bathroom. Attuned to the scale on which things were done here, he was scarcely surprised to find himself in a tiled room as large as a small hall. The bathtub was not a tub at all, but a small swimming pool running across the entire end of the room. There were shower-baths and sprays and basins and footbaths and bowls and lava-

teries, ordinary and extraordinary. There was a glass door opening into a hot-room; and all four walls of the room were solid mirror from baseboard to ceiling. There was an electric bath and a light bath; there were wall closets and cupboards containing every kind of soap and lotion and tooth-paste and toilet medicament which the ingenuity of Paris and New York has combined to offer a vain and credulous humankind. There was every useful and useless accessory designed to make arduous the simple task of cleaning one's body.

Curtis, stark naked and astounded, walked slowly toward the middle of the room. Instantly a thousand other stark naked Curtises converged upon him from the infinite depths of the reflecting mirrors. He felt about as much sense of privacy as if he had stood nude at the corner of Wall and Broad streets at the noon hour. He plunged hastily into the swimming bath, but he scrambled out in greater haste. The water was numbing cold.

"I say, Firkins," he called into the other room, "do you turn on the ice here the way we turn on the heat?"

"Was the bath chilly, sir? You said fifty degrees cooler than outside."

"Quite so," said Curtis grimly, walking into the bedroom. "Just tell me how you do it, there's a good chap."

"I see, sir. Perhaps I'd best explain the ammonia cocks. We had a refrigerating system installed some years back, sir. Ammonia pipes under all the floors and in the walls; there's a thermostat control in each room to regulate the coldness. Your thermostat's at the head of the bed, quite handy. You just turn on the cold like we turn on the heat at home, sir. It's quite simple."

"Of course," said Curtis. "To be sure! And before you go, just show me where the cock is, so I can turn on the sun if I happen to want it any time in the night."

"Beg pardon, sir!"

"Nothing, Firkins—nothing. My mistake. Now when do we eat?"

"Dinner's at nine o'clock, sir. Will that be all for now, sir?"

"Yes, that's all—but you might send some one up with a whisky and soda. I shall lie around here and take it easy until time to dress."

CURTIS went down to dinner in an expectant frame of mind. After the lavish absurdities of his quarters, he was prepared for almost anything in the rest of the house. But he was agreeably disappointed. He came down early and walked through the lower rooms alone. The rooms were large and cool and very low-ceilinged for a house in the tropics; but that, he knew, was compensated for by the cooling system.

To his wonder, and also to his relief, for he disliked the department-store completeness of even the most authentic period rooms, there were no studied assemblies of furniture. There were, of course, several rather flamboyant old French and Spanish pieces. But they were well distributed, and inoffensive to his taste, which demanded livability in a room above everything.

Curtis walked on through room after room. Finally he came to the end of the house, and to a spacious corner apartment —half library, half piazza. Two walls of this room were paneled above the book-cases with a veneer of virgin cork whose mellow brown blended soothingly with the ivory-tinted woodwork. The rest of the room was a screened-in veranda, giving onto the hundred-mile sweep of valley.

It was like nothing less than sitting in a stage box of the gods on some Olympian height, gazing at a far-away and beautiful world. The color-splashed majesty of the panorama swept over Curtis again, and he sank into a chair with an exclamation.

"By the living God!" he murmured.

"Do you like it?" came a low voice from his left. He turned slowly. In a high-back swing hammock near by lay Catherine Espinosa.

HER eyes were closed, and she lay absolutely motionless and relaxed. But for her words, he would have thought her asleep. He did not answer at once. He regarded her intently. She was dressed in a low-necked evening gown, soft and black and straight-lined. Her face and neck were deeply sun-tanned, but her arms and breast were white. The contrast was suggestive and exciting. The brown of her face made the uncovered white of her skin seem lovelier and more naked by contrast. It affected him unreasonably and profoundly.

Her right arm, which lay across her bosom, rose and fell with her small, slow breathing. Her other hand, long-fingered and languid, overhung the side of the hammock and held an unlighted cigarette. At her throat, barbaric in its singleness and

immensity, lay a great and brilliant emerald.

Curtis sat himself down quite near the hammock. The cigarette in her hand almost touched his knee.

"Why do you keep your eyes closed?" he asked unsteadily.

"Perhaps it is because I am really resting and wish to remain half asleep," she answered in a curiously subdued monotone, "and perhaps it is because I am willing that you should look at me as you wish—"

Curtis' lips were parted, that she might not hear the quick intake of his breath.

"But you are not to touch me," continued the effortless monotone, "—not even my finger-tips, when presently you light my cigarette. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I think I understand," said Curtis slowly, trying to keep the tenseness out of his voice. "I understand what you say, but that is about all. I understand nothing else—this great house, all this dream country, you. What kind of woman are you? How long have I known you? Six hours, or six centuries? I feel that I have often seen you with your eyes closed, and that I know you intimately."

"A man soon knows a woman intimately if he watches her with her eyes closed. For a man to know a woman, he must watch her. For a woman to know a man, she must listen, but not look."

"I'm not interested in your psychological observations," interrupted Curtis.

"No? And what are you interested in?"

"And I don't like obviously provocative remarks, either," growled Curtis. "Better keep to your pose of sophisticated goddess, or devil, or whatever you are, and tell me plainly why I am up here."

SHE did not answer at once. Finally she opened her eyes, but still she did not look at him. She raised her left hand slowly, and extended it toward him. He took her cigarette, lighted it, leaned over and placed it between her lips. She flushed faintly, but made no comment.

"Perhaps you would first tell me why you are in South America, señor. Or if you prefer, I will hear it from my aunt, who doubtless knows the whole story by now from your captain."

Curtis' tension gave way to amusement.

"That's better," he laughed. "Let's both stop posing. You're too clever, and I'm too tired for that sort of thing. But your aunt wont get anything out of Captain Runker. I'll tell you myself. I'm here because I'm broke, ruined, insolvent, bankrupt. I'm going to sell my boat, if I can, and make a fresh start down here."

"Would you wish for me to buy your yacht?" asked Catherine negligently.

"Certainly not," he rejoined harshly. "I don't care to make love to a woman and have financial relations with her at the same time."

"So?" drawled Catherine. "Are you certain that you are making love to me? And what a curious Anglo-Saxon attitude! Now, Maria Soldano makes love to me at the one moment, and in the next moment tries to cheat me out of my emerald mines. He is a man of the world."

"Funny name for a man, even if he is a man of the world," interrupted Curtis, piqued in spite of himself. "Who is this Maria person?"

"He is my suitor, and perhaps my fiancé. He is a Spanish nobleman, and his full name is Don Alejandro Maria Soldano y Ydan de Parza, Marquis de Cozarro. You will meet him at dinner. You will have much in common. He also is a polo-player and yachtsman."

"Not the only taste we have in common," growled Curtis, disconcerted into crudity. "Are you really going to be married?"

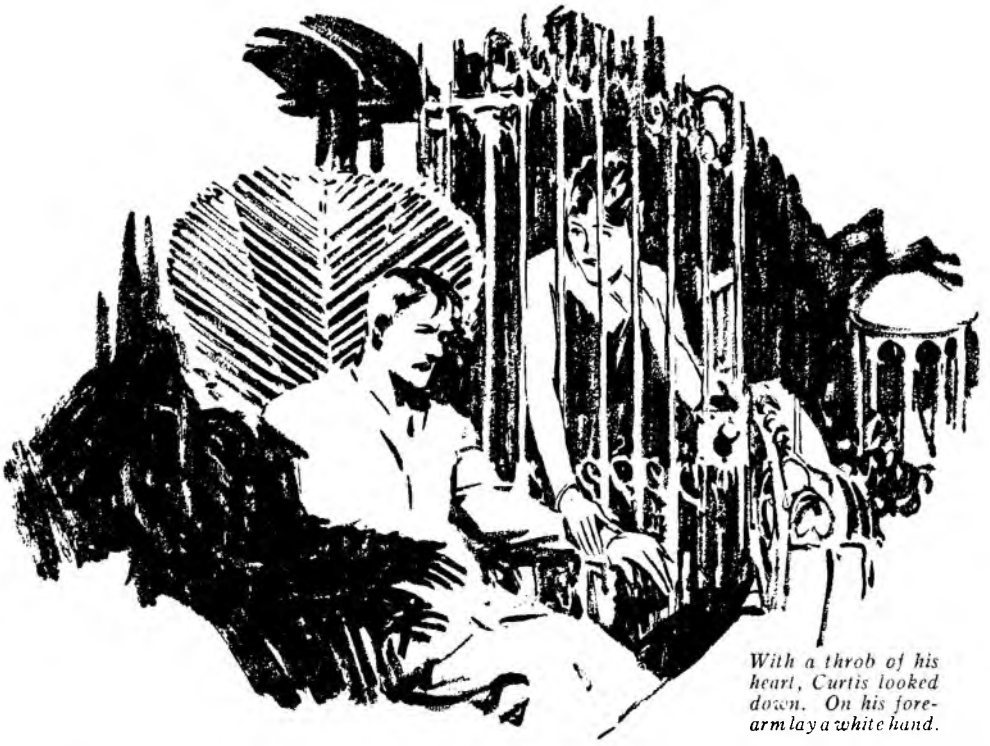
"Probably not. For a time I thought so; Soldano has much charm and persuasiveness. But I do not know. I like my position as it is; my power, my freedom to live as I choose. Also I have resided too much in the North. I could not make a good wife to a Spaniard, though I am Spanish myself."

"You couldn't make a good wife to anyone," Curtis broke in, "—but, by heavens—"

"Yes, I know—but do not go on."

"I will go on. No man in his senses would marry you, any more than he'd marry Cleopatra, or Queen Elizabeth, or Catherine of Russia. No man—"

"Perhaps," she stopped him curtly, "perhaps that is so. But men are seldom in their senses when they marry. However—" She broke off, sat up straight, and resumed in a different and sardonic key: "However, do not be disquieted, Mr. Imric. I do not think I shall make you marry me. You are too much like me in all ways. You are dominating and fierce, and I am possessive and fierce, and we should tear the souls of one another to pieces. We might love, but we could not live."



With a throb of his heart, Curtis looked down. On his forearm lay a white hand.

"Upon my soul!" burst forth Curtis.

She paid no heed, but rose slowly to her long height.

"Yes," she went on, smiling slowly, and placing a reflective and almost impersonal hand on his shoulder, and looking straight into his eyes, "yes, my friend, we might love together, but we could not live together, so have no fear."

"Upon my soul, you are the most outrageous and the most wonderful creature I have ever seen."

"Oh, no—I am simply an intelligent and frank woman speaking to a man who is only accustomed to intelligent women who are not frank."

"Very well," said Curtis almost blankly, "I give up—what are your orders?"

She smiled and considered.

"Well, while you are here, you may flirt with me as you wish. I am tired and bored and stale with life. I need the stimulus. I like playing with fire. But you will take care not needlessly to offend Soldano. For I have not yet decided about him. If he only loves me, then of course I cannot marry him, for it would soon end. But if he really admires me and desires to marry me in order to control and manage my estates, that would be an excellent basis for enduring happiness, and I should seriously consider it—one can have happy love at a moment's notice. Happy marriage is a matter of careful thought and business planning. Do you not agree, señor?"

"I do—not."

"*Quien sabe?* That is for the gods to say. Shall we go in? It must be that dinner is ready."

THE Marquis de Soldano was a distinct surprise to Imric. There was little suggestion of the Spaniard about him. The man was a beautifully built, six-foot-one athlete. Now, Imric was accustomed to the latter-day athletic Latin—to the type of wealthy Continental who digs himself out of his medievalism and crosses the Atlantic to play polo and tennis and race yachts, the type that has accommodated itself to the American habit of a shower-bath after exercise whether needed or not, instead of being content with powdering the neck and readjusting the tie. Yes, this type Curtis knew well enough. He had drunk with them and clubbed with them and played polo and tennis with them. But the ones he had known had been small and lithe and voluble, silent only over their wine and their women, shrill and full of self-encouraging cries in their sports.

Soldano was an exception. Especially did he seem an exception in this exotic setting. He was as handsome as Curtis was homely, he outheighted him by two inches, and he was as impeccably tailored

as a broker at a garden party. And he did not need a hair-cut.

Not only was there no trace of accent in the Spaniard's smoothly cultivated English, but Curtis made sure he detected that peculiar slithering drawl which is commonly attributed to a few years' sojourn amid the classic absurdities of Oxford.

The Marquis de Soldano, in short, looked like an American, dressed like an Englishman and thought like a Spaniard. Only in the last did he betray his Latinity; he was too well and widely read to be merely a university man.

To say that Curtis' nose was out of joint because of this suave and brilliant person would be an exaggeration. But the smoothly friendly courtesy of the tall Spaniard made him uneasy. Curtis was rather accustomed to feeling condescension without showing it. He couldn't do it to Soldano, and the loss of this spiritual advantage irritated him measurably.

The long and the short of it was that during dinner Curtis Imric came very near plain sulking. Not even the genius of a French chef expressed in the supreme delicacy of iguana cutlets *à l'aiglon* could draw him from his moodiness. Catherine Espinosa talked vivaciously with the Spaniard and gave Curtis scarcely more than an occasional and enigmatic glance. Like all men who have dealt much with women, he was by experience jealous, though he would have denied it. And he really did know something of women, which means that he knew that every everlasting one is different from all the everlasting other ones. And this one was very different.

He wanted to see her alone again. He determined to ask her to take him through the gardens after dinner. But she refused.

"I am very tired, if you will excuse me this evening, Mr. Imric. Tomorrow perhaps." And she smiled indolently.

AT this point Soldano intervened, and Curtis could have kicked himself for mentioning gardens at all.

"I'd be delighted to take you around a bit, old chap—it's a bully night," he volunteered.

There was nearly a full moon, and no escape for Curtis short of downright rudeness. They strolled down the hillside through terrace after terrace, each one broader than the last, opening out fanwise from the great house far up at the center. Curtis was distrait, but after a time he began to succumb to the easy charm of the other's conversation. They had been speaking of Curtis' boat at dinner.

"If you really want to sell her, Mr. Imric, I might put you in the way of the right man to see at the capital. I've got a bit of influence at Tobango."

"In business there?" asked Curtis idly.

"Er—yes, and no. Fact is, I'm a concessionaire—which is a polite euphemism down here for adventurer." He laughed pleasantly. Curtis regarded him with more interest.

"Money in it, I suppose?"

"Rather. It's largely on paper, no organization required, and your only overhead is bribery."

"Direct?" asked Curtis laconically.

"Absolutely direct. For instance, if you agree to sell your boat for seventy-five thousand gold, the contract is drawn for a hundred thousand, and you pay back twenty-five to the president, or whoever handles the deal."

"What if I don't pay back?"

"Umh—well, in that case probably neither you nor your money would ever be heard of again."

"Sounds like New York," commented Curtis.

"Dear me, no. They stay bought here, and there is very little daylight killing in the streets."

Curtis smiled. This big curly-haired man seemed to talk the same language.

"Don't think me rude," he ventured, "but I can't help wondering if you're up here on business now."

"Oh, yes," was the ready answer. "I'm trying to get a concession out of our fair hostess to work some emerald ground she owns way back in the hills."

"Really? Are there emeralds in this country?"

"Rather. Best in the world next to the Ural mountains and the Muzo mines in Colombia. The area I'm interested in has been owned by the Espinosas for generations, but never properly worked. She's had an engineer up there for six months—compatriot of yours."

"That emerald the Señorita wore tonight," asked Curtis, "was that from her own mine?"

"Ye—es." The Spaniard hesitated. "I believe it belonged to her mother. It was cut in Amsterdam." He paused and seemed to consider. Then he continued lightly:

"I'm going down to Porto Pina tomor-

row for about three days. But when I get back, I'm going upriver to look over the emerald workings. If you'd care to come along, I can promise you a bit of shooting—'gators, tapir, monkeys, and perhaps a crack at a jaguar."

"I'd love to," responded Curtis with alacrity—an alacrity heightened by the prospect of three days alone while Soldano was at Porto Pina. He suddenly felt friendly toward this tall, agreeable chap.

"And I wonder if you'd send out to the *Dora* and tell them to give you a couple of my rifles?" he added.

"Surely. No trouble at all. Shall we take this path to the left? It leads back to the house, and there's a splendid view at a sort of tea-house halfway up."

THEY came out presently at a natural balcony on the mountain-side. There was a railing, and the balcony was thatched over with palm laid on bamboo. Beyond the railing, the mountain fell away a sheer two hundred feet to the valley of cultivation, its banana groves and palms standing almost tangibly silent in the tepid moonlight.

The night was breathlessly still. The two men seated themselves and lighted cigarettes. Strange, far-away, unidentifiable sounds came to them. Distant, shrill screeches and low, moaning roars. Behind them, mused Curtis, an ultra-civilized household: valets, chefs, marble baths and sophistication. Before them, the vast, sullen tropical forest, fetid and lethal.

And then suddenly, quite close at hand, a wailing shriek crashed and echoed about the rocks. The shriek carried horror and agony and shrill despair, but it carried, too, an oddly familiar sound. Curtis gasped involuntarily and looked at Soldano. The Spaniard was laughing softly.

"That," he said placidly, "is the love-cry of the terrible *felis domesticus*—in other words, the common or barnyard cat. I used to have quite a way with cats. Wait a minute, and I'll show you a trick my brother and I used to amuse ourselves with at home."

Soldano moved a few paces away and began to make cat noises. He mewed, and he meowed, and he emitted a deep, soft purring sound, and he screamed in catlike ecstasy. Every now and then he paused and waited. Curtis, fascinated, watched him, as he would watch an Indian calling an amorous but suspicious moose.

Soldano scorned the orthodox and articulate methods of summoning a cat. He did not say "Come, Kitty, Kitty—here, puss, puss—here, pretty puss," and all that. No, he simply exuded cattiness. He was, to all intents and purposes and for the time being, a lady cat, answering the importunities of Thomas, her forest lover.

CURTIS was enthralled. Presently he saw Soldano stoop over. A large black cat was rubbing against the man's leg, purring and scraping his arched flanks in an ecstasy of friendliness.

The Spaniard scratched and caressed and smoothed the animal's coat from neck to tail as a handler polishes a terrier for the bench. His searching fingers found every last itching curve and brought joy and rumbling purrs with every touch.

And then suddenly Soldano's arm stiffened. His hand grasped the tail midway. He rose to his full height, his legs well apart, and began to whirl the cat with the horrid stiff-armed whirl of the trench fighter throwing hand bombs.

Curtis lurched to his feet with a snarl of anger. But he was too late. With a final snap at the top of the swing, the cat shot screeching and spitting far out over the mountain-side.

"Not bad, that, eh?" Soldano said coolly, still listening at the railing. "My hand hasn't lost its cunning. In San Sebastian my brother and I used to catapult them over housetops. But it takes practice."

He turned to face Curtis.

"Care for the brush, Mr. Imric?" he asked sardonically, extending his hand. Curtis looked, and saw that it was the tail of the cat.

Imric came pretty close to hitting the man then and there. But he didn't. He turned on his heel and started up the trail, Soldano following him apparently unaware of the deep disgust he had stirred in the American.

"Sometimes," continued Soldano blithely, "they don't come apart like that, but the skin slides off just the way you skin an eel. I kept several and—"

"Look here," snarled Curtis, turning abruptly in the path. "Don't say another word. And don't ever let me see you mistreat an animal again, or I wont promise to keep my hands off you. I might have known. Scratch a Spaniard, and you find a bull-fighter. Of all the wanton, dirty, needless pieces of cruelty! And you—with

your English training! Is that all the sportsmanship you've learned?"

Soldano was taken aback. But he was a cool hand. He waited a moment before replying.

"Come, come, Mr. Imric. We mustn't quarrel. At least not about trifles," he continued slowly. "And as for sportsmanship, you Anglo-Saxons have no monopoly on it. We breed bulls to fight 'em and kill 'em, and they sometimes kill us. And you breed pigeons to shoot 'em, but I never heard of a pigeon fighting back. Or a fox, either, for the matter of that, when you chase him over miles of country and finally sit around on horseback and watch a pack of hounds tear him to pieces, and then give his dripping brush to a lady sportsman."

"That's different," retorted Curtis, angry at even having to argue. "Don't split hairs. Fox-hunting is sportsmanlike because it's dangerous. Thousands of men have broken their necks in the hunting field."

"Jolly lot of good that does the fox. Now, I'd admit some merit to your argument if you'd occasionally let a fox bite a man to death. That would be fairer, more like our bull-fights," he finished with a good-natured laugh.

"That's rot, and you know it," said Curtis. "In any case it doesn't explain the way you handled that cat."

The Spaniard abandoned his tone of bantering superiority.

"No, Mr. Imric, that is true," he said seriously. "You'll probably not believe me, but I have never killed wantonly, as you say. This place happens to be overrun with cats; so it was in San Sebastian." He smiled.

"The cats need to be killed. I like killing, and I say so; you like killing, and you call it sport."

"Yes," said Curtis angrily, "I like killing when it's an incidental part of sport—when I go big-game hunting, I kill for food or as the culmination of the chase. I don't entice an animal to me with the call of its kind and hurl it to death."

"No?" Soldano laughed pleasantly. "I went moose-hunting one time in northern Quebec with a celebrated New York clergyman. I've seen that man sit comfortably in a canoe for hours at a time while his Indian guide imitated the mating call of the cow moose. And I've listened for hours at a time while the bull came crashing to the trysting place twenty miles through the woods to be shot down in cold blood—if

he's lucky; and if he's not lucky, to be wounded and to go off and die in the hills. Food? Piffle! Who ever heard of a sportsman eating moose meat unless he was starving? They take the head and leave twelve hundred pounds of splendid animal to rot in the lily-pads. Bah! Compared to that performance, our Spanish bull-fight is a clean and merciful stand-up fight."

HE paused an instant and lighted a cigarette.

"Rank sophistry," growled Curtis uneasily.

"Not at all, my dear chap," Soldano continued soberly. "I've lived and fought and played with you Anglo-Saxons for a good many years, and I resent your eternal pretension to a world monopoly of sportsmanship. Other lands, other customs, that's all. We all like to kill—all virile men do. Let's confess the atavistic streak and have done with it. You dress up in pink coats and watch dogs tearing a fox to pieces, and we dress up in medieval velvet and gold lace, and slaughter bulls after letting the bulls rip the entrails out of a lot of drugged cab-horses."

"You talk infernally well, but I know I'm right."

"Of course, my dear fellow; no Anglo-Saxon ever knows when he's wrong. That's why you people run the world. . . . Here we are at the house again. Would you care for a whisky and soda before turning in?"

"No, thank you," answered Curtis ungraciously.

"Very well. I'm off to bed. Sweet dreams to you, Mr. Imric."

Curtis went moodily to his room. It was refreshingly cool and dry after the muggy heat of the outdoor night. But he could not go to bed. His mind and his spirit was in a curious mixture of turmoil

"Where and when do we picnic?" asked Imric. "That," Catherine rejoined gravely, "is for the llama to decide!"

and lethargy. The Spaniard, the girl, this barbaric kingdom of Parisian princess and African slaves, where life—clothed in magnificence and stripped of pretense—went on unashamed and unresponsible!

Curtis found his pipe and filled it. The act was an instinctive effort to recapture the point of view and standards that a pipe stood for, and that scented cigarettes and cat-whirling Spaniards did not stand for.

He opened the full-length French windows near his bed, and stepped out upon a broad, covered balcony. In the waning moonlight he could see that the balcony ran almost half the length of the wing in which his rooms were situated. But at his left hand, effectually confining him to the section of balcony in front of his own rooms, a wrought-iron grille extended from floor to ceiling and from wall to parapet. In the middle of the grille was a gate. Curtis tried the handle, but it was locked. Funny country, he thought idly, where they have to make sure the house guests wont prowl about and rob one another!

He settled down in a bamboo reading-chair and kindled his pipe. He would try to smoke himself into drowsiness. For perhaps half an hour he smoked. Gradually his thoughts became composed, and there fell upon him again the heedless mood of the afternoon; again his spirit yielded to the spell of the cynical Southland. To drift with the tide of the Southern seas and to take what each day and each night held forth—aye, that was it. Life was but one day after another, and no man could say that another day would come. He drowsed, and the pipe went cold and slipped from his fingers. . . . . He slept.

After a time, in his sleep, he found himself trying to push a weight off his forearm. He knew that he was dreaming, and that the weight wasn't real, but he had to get free of it nevertheless. The subconscious struggle awakened him. He moved his arm; and then, with a throb of the heart, looked down. On his forearm there lay a long white hand. The night was very dark by now, but he could see that the long white hand and the long white arm were extended through the grille.

Curtis made no move or sound. He stiffened the muscles of his forearm, and the answering pressure of the long white hand made the blood beat at his temples.

CATHERINE ESPINOSA withdrew her hand slowly through the grille and spoke in a low voice.

"It was by the smell of your tobacco that I knew you were still awake."

"Yes?" whispered Curtis, coming close to the grille. "And why did you come at all? And what have you got on? I can see nothing but your white arms and your white throat."

It seemed to Curtis that she had moved farther away, but in the next instant he heard her low throaty laugh.

"I am surprised, señor, that you do not recognize a nightgown because it is black."

"Come closer," said Curtis. "Damn this grille!" He tried the handle again. She must have sensed his movement.

"No, no, Mr. Imric," she said gravely. "It is locked—and you must try to understand. I do what I wish when I wish to. I came to speak to you because it pleased me to do so, but even I do not care to be discovered here. So do not raise your voice, but listen to me. You have already quarreled with Soldano. I do not know what about, but I know from the way he spoke you have quarreled. You must not do that, I have warned you. That is all, señor. *Buenos noches!*"

"Come back—listen to me—come back," breathed Curtis as loudly as he dared. There was utter silence. He listened tensely, and tensely peered into the darkness.

And then, when he had thought her gone, came a laughing whisper in his very ear:

"There is a Spanish proverb which runs: 'Never a lock without a key!'"

THIS time she was really gone. Curtis stood at the grille and clenched the bars in his two hands. So might a prisoner stand when a visitor has departed. After a time he relaxed his grip and turned slowly back to his bedchamber.

Three days passed—days that were memorable even in the not uneventful life of Curtis Imric. Days in which he reasoned less and less, and felt more and more. Nights in which he lay and struggled with an issue which even his sophistication could not define. Hours in which he fought the gathering lethargy of spirit, hours in which New York, and debts and the deep-grained fighting instinct of the North seemed alien and far-away and worthless of attainment.

The queer part of it was that Curtis had long since chosen the easiest way, deliberately, as he had thought. But now that the easiest way lay before him, seemingly for the taking, he could not reach forth his hand.

Had Imric been a better man, or a worse man, his course would have been simpler. But he was of the in-between type, introspective and over-analytical of his own acts, the type to whom come hardest the values set upon things of the world by the world itself. To him the zest of getting was greater than the accomplishment, the joy of subduing greater than the event; and always the goal seemed smaller than the road which led to it.

Imric was neither prig nor hedonist. He was too mentally fastidious for crass self-indulgence, too physically vital to forgo temptation. He was an emotional idealist with too subtle a prevision. He could embark upon nothing heedlessly and wholeheartedly. He was not a weak man. But it is often the strong who fail from overmuch knowledge and too little fear and faith. Not too little knowledge, but too much, is a dangerous thing. The ignoramus, hedged in by faith on one side and fear on the other, rides straight and true upon the road of righteousness. Imric, who knew too much, might well ride for a fall.

For these three days he was exposed to the cumulative charm of Catherine's personality. She blew upon him hot and cold with a finished technique of coquetry that left him wondering if it were not, after all, a sublime simplicity. For hours at a time, she would withdraw herself; and then, of a sudden, she would seek him out with Amazonian directness and carry him off to some far corner of her domain. They rode, and they drove; and they went on river trips in launches, sometimes alone, and sometimes with the aunt and Captain Runker along: and sometimes, to the amazement of the native servants, they picnicked in Northern fashion, sitting actually upon the ground, with black men standing behind them wielding long-handled mosquito fans. Then Imric would think of Cleopatra, and into his ugly face and fine eyes there would come a self-derisive and sardonic look.

At first these expeditions were conducted in state. Catherine and Imric rode in covered bullock-carts, accompanied by a retinue of breech-clouted Carib porters and white servants to serve the champagne and paté.

After the second of these royal progresses Imric balked.

"If you don't mind my saying so, I think it's a bit out of the picture to have a man in a striped waistcoat wait on me in the woods. If I've got to drink champagne in the jungle, I prefer it in a coconut."

Catherine raised an eyebrow and smiled.

"Very well. Tomorrow we shall go by ourselves upon a different sort of picnic."

On the morrow he waited for her all morning, but in vain. Finally he became impatient and routed out the dragon aunt. That lady informed him, in rather bad French, that this was Thursday, on which day the Señorita dispensed justice in the estate offices.

The estate offices proved to be in the far eastern wing of the house. A servant led Imric through a long paneled corridor and opened a door. He found himself in a large, white-walled, chapel-like chamber, more Hispanic than anything in the rest of the house. Seated on benches, facing the far end of the room, were some fifty natives. And on a raised platform behind a desk, surrounded by clerks and assistants, sat Catherine Espinosa.

Apparently Curtis' entrance was not sufficiently respectful or quiet, for a black gentleman in a frock coat pounded on the floor with a staff, and there were admoni-

tory hissings from the audience. Curtis sat down abashed, halfway between laughter and awe.

Catherine was literally holding court. From the nature of the cases and the sentences she imposed, mostly floggings, Curtis judged her function to be a combination of Irish R. M. and an American army court-martial. For the hundredth time in as many hours his feelings underwent still another readjustment. The girl was dominant, curt, just, and keen as mustard. She was Cleopatra clad in a white duck suit and wielding a large Chicago-made fountain pen.

Finally Curtis summoned enough nerve to scribble: *"When do we picnic?"* on a card and send it up to the throne. She read it, scribbled on it in turn, but did not so much as glance up. The card came back with a careless *"Four o'clock"* scrawled across it. Curtis tiptoed out with the exaggerated care of an American law-student leaving the Old Bailey in London; he was delighted, and piqued, and stimulated out of the last vestige of his spiritual apathy.

AT a few minutes before four that afternoon there was a knock at Curtis' door. It was the man Firkins.

"Señorita Espinosa's compliments, sir, and would you care to join her at the stables?"

Curtis hurried from the house. As he approached the stable compound, he saw a pair of small, fat saddle-horses tethered to the top rail of the corral. Inside the corral, with a dozen men standing around, but with no one venturing to assist her, Catherine was cinching the Latin-American version of a pack-saddle to the ostrichlike back of a llama.

Curtis folded his arms on the rail and waited. Finally he inquired mildly:

"Want any help?"

"No, thank you. Or rather—yes. Pass me those two duffle-bags."

She tied the mouths of the sacks together, slung them over the pack-saddle, and secured them with a sort of embryonic diamond hitch.

"Now," she said, driving the llama before her through the gate, "if you'll get on your hobby-horse, we'll be off."

"Want a leg-up?" queried Imric, noticing for the first time that one of the horses bore a side-saddle. But she forestalled him; with two steps and a spring, one hand on the neck and the other on the horn, she was in the saddle. It was a little showy, but not nearly so hard as it looked; for she was very tall, and the Peruvian stallions very small and stocky.

They rode away, the llama ambling moodily before them up the trail. Curtis was amused. Then, as he began to take in her appearance, he was a little touched. She was dressed in a khaki riding-skirt and blouse, and her nearly black hair was crammed severely under an Australian campaign hat. The only touch of color was a vivid orange neckerchief, the only note of sophistication her pipe-stem riding boots. She looked absurdly young and flushed, and rather like an earnest girl scout, thought Curtis—only longer and more alluring than any girl scout before or since.

"You rather like running to extremes, don't you?" he ventured after a little.

"Yes—perhaps so. But I think it is more this way: I like to have everything done for me—perfectly, you will understand? Or I like to do everything for myself. Today I have chosen to do everything, so that you shall see I am not, well—so that you shall see—" she ended uncertainly.

"Ah," he said.

"And you shall do nothing. I shall prepare our food, and care for the beasts, and I shall saddle and unsaddle. I shall wait upon you as if you were the master."

"Which I am not."

"Which you are not."

FOR a time they rode in silence. Their horses walked with a mincing circus step; occasionally they broke into an oscillating single-foot, a single-foot so smooth and gentle that a paralytic nonogenarian could have sat it.

"Do you like your mount? Is he not well gaited?" Catherine challenged quizzically.

"Excellent, excellent," said Curtis hastily. "Are they always so—er—dovelike?"

"Always," said Catherine severely, but with an un-Spanish twinkle in her eye. "You should see our great generals leading parades at the Capital upon such horses as these. They wear silk hats and frock coats with broad golden sashes upon their breasts, and they dance gently and they prance very gently just as do your great Tammanee generals upon the Fifth Avenue. But if they got upon real horses, they would fall off before they got on."

"Quite so," agreed Imric. "And now, if I may ask, where and when do we picnic?"

"That," she rejoined gravely, "is for the llama to decide."

"The llama? Some high priest, you mean? Oh, I forgot—the llama is that long-necked pack-animal cross between an ostrich and a woolly lamb, up ahead there. But why does he decide? From the way he started out, I sort of thought he was working for you."

"Llamas are very queer animals. They bear their burdens until they are weary, and then they lie down and refuse to arise until their packs are removed. And if you then urge them unduly, they turn those long patient necks around and spit into your face."

"I assure you I had no such thought," said Curtis hastily. "I'm quite ready to picnic whenever the llama is. Where'd they get these obnoxious habits?"

"I do not know, señor. It has always been so, for many, many hundreds of years."

"Ah—for many, many hundreds of years," growled Imric, the phrase carrying him instantly to another mood, lightness and banter falling from him and leaving him unaccountably sad and restless.

"Oh, but please, please do not change so again. I like it when we talk nonsense so sternly, and when you make jokes with no smile upon your great mouth. Spanish men cannot do that. When they make jokes, they laugh loudly and slap their legs. Please do not be sad and serious."

"Too late, woman," laughed Curtis. "I think I need to be fed. And what is it that I see ahead of us on the trail? As I live, I believe the llama has lain!"

"Yes," intoned Catherine, "the llama lies, and my lord shall be fed."

AN hour later they still sat there. He had yielded to her caprice and let her do everything, not even bothering her with offers of help—but marveling none the less at the practiced capability of her work. This was no pose. This tropical princess was a cook and a dishwasher and a horse-wrangler, when she wanted to be, by divine right of knowing how. God in heaven, how many undisclosed facets were there to this glowing gem of the Southland? What manner of creature was she? This morning, pagan queen of a black kingdom, meting out even-handed justice in the lofty hall of a great palace. Tonight a lovely, long-limbed, disheveled girl, squatting by a dying fire, wiping out the fry-pan with a handful of dried grass.

They had not spoken for a long time. Curtis lay back and smoked and watched her. She was, of course, intensely conscious of his scrutiny; indeed they were, both of them—silently, and therefore the more intensely, conscious of the intimate implications of the situation. Both of them, perhaps for different reasons, cherished the thought.

Curtis tried to make up his mind. He had always plumed himself on being a realist—"actualist," he called it. Did he love the girl, or did he only want her—want her with a plain, savage, male want? Two days ago the answer would have been easy—and not too creditable either to him or to her.

But now it was otherwise. The longer he was with her, the less was he obsessed by the call of her person, and the more did he crave her spiritual regard and her emotional surrender. And that, he feared, was love.

She must have sensed something of what was passing in his mind, for she finished packing up the cooking outfit, then came across the fire and seated herself beside him.

"Señor Imric," she began, taking a cigarette from him and lighting it, "I have had it in mind to thank you for not misunderstanding the way I behaved on that first day."

Curtis stared.

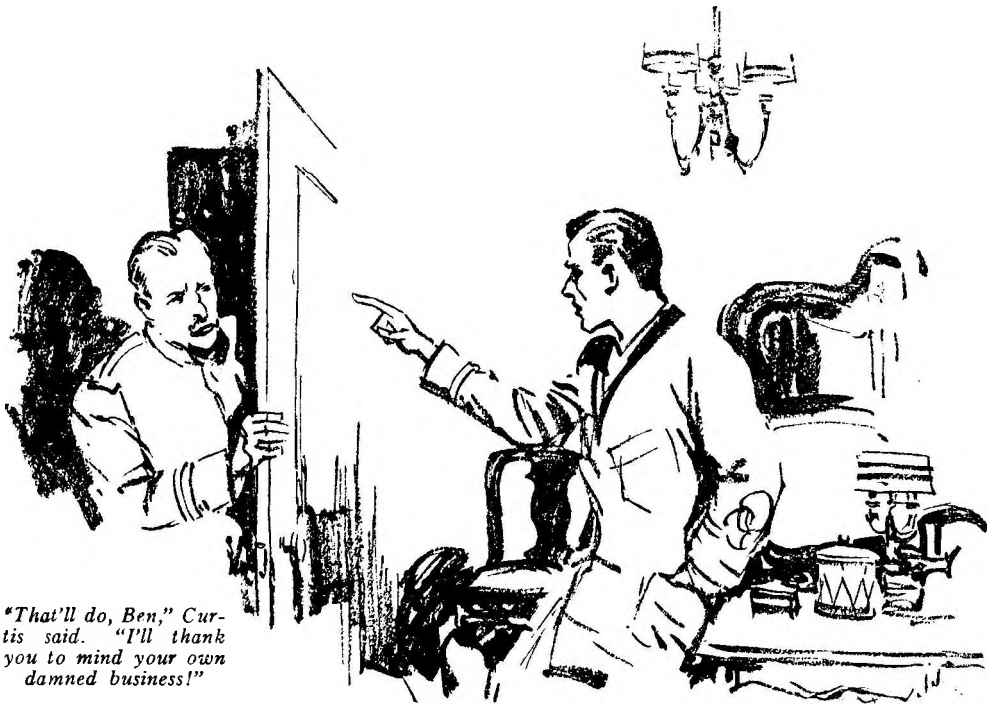
"No—I am not apologizing, and I am not making excuses. I never do that. I do what I wish when I wish to do it. That is all. That is me. But I like you much more because—though you like me much, very much, perhaps—you have tried not to let me see it."

"Wait a minute," said Curtis harshly, his heart pounding. "Do I do any of the talking?"

"Not yet, my friend," she stopped him. "You will hear me through. I think you have made it easier to tell you what I brought you here to say. You will hear me, and then you shall decide."

"Go on," said Imric dully.

"Since Soldano went down, I have decided. Yesterday I sent him a messenger and returned unsigned his contracts of concession for my emerald land. I am now happy to ask you to undertake the enterprise jointly with me. I shall supply the



"That'll do, Ben," Curtis said. "I'll thank you to mind your own damned business!"

equipment and operating expense, and the profits we shall share like and like. What do you say, señor?"

"What do I say?" returned Curtis. "Of course I say yes. What else could I say? You're giving me the chance to retrieve my fortunes. I don't know an emerald from a piece of glass, but if you've got an honest engineer up there, I'll take care of the commercial end. But one stipulation I make. I shall sell my boat, and contribute the proceeds as my share to the capital of the adventure."

CATHERINE meditated a moment. An inscrutable smile gathered at the corners of her mouth.

"Very well, señor, if you so desire."

Then a doubt crossed Imric's mind.

"But how about the Marquis? Hasn't he set his heart on this scheme?"

"It is not the only scheme on which he has set his heart. He has lost, that is all," she added coldly. "Tonight he returns, and tomorrow you go with him to the mine. I had hoped that he would not return at all from Porto Pina, but in his letter he insists that he has papers and plans at the mine, and that he must make a last trip. I cannot forbid him, for he has accepted my decision with perfect courtesy and much philosophy."

"He would," remarked Curtis laconically.

"Yes, he would. For he is a true Spanish gentleman in defeat. But I do not like it—no, I do not like it."

"Why not? Seems natural enough to me."

"Ah, you do not know Maria Soldano as I do. You do not know that underneath his charm he has the heart of a tiger. You do not know us Spaniards. It is such as he that once ruled your island of Cuba."

Curtis had his own ideas of Soldano. His mind flashed back to the cat incident, but he made no comment.

The girl continued:

"He is a great Spanish nobleman. But he has no money, and he knows neither fear nor mercy nor conscience. He has the body of a great *espada* and the mind of a wicked cardinal. You will do well, señor, to be on your guard. In this land there is no law, and in Soldano there is no scruple. He is splendid and he is terrible."

Imric flushed uncomfortably at this praise of the man.

"I fancy I can look out for myself," he said shortly. And then the devil of jealousy goaded him.

"Are you going to make me run your mine while you marry Soldano?" Instantly he was contrite: "I beg your pardon, I have no right to say anything like that. I'm really sorry."

The girl at his side seemed to stiffen, but she did not answer. Slowly she rose and, crossing to the far side of the fire, reseated

herself. With deliberation she tossed some fagots on the fire and watched until it broke into a fresh blaze. Then she raised her head and looked at him, level-eyed and starry-eyed, across the firelight.

"Señor, you have the right—to say to me—what you will." Her voice held a strained, thrilling flatness, and her eyes did not leave his face.

Curtis sat motionless. He felt the hot blood pricking at his cheeks.

"Why have you gone over there?" he asked.

"Because I cannot bear it any longer, señor. Let us have done with pretense. You love me—why do you not say so? Must you humble me to please your cold pride?"

"Pride!" burst forth Curtis. "I have no pride. But you have pride—the glorious pride of your certainty—or you would not dare taunt me. Love you? Yes, by the great God I love you, love you so it makes me well-nigh mad to touch you, and well-nigh mad not to touch you. Come back here, or I shall come there."

"Stop," she commanded.

Curtis sank back.

"It doesn't matter," he said harshly. "I can love you so from here that I can crush you in the arms of my desire without touching you—and you know it. Don't you know it? Don't you feel it?"

"Yes, yes, my Curtis, I know it, and I wish to feel it more and more."

SHE was kneeling now, close to the fire, her long hands crossed on her breast in a vaguely sacrificial posture. Her hair had partly fallen down, and she looked lithe and ghostly in the flicker-light of the fire, and very desirable.

Curtis lighted a cigarette to steady himself.

"Listen," he began somberly. "I am penniless, but I shall marry you and dig wealth and self-respect out of your own lands. I have run away from my country and my duty and my debts, but I love you so that nothing matters but the sound of your voice and the touch of your hand and the smell of your hair. Do you understand, Queen Catherine?"

She laughed softly, and her arms fell gently to her sides. Then she came across the fire again and seated herself very near him.

"I like your far-away making of love. It is thrilling. I do not know why. But do not touch me, Curtis—not yet. Hear me now in turn."

She laughed with the throaty, melodious laugh that came so rarely. Then she became grave.

"I am Catherine Espinosa. I am my own law, and none in this land may question me. I give where I choose and I take where I choose. All my life, since I was a young girl, I have done as I chose. I have played with men's hearts, and perhaps I have played with fire, as you would say. But never, señor, have I loved, and never have I given myself to any man. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, I believe you, because you're too proud and too lazy to lie."

"And now I love. I have played with fire—I am burned—and I find it very good." She paused musingly and then went on calmly:

"I shall come to you as did the maidens in the ancient fables, Curtis Imric. I come with my hair down. But I shall not marry you, for I love you too well."

"What do you fear?"

"I fear ourselves. You and I, Curtis, are too much alike. We are too possessive, too fierce for one another. I would not expose our love to the hazards of marriage. But I am queen here, and you shall be king—while we live, and while we love. Do you understand, Curtis? And will you be content?"

Curtis did not answer. He stared long into the dying fire.

"Come, my dear one," she whispered softly. "It is very late. We must go home. Will you not kiss me—once? And then we shall go. We shall talk again—later."

He crushed her to him. The scent of her hair flooded his being and the surrendering crush of her lips inflamed his senses like raw spirit on a virgin palate. A whirling eternity of seconds it lasted; and then the devil of prevision rose mockingly in his brain, and he pushed her roughly away in a movement that was the essence of denial and of savage longing too.

"Come," he said, husky with feeling, "we'll be on our way. Yes, we shall talk again—later."

MEEKLY she obeyed him, with a faint, wise smile upon her face. Starry-eyed with love, softly demure and woman-wise in victory, she went about her work, saddling her animals and adjusting their burdens. And so they rode homeward.

When they reached the big house, they separated with no more than a perfunctory good-night—Curtis constrained and conscious, Catherine soft and demurely certain in her bearing.

Curtis went straight to his rooms and undressed. He turned on his bed-light and tried to read. But he couldn't make a go of it. He put aside his book and went to a writing-table in the corner of the room. Here he pondered for some time, pen in hand. Then he drew up a bill-of-sale of the *Dora,* leaving the name of the buyer blank, wrote a memo to go with the document, and enclosed the whole in an envelope addressed to Captain Runker. After that he looked at his watch, frowned, went back to bed, lighted a cigarette, and lay thinking and listening. It was too early yet; the household was still up, and that infernal wet-nurse Firkins would be puttering about wanting to tuck him into bed. He determined to get rid of the man once for all, and so rang his bell. Firkins appeared, so promptly as to suggest that he had been leaning against the keyhole, which was not impossible.

"Firkins, I'm starting first thing in the morning on a few days' river trip. Will you get some things together for me?"

"Yes, sir. I've already packed your Gladstone and a bedding roll with what you'll require. Captain Runker informed me of your plans, sir. May I ask, did you speak with the Captain after you came in tonight? He was asking after you very particular, sir, earlier in the evening."

"No," answered Curtis impatiently. "I don't need to see him. Just leave this letter at his room on your way to bed. That's all for tonight. Thank you, Firkins."

THE man took himself off. Curtis waited for a few moments, then tiptoed to his door and locked it. After that he looked very carefully around the entire room in a sort of ecstasy of anticipatory care. He walked to his bureau and brushed his hair with absent-minded precision—then catching himself in this needless vanity, laughed harshly, slammed down the brushes and moved slowly to his bed-light.

He stood quite still for some moments and listened. There was no sound. Finally his hand went out to the light-switch, and again his lip curled in self-derision as he noted the trembling fingers. He snapped off the light and turned to the door which gave upon his balcony. The moon was nearly down and did no more than temper the darkness it could not dispel. Curtis passed softly out onto the balcony, his bare feet soundless on the tiled floor—he did not dare risk the shuffling slap of slippers—and besides, he might forget them.

He located the bamboo reading-chair, and started to sink into it, but it creaked horribly at the first touch, and he drew back in alarm. Then he looked towards the grille. The basket-pocket on the left arm of the chair was within a few inches of the ironwork. This—this was what he loved—the gulping thrill of anticipation and uncertainty. "Never a lock without a key." Aye—that was it—but would it be there?

Slowly his arm reached out; his hand found the bamboo-pocket; his fingers searched its recesses—and closed eagerly upon the metal object which every nerve in his body was calling for—a great iron key, still warm from human touch!

He started to straighten up, but another sound was hammering through his consciousness; a low insistent knocking at his bedroom door. His fingers unclasped and came away without the key. With a quick deliberation he slipped back to his room and into his bed—his balked blood pounding at temples and ears.

AFTER a moment he switched on the light, flung himself noisily from bed and unlocked his hall door. The Captain stood there, his small blue eyes glittering against the dark of the hallway, taking Curtis in from foot to head, and coming quizzically to rest on the still carefully brushed hair.

"What the hell do you want, Captain Ben?"

"Sorry to disturb you—not to say wake you, Mr. Curt," said the skipper slowly, and with what Curtis feared was deliberate irony, "but about these papers the valet brought me just now—I read 'em, and I read your memo of what I was to do with 'em."

"Well, then, why don't you go ahead and do it, instead of waking me up in the middle of the night?"

"Middle o' the night, nothing," replied the Captain placidly, walking past his irritated master and calmly seating himself. "And you wasn't aiming to go to sleep, as far as I kin see. Now, you listen to me, Mr. Curt: I been with you, boy and man, for some spell of years. When we're at sea,

I work for you. You give the orders, and I carry 'em out. But I aint working for you now on shore, Mr. Curt—leastways, I aint getting paid for it—and I don't figure to carry out orders unless I think they're good orders. Get me?"

Curt was close to cold rage. He became very quiet. Also he knew from experience that the man's affection was equaled only by his obstinacy, and that to stand him off now would merely intensify his Down East stubbornness. Curtis forced himself to a conciliatory tone.

"Yes—I get you, Ben, and I'll admit you've earned the right to boss me all over North and South America, if that'll satisfy you."

"I aint earned any right, Mr. Curt," said the Captain softly. "I'm just naturally takin' it."

Curtis laughed in spite of himself.

"All right, you win—what do you want to know?"

"I want to know if you're giving the *Dora* to this Espinosa girl."

"I'm not giving it—I'm selling it," returned Curtis patiently. "I'm putting the money into her emerald mine on a fifty-fifty basis with her."

"Well," the Captain pondered doubtfully, "that's some different, I admit. But how do you know you wont lose your money? How do you know they's anything up in that mine?"

"I don't—I'm taking a chance."

"Are you taking a chance on anything else, Mr. Curt?"

CURTIS grew angrily red about the forehead. The Captain noted it and rising hastily, walked to the balcony. "All right, all right, Mr. Curt, I'll lay off that particular shoal, if you don't like it. But I bin talking a lot lately with this here Aunt—I never kin pronounce her spig name—I call her 'Matilda' because she favors my Aunt Matilda down in Augusta, Maine. Say, me and this big Matilda are getting pretty thick lately." He chuckled reminiscently. "And of course we old folks hev bin doing considerable gossiping about you young folks."

"Of course," said Curtis stonily.

The Captain flicked an appraising eye towards Curtis, and then went on warily.

"Yes, we two are pretty thick—even been readin' Shakespeare together—she don't understand all the English words, but I explain 'em good enough."

"I'm afraid you're getting soft, Skipper," Curtis laughed outright. "Never knew you to read anything except a newspaper or a tide-book. What plays are you reading?"

"Well—we just finished 'Antony and Cleopatra.' Tough story, that. Sort of goes against the grain to see a good fighting man like that Roman guy fall for that Egyptian skirt—ducking his job back home and gettin' all softened up. No sense in it, Mr. Curt. They's no sort o' use gettin'—"

But Curt had turned upon him savagely.

"That'll do, Ben," he said in a hard voice. "Beyond a certain point I'll thank you to mind your own damned business. And that goes for ashore or afloat either."

"Oh, all right, all right—no offense, Mr. Curt. And I'll be going now—just a moment till I get my pipe. I left it on your piazza this afternoon."

THE Captain walked through the French windows to the darkness of the balcony. Curt heard him strike a match and saw the reflected glow—then the mumble of words as the man evidently fumbled around on the floor. Curtis threw himself on the bed and lighted a cigarette. The Captain came back into the room, pipe in hand. Curtis regarded him sourly—and then—as always, relented.

"I expect to be upriver four or five days, Ben. When you get back from Tobango, you'd better follow me. I may need you—anyway, I want you to go over the lay-out of the mine with me."

"All right, Mr. Curt. I'll get back and up to camp as soon as I can. Good night to you, and good luck."

"Good night, Ben. And—er—Ben—I quite understand—thanks for everything."

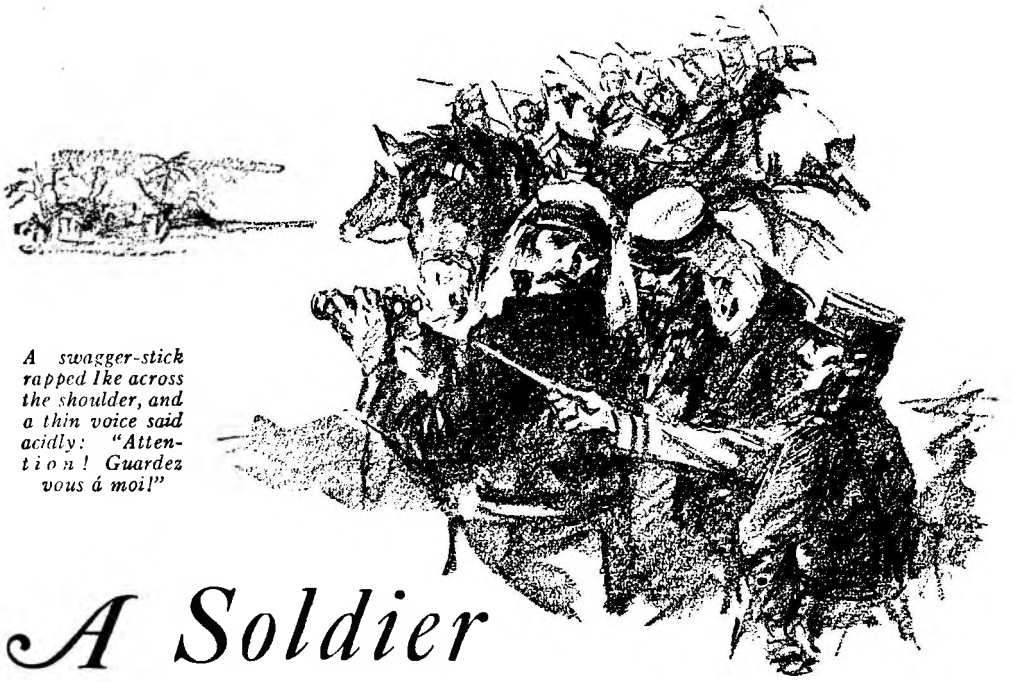
The Captain paused in the doorway.

"The hell you understand," he remarked grimly, and closed the door behind him.

A long time had passed, how long Curtis could not determine. Again he lay and listened—again he arose and bolted his door. Again he turned out his light and tiptoed to the reading chair on the balcony. Again, though with less of titillating excitement, his hand reached out in the dark and his still eager fingers explored the recesses of the bamboo pocket.

But this time there was no key. Princesses may not be kept waiting.

The pace speeds up to a climax of desperate battle in the next installment—in our forthcoming June issue.



A swagger-stick rapped Ike across the shoulder, and a thin voice said acidly: "Attention! Guardez vous á moi!"

A Soldier of the Legion

This splendid drama of valiant men in battle is by the gifted author of "The Lost Regiment" and many another spirited story.

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

"BUT, my dear Colonel, it is impossible. One does not promote direct to lieutenant a mere soldier of the Line!" demurred Courtois.

"Ah! But the gesture superb, my dear Courtois!" came back Commandant Knecht of the Foreign Legion, his brown eyes gleaming with a romantic idealism. "He is a monument of the old Army of Africa, that Hortet! He is all the traditions of all our campaigns—from the wars of Abd-el-Kader down to our final victories over the Tuareg, under Joffre! What *men*, those zou-zous! The *compagnies légères!* The tirailleurs! That old army that conquered Africa! As my cowboy Sergeant Ike says, they were boiled-hard! It is a tribute to those old gallants that we honor Hortet. Is it not, Lamy?"

"Ah!" said both of the colonels, catching Knecht's enthusiasm. Courtois was one of those thick-set Gascons whose swarthy face is a peremptory mask of military command and be damned to you; Lamy, a long Norman, with a head like a sledge-hammer and a pair of sweeping gray mustaches resembling sabers in their grizzled curves. The three colonels were in conference after the battle of Dar-el-Beïda—considering ways and means of getting the relief convoy from there to Tinghar in spite of the objections of some ten thousand hostile Arabs—when Knecht had brought up the promotion of Hortet for signal gallantry in the palmery fight of Ksar el Meski.

Lamy was the first to speak, after that one appreciative *"Ah!"* that said so much. Each of these three seasoned Sahara fighters had gone to school at the knee of some grizzled old veteran of the Army of Africa, some zouave, chasseur, tirailleur, who had campaigned here since a young *bleu* of sixteen prodding for his first stew in the company *marmite*. Ah, the *marmite!* That huge earthenware pot on the camp-fire, full of good things that only the French know how to concoct! All three, as beardless young shavetails direct from St. Cyr, had

learned their Arab and his deviltries from such as Hortet. Lamy twirled his saber-like mustache and growled:

"The old sergeants! May the good God reserve a special place for them in the heaven provided for soldiers only! How many of them have I seen shot on the field of honor, broken through years of wounds and service, retired by age-infirmities, without ever once experiencing the honor that a commission alone can give! Yet what better officer than the veteran sergeant of the Line! Your idea passionates me, my dear Knecht!"

"Eh bien!" said Knecht vivaciously. "Consider, you two: Where were *we* when Hortet was shot at the charge of Col de Tirourda under Changarnier? Infants, in the nursery! Where were we when, under Joffre, he distinguished himself at the taking of Timbuctoo? Smooth-faced boys at St. Cyr, learning our ABC's of the military art! And now, old and war-worn, he is shot—for the ninth time, let me insist—under me at Ksar el Meski. But you cannot kill him, that one! Being a commodity of Languedoc flint and rusty iron—"

"That's just it," cut in Courtois. "How old *is* Hortet, anyhow? The medicos—"

"Bah!" exploded Knecht, "I challenge to the duel *à mort* any medico who dares to reject him for physical reasons! Is it not that we honor those old-ones, those boiled-hard ones, through Hortet while yet our veteran lives? Barthelou, Mongeot, Baudry—you knew them, Lamy; and you too, Courtois! What *men!* Dear God, what men! They have perished on the field of glory; but—"

"YOU have reason, Knecht!" grunted Lamy. "This is not for medicos. Hortet could pass *nothing!* He is a wreck; but I, for one, would not like to argue with that wreck if he had a bayonet in his hands!" Lamy laughed at the bare idea of facing any such physical wreck as Hortet when the battle-madness was upon him, but Courtois said: "My colonels! Regard you—we cannot order any medico *now* to leave his work and examine your Hortet for promotion! Surgeon L'Hermite and all his staff, they have labored for forty-eight hours without sleep over the casualties of Dar el Beïda. And today—there will be many more, my friends! Busy will be the dressing-station with the Convoi du Train! L'Hermite can spare no one for your Hortet, my dear Knecht!"

Commandant Knecht appeared sorely downcast; his heart was set on promoting his zou-zou this day, on the field of battle. It was the poetic gesture that would satisfy the romantic soul of him, but the difficulties in its way were enormous. The commission itself could be no more than a gesture, a brevet, not valid until countersigned in Algiers. And on that brevet given by the three colonels must be also the medical endorsement, "Physically qualified for active duty," before it could be forwarded to the Headquarters of the Nineteenth Army Corps in the Place Bugeaud in Algiers. That endorsement must be had, here and now, or the brevet would be a mere empty form, even with the endorsements of the three colonels on it. And he wanted to confer the brevet today, on the field, before all the Légion on parade—after the taking of Tinghar.

"Eh bien?" he said at length. "There is the major, Le Vicompte d'Erlon—"

A sonorous cackle of scornful guffaws greeted that name and drowned Knecht's further speech. Lamy growled: "Some day I shall pick him up on my sword, thinking it is a frog for the *casserole!* He would go well, gently crisped in hot olive oil, that one!"

Courtois snorted with repressed ire. "The royalist! Ah, *bah!"* he choked in his thick throat. *"Quelle gouvernement!* Just what does he do here but watch and criticise, that he may go back to his noble party in Paris and make odious speeches on our campaign in the Chamber of Deputies! You have chosen wrong, Knecht!" Courtois shifted his big bulk irritably, for all three of these commanders were democrats, through and through, and hated all royalists with a hatred reaching back to the Revolution. An American would find it difficult to believe that hatred, to realize how strong—and critical of everything the Republic did—were the royalists in France. That a powerful party of them were in this very day bent on having a king, working for it, sneering at the wranglings in the Chamber, all three colonels knew. But they wanted *three* kings, degenerate princes of the houses of Bourbon, Orleans and Bonaparte,—the very sight of whom bumming around Europe was enough for democratic France,—and could agree on none of them.

Knecht wagged his head sententiously. "You do not know my Légion boys, Courtois, I perceive!" he said with a sly grin.

"Only let L'Hermite give our royalist dandy the necessary orders! Deputize him for the medical force, you understand. . . . . He has nothing else *to* do, has he? And for L'Hermite it would be perfunctory. He would pass Hortet on a glance at my request. *Eh bien?* Let him deputize D'Erlon to do so, then!"

Courtois and Lamy considered that and nodded. "Observe the royalist passing a private for promotion to lieutenant!" said Lamy sardonically. "He would not do that for Lannes himself!"

He was referring to Napoleon's famous marshal, who had been promoted from the ranks in the old democratic army of the Directory. The point was well taken, but Knecht said, sweetly: "I wish you could know my sergeant-major Ike, who is from Texas, where the Red Indians of North America all live, Lamy! Let L'Hermite send our little rabbit out to *him!* I guarantee there will be no further medical difficulties in the promotion of my zou-zou!"

THEY growled assent to that, and Lamy undertook to see the grizzled and enormous chief surgeon of the army and explain what the three colonels wanted. Courtois and Knecht were, meanwhile, to fawn on the little royalist and put him in an excellent humor to deal gently with Hortet. Then the conference went on to discuss how to distribute the nineteen regiments of infantry, six batteries of 65's and one of 90's, and five squadrons of cavalry—chasseurs, Légion Mounted and Camel Corps—under their combined command so as to form a lane of fire down which the convoy train would march direct to Tinghar.

It was a big military operation. Sar-Major Ike Smith of Texas was taking part in it on the left flank under Knecht, where a chain of grim stone *ksars* scattered over the Desert disputed hotly any further advance on the walled town of Tinghar. The *ksars* were spitting musket fire from their battlements and replying with old Turkish ordnance to the rain of shells from the 65mm. mountain guns. Ike's platoon sat their horses in the shelter of a dry *oued*, waiting for the artillery to demolish the *ksar* on their immediate front sufficiently to take it with a swift cavalry charge. Down the Oued Ziz from him several miles rose the long red walls of Tinghar, surrounded by straggling palms and centering a network of caravan routes meandering in in long white threads across the lower desert wastes. The Thirty-second Tirailleurs garrisoned Tinghar—had been besieged there for months. Also Ike knew that those long brown and white bars of Berber horses with mounted Arabs in saddle were immense *harkas* of fighting men, recruited from the Regg, Ferkla, Oulad Moulani, Aït Morghad —all the hostile tribes of this region under Sultan Belkacem. The 90's were shelling them at long range, but they promised plenty of pitched battles before this little French army would ever reach Tinghar.

Just at present Ike was wholly occupied in reading helio. He was on foot, his glasses trained on a distant *ksar* well within the Arab lines. That anyone should be sending helio from there was most important, for it must be coming from Intelligence, those devoted native sheiks of the Chaamba doing spy-work for the French among Sultan Belkacem's people.

"Take this down, Criswell," Ike ordered his Michigan corporal from under his glasses. "Must be something fer Headquarters. They'll skin us blue ef we don't git it straight!"

Criswell dismounted and got out pad and pencil. The two of them, six feet of iron-hard muscle and bone, were America's exhibit in this platoon of the Légion Mounted. Ike cursed in the fluent oaths of seven languages as the helio stopped, went on again, stopped, continued jerkily. The *ksar* was now the storm-center of fire from all its neighbors, bent on stopping that helio. "Gosh-all!" growled Ike. "Intelligence don't mind expending a few buddies! Four men hev dropped sending that helio, so fer! *'Sultan Belkacem's smala—'* Wotinell's a *smala,* Jim?"

"Camp," said Criswell briefly, writing it down. "Hosstyle sultan's camp, Ike, get that! Somethin' for us birds to do, I'll bet ye! What's next?"

BUT they never *did* get that next helio word, for just then a swagger-stick rapped Ike sharply across the shoulders, and a thin voice said, acidly: "Attention, Sergeant! *Guardez vous à moi!"*

Ike lowered the glasses and looked angrily over his shoulder, fuming over the idiotic interruption at a moment like this, yet in duty bound to snap to attention. A dapper little major stood surveying him with severe blue eyes. He was about five feet high, natty, pink-faced, polished till he shone as to belt and puttees, though everyone else was dusty in the swirling

clouds of this battle; his small hands were immaculately manicured where they held the swagger-stick across his knees. *"Houp!"* shouted the little major imperiously. "You've forgotten something, Sergeant!"

Ike flushed as he realized that the little man wanted to be saluted. There was the helio message, and they were missing whole words of it, drat him! But— "Take 'em, Jim!" muttered Ike as he handed his glasses to Criswell. A scornful quirk came to his lips under the heavy mustache. Then his big paws went out, grabbed the Major by both sides of his tight tunic, and Ike swung him aloft like a child. "Thar, sonny!" said Ike, smacking a kiss on his forehead. "Run home an' tell yore ma you've been kissed by a real man! . . . . What'd we miss, Jim?"

The little officer flew into a rage and whacked savagely with the swagger-stick upon Ike's broad back bent over the message. *"Ksar to left of me. Mouley Azziz,"* it read—after the missing blank.

"Lost that one while you was handing me the glasses," said Criswell regretfully. "How are we going to know where this sultan-bird *has* his camp without it? One of them *ksars* to the left of him, he says—"

Ike gathered that he was being annoyed. There was a sputtering of explosive French in the air, and his back was being tickled. He looked around again.

"Beggin' the Major's pardon," he said elaborately, "but has he any orders fer me?" And saluting gravely, Ike stood at attention.

"But yes! Pig of a sergeant!" raged the little man. "Behold, the Major, the Vicompte D'Erlon, Observation Officer attached to this army." He slapped his thin chest grandiloquently. "You have insulted me—but we let that pass. I have orders from the medical department to examine Private Hortet. You are to escort me to him—"

"'Zat so?" said Ike, unimpressed by either the slapping of the Major's chest or his numerous medals, none of them of any importance. "Hey, you birds!" he called to his platoon. "Got a spare horse? I'm escortin' you all right, Major!" said Ike with grim firmness. "Hortet's out *thar!*"

HE pointed a horny finger out over the desert in the direction of the *ksar*. Under its very walls was a rifle-pit that sputtered a bluish haze of smokeless, a nest of Legionaries who had got out there snake-wise across the rocky terrain and had dug in with the praiseworthy object of keeping down Arab heads when the platoon charged. Hortet, Anzac Bill, Mr. Dee and a fire-eating Swiss by the name of Rutli were in that pit—the old zou-zou's idea, by the way; and their horses were back here with the platoon. But the Légion answered not a hint of that. Instead, a voice said cheerily: "Plenty empty saddles in 'bout five minutes, Sergeant!"

The Vicompte d'Erlon turned a pale green. His lips quivered unhappily as his voice, soft and small, asked: "Out *there?*"

"Yep," said Ike. "We-all's esco'tin' you, Major. Soon's the artillery gits through wranglin' 'em."

VICOMPTE D'ERLON looked about him for means of escape. The trouble was that he had come here under strict orders to examine Hortet and could not go back without having done so. However, there was the perfunctory nature of his mission, and he proceeded to explain it to the unsympathetic Ike.

"Pouf! It is nothing, this examination!" he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders and smiling wanly. "He is to be promoted to lieutenant, this Hortet, and I must look at him for the medical endorsement. Perfunctory, you understand, my sergeant. He is in good health, no?"

"Ef he aint shot. Ask them Arabs," said Ike, chewing.

"Parfaitement. And so I—" D'Erlon drew forth from his tunic an official brevet. Ike raised a bellow of delight as his eye fell on that printed form and realized that their firepot zou-zou was to be promoted from the ranks—and surely no man was better qualified for it!

"Hey, you bums!" he yelled at the platoon. "Hortet's a looie! Ol' Knecht's done promoted him, fellers! Waddye know!"

The platoon cheered in seven languages. To a man they appreciated that gesture of Knecht's. And Hortet had been the natural leader of the gang ever since he had deserted to the Légion from the Chasseurs, the day the Légion had looted that esteemed body of troopers of their harness and mounts.

It was the grizzled Hortet who produced most of the original ideas in everything the gang did. And an officer who could invent the winning stunt on the spur of the mo-

ment was what the Légion wanted. Besides, he represented to them all that army of ragged, unkempt and unholy ruffians who had conquered Africa and were the glorious tradition of its present fighting men.

"The Major, hyar, he gives him the once-over for physical, an' then us birds takes his orders, see?" went on Ike with enthusiasm. "C'mon, sir," he invited hospitably to the Major. "They're wavin' flags down at the battery. Pass the word to take dust-rags off'n the rifle-bolts, Criswell."

For perhaps twenty seconds a gorgeous fight ensued. . . . . Hortet lunged upward through the sheik's throat with his bayonet and pulled the trigger of his carbine.

THE Légion made ready for its charge. D'Erlon looked nervously over at the *ksar*. It smoked with the white clouds of its long flintlocks loaded with handfuls of black powder, and was dusty with the débris of its ruins, but no man could tell how lusty were yet its defenders. The walls were a mere talus of broken stone, up which this platoon would charge dismounted—and they were no place for a minister's son!

"Not necessary, Sergeant," D'Erlon said in a weak voice, without bottom. "I'll pass your Hortet, right now. Perfunctory, is it not?"

He somewhat shakily got out a fountain pen, but Ike growled.

"Without ever havin' seen him, sir?" he asked incredulously. "No, ye don't!—'taint regular, sir!" he protested. "Promotion wouldn't be no good thataway!" He caught the platoon's eye. They weren't going to have it, that hardboiled line of troopers, none at all! Their looie's promotion was going to be regular, and no funny-business about it! Besides, there was an iron grin on their faces that Ike understood perfectly. This bird was scared blue! Might as well give the little dandy his baptism of fire while they were about it! It would be a comedietta! They weren't going to let *him* get away!

"No sir!" said Ike for the platoon. "You's bein' esco'ted out to Hortet, Major! Up you goes! —An' I'm goin' to show ye a real man!"

He swung the protesting Major up on his own saddle as the bugles blew for the advance. Up out of the *oued* sprang the line of horses, thundered out over the desert. The *ksar* popped up Arab heads in dozens out of its ruins and greeted them with a terrific volley of lead slugs and the blasts

of two old muzzle-loaders wheeled up atop the battered slopes. Grape and lead screamed overhead, smacked and thudded down the line, and men fell spitting scarlet. Hortet's pit raved like a machine-gun, but Ike's platoon had to take it without reply as its horses spurred faster and faster. A grim roar of laughter was crackling down the line, however, for there was comedy aplenty in this charge. Imploring, protesting, the Major was trying to squirm under Ike's armpit to get behind him out of this hail of lead, and Ike had solved that cavalryman's difficulty by pinning him firmly around the waist—rear-end-to toward the enemy, and his putteed legs kicking frantically!

"Easy thar, ol'. shorty!" they heard Ike growl, and saw him hand the Major's posterior a none too gentle spank. The Légion nearly fell off its horses with glee, for the Major thought he was shot, and let out a yell that caused hysteria in the ranks. They had respite now, and the distance shortening rapidly during it, for the Arab gun takes time to reload. It only needs powder and lead—neither cartridges nor percussion caps—to function, but not a head was in sight during the reloading now, and the Légion dashed on, whooping pure joy over Ike and his escorted Major.

At the foot of the slope Ike checked his horse and blew signals to dismount and charge. Hortet and his squad were already up on the rim, hanging on by their teeth and firing over it. There were just a few breathless seconds left before the next Arab volley.

"Up you goes, Major!" gasped Ike. "Hyar's yore gun." He had yanked the Major's automatic from its holster and shoved it into his hand. "That's him—Hortet—fourth man prone on the left up thar. C'mon, gang!"

UP the broken débris swarmed the Légion, flung themselves prone on the rim. Below was a large court, milling with burnouses, and from it came a raging fire of long muskets. Then, *"Swords out!"* they heard some one yelp in Arabic; steel leaped from its scabbard, and up they came.

Hortet jumped to his feet. "Bayonets! —*Frappez-les, mes enfants!*" He stood, a single heroic figure, gathering men to him like magnets. Gray and grizzled was Hortet, and with that bandage of the Ksar el Meski fight still about his head, he was the personification of all those terrible old zouaves who cared nothing for bullets but glutted their enemies with cold steel. A second later he was jumping down the revetments, a wedge of men at his back. Ike, Criswell, all the platoon fell after. For perhaps twenty seconds a gorgeous dog-fight ensued, bayonet, yataghan, clubbed gun, a roar as of tigers battling. Ike saw Hortet barging like a plow straight for the tall sheik who seemed in command, saw that warrior's yataghan piercing downward at him in a long overhead thrust, held his breath a second with anxiety—for he had two warriors of his own to deal with and could by no means help—and then Hortet had dodged under that stroke, lunged upward through the sheik's throat with his bayonet, and pulled the trigger of his carbine. It was about the only explosion—save a few scattering shots from the hip—and it blew off that sheik's head like a bomb. An appalled groan went up, then hands, black skinny arms; and what were left of the Arabs were imploring *aman*. The panting Légion stood around them, bayonets poised. The Arabs saw death in their eyes and howled, capered, begged mercy in the name of Allah.

"What'll we do with these bums, Loot?" Ike asked Hortet, his eyes twinkling with pleasure, for he had chosen just that way to announce to the old zou-zou that he was promoted to lieutenant—so far as the Légion was concerned. The platoon raised a yelp of delight. Their eyes, their looks, told Hortet that he was now their officer, all right, and a damn' welcome one! They had taken the thing into their own hands.

Hortet looked mystified, astonished, grinned upon them under his gray mustaches like some warrior of old Gaul. *"Morbleu!"* he growled, "is it a joke that you call me lieutenant? *Bah!"*

"You sho' is!" Ike assured him. "Knecht's done promoted you, Frawg. We-all esco'ted out a Major what has yore commission. —Hyar, whar's I'ink Willie at?" he demanded in some trepidation. "I had him right hyar, Loot, poppin' away as he come up, like a li'l man! Any of you birds got him?" Ike asked the platoon.

THEY hadn't, and there was a hurried search. Out from under a pile of burnouses stuck a pair of dusty puttees—there was a joyful howl of discovery, and dead Arabs were hove off him unceremoniously. Their Major came to.

He looked mad, ruffled—but that expres-

sion of fear was gone, now, forever. Ike picked him up and brushed him off carefully: "Thar, sir! Do yore stuff, Major! That's him, our Hortet," said Ike. He indicated the old zou-zou, who snapped to attention.

D'Erlon blinked at him, dusted himself off. He seemed wondering that he was still alive. But his eyes had a new steadiness now; he looked on them hostilely, but with a confidence in himself not there before. He had lived through a Légion charge, that was it, Ike perceived, had really taken part in it. The automatic in his small hand still reeked of its last cartridge. Ike was quick to see what had happened to him. The first fear is the worst, under fire. D'Erlon had survived that ungovernable panic of it. He would never make another such exhibition of himself again! Besides, he was an aristocrat, a nobleman, and somewhere back among his people there must have been a granddaddy who was somebody.

Ike said, placatingly: "Beggin' the Major's pardon that we rough-necks hed to esco't him so onpolite-like; but ye know, Major, hosses is hosses—" Ike grinned and spat a huge quid of chewing sidewise.

The ghost of a smile came into D'Erlon's eye. He was a lot more confident—now that he had been through a proper dogfight, been knocked down and trampled on by a lot of unwashed Arabs twice as big as he, yet had shot a few of them himself, for all that.

But the Légion had had their fun with him,—there was a whole cargo of dignity lost out there that had to be got back,—and his French sense of humor was prompting him now to try a bit of fun with the Légion in return.

"So?" he said, and surveyed Hortet haughtily. "This is the private to be promoted, is it? But he is a wreck, that ancient!"

A growl, sharp, savage, rasping, went up from the Légion. The boys would tolerate no monkey-business on physical grounds with Hortet, that growl said. D'Erlon went on, imperturbably: "Attention, Private Hortet! Strip!"

The little zou-zou glared at him fiercely out of his one eye under the bandage, but he ripped open his tunic with military celerity. They stood, the dapper and diminutive officer and the stocky little firebrand zouave who was in all the campaigns in Africa for the last forty years, facing each other. The Légion looked on in a tense silence; the Arab group dropped its tired arms and wondered.

"Mouth!" yelped D'Erlon sharply. A murmur went around the platoon, like the snap of a whip, as Hortet's jaws opened, exposing one yellow tooth. Was it possible that the little whippet was going to put him seriously through Légion Physical? Black were the looks of the Légion upon D'Erlon, and more than one bayonet swung stealthily to a point behind his back!

"Hm!" said D'Erlon professionally. "One eye, no teeth, five scars in the body—and *what* scars! He has no bowels, this one!"

The Légion swore under its breath and looked to Sergeant Ike for permission to slay. They had abolished, conveniently, many an officer like this idiot! Ike spat, motioned to wait. They had to have his signature on that brevet somehow, hadn't they? He himself was thinking of certain ingenious tortures. Any hopes that he had had of D'Erlon being a proper man under his dudish exterior had vanished by this time.

"Eh bien?" said D'Erlon, and paused. Deliberately he snapped open the automatic, fumbled for a fresh clip, shoved it in. *"Alors*—but he is not entirely hopeless, this wreck, *mes enfants!"* he pronounced, turning to the Légion with a cool smile. "Me, I should like to see more of him in action. . . . . To warm up this pistol some more. Suppose he commands the platoon, *pro tem?* So I may study, for a little, his physical qualifications?"

IT was a space of several seconds before the Légion comprehended. Then Ike bellowed: "Listen at him, fellers! He's thirsty fer more—aint you, Professor?" he demanded delightedly of the Major, and grabbed for his hand with one huge paw. "I tell ye, boys, one good taste of this battle-stuff does shore raise a thirst in a man! —C'mon, Looie!" he urged Hortet. "We birds jest nat'rally got to put on another show or you wont git no promotion nohow, the Major says! Aint it so, sir?" he asked D'Erlon as they shook hands.

D'Erlon smiled calmly. He was learning something about democracy—at first hand—from this delightful American who was a curious mixture of respect for the uniform and contempt or comradeship with the man inside of it. Also he had teased the Légion, successfully, to the point of near getting killed by them, and had

gripped them fast when they had discovered he was even capable of it. And he *did* want to see more of them. There was that big fall with Fear to be lived down,—and here was a fine battle going on, with himself actively in it,—and they had seen that hunger for reinstatement in his eyes and were pathetic in their eagerness, now, to help him get back his self-respect.

"But yes!" he replied to Ike. "You are in command, Hortet; lieutenant *pro tem.* And we shall see! For me, I am—observing officer. Is it not my job, *pardieu?*" he demanded with a twinkle. He produced the magic brevet, while the Légion looked on with changed feelings. He might be little, and pink-faced, and dandyish; but they had misjudged their man from appearances, as soldiers are prone to do. They were contrite, now, and none more so than Sergeant Ike.

At sight of the official paper Hortet nodded agreement and raised his voice in his first command. "Corporal Criswell! Secure prisoners and send to the rear!" the Légion heard him order with thrills of satisfaction. He was born to it, their Hortet! They would follow him anywhere, and with confidence, that old soldier of the Line!

Where to, Hortet let them know with his usual promptness. "Attention, platoon!" he addressed them. "The Major would like another little affair? *Bien!* We go to raise the *smala* of the Sultan Belkacem!"

Ike gasped. But wasn't it Hortet all over! The Frawg loved glory, and of all the audacious enterprises possible in this fight, a raid and a cutting-out party on the Sultan's camp would be the most wildly intrepid. But Ike sensed Hortet's thirst to celebrate his lieutenancy by a *coup* like that and said: "Shore, pard—I mean, Loot—but whar at? I took a helio awhile back from Intelligence, but lost out on a coupla words. Near some *ksar,* 'twas. Left of a feller called Mouley Azziz."

"Oui!" Hortet shot out like a pistol-shot, *"Vraiment L'Intélligence! Troisième,* third, *ksar,* it was, Sergeant Ike! I too read the helio, from the rifle-pit. *Morbleu!* Strip those dead Arabs, *mes enfants!"* he turned to order the platoon.

WITH alacrity the Légion obeyed. They hadn't the least idea what he proposed, but that order was just like Hortet. A gorgeous bit of strategy would emerge, presently.

It did. The platoon guffawed with hilarity as Hortet bade them put those burnouses on. Men roared with mirth watching Sergeant Ike struggle into a huge black and white one that made him look like an elongated wine-keg draped with curtains.

"Off, kepis!" ordered Hortet. "Hide them underneath, my children, and put on the *khits. Ouff!* Never mind the little insects!" He was robing himself, meanwhile, and grimaced saturninely as the big domed *khit*—that picturesque Arab headgear encircled with brown camel's-hair cord—descended low over his forehead. "And those long Arab guns, my boiled-hard ones!" added Hortet. "Do we abandon these handsome souvenirs, *pardieu?"*

The Légion jeered at itself. But it was happy, for the idea back of all this had at last penetrated. They were a very respectable *djich* of Arab horsemen, now, and would get far through the hostile lines in this raid on Sultan Belkacem's *smala* in such disguise. In fact, in no other way could they penetrate that region of hostile *ksars,* far in advance of the army.

Hortet looked them over and ordered all carbines stowed in their saddle-scabbards and the long guns substituted for weapons. But he was not satisfied yet.

"We need a captured French officer with us, for a camouflage, name of a hen!" he mused. "We are a *djich,* a band of brigands, riding straight to the Sultan with him, you comprehend, my comrades. We would not be halted nor questioned if we had a prisoner. . . . . If the Major would permit?" he turned to suggest to D'Erlon, very respectfully.

Ike slapped his huge thigh and roared. "Sit him up hyar, Loot!" he begged. "You know *me,* Maje! We b'long to the same lodge, you an' me!" he added engagingly to D'Erlon, and invited him up on his saddle.

D'Erlon smiled the whimsical smile of the aristocrat fallen among thieves. To him Ike was irresistible, a new kind of human, Democracy in one man, irreverent, careless, capable, and fearing nothing from the grim iron hand of Fate. Besides, he was mightily amused over the keenness of Hortet's plan and the doings of these soldiers, left to themselves, with one of their own for officer.

"Bien, my Buffalo Bill!" he said, and climbed up by means of Ike's stirrup.

"Ah, that glorious Buffalo Bill!" he confided as the platoon formed for a sally by

For a moment Ike thought it was all up with them. Then the Major's automatic raved—ten aimed shots. The mob wilted before it, as Hortet finished binding the Sultan.

the rear gate of the *ksar*. "To us Frenchmen he is our own *D'Artagnan* come to life again! So gallant! So incomparable!"

"Yaas, he done me out'n six months pay, oncet," said Ike, letting go a squirt of the juice that soothes.

"You *knew* him?" said D'Erlon with reverence.

"Shore. Ol' Bill was a good scout, though —when he hed any money." This sidelight on American history occupied D'Erlon while they were filing out the gate, and then there was plenty else to think about, for the French artillery flattered them with a savage shelling as they galloped across the desert toward the Arab lines. It was a stunning and stormy business while it lasted, that orange-flamed hail of shrapnel, but it was a grand send-off, for the Arabs hailed them with shouts of encouragement, and in two minutes more they were through the outposts, unchallenged and safe.

Ike looked ahead. So far as he could see, this was another venture of Hortet's into a mere yawning death-trap. Their only warrant of success rode on his own saddle-bow, Major D'Erlon, shining in polished leather, medals, gold-braided kepi, obviously a prisoner of rank being taken to the Sultan. But there were mobs of Arab *fantassins*, infantry, filling all the scattered palmeries and enduring the shell-fire of the 90's—solid bars of cavalry, any one of which might ride them down and demand their prisoner—*ksars* all about, untaken, and fortified with ordnance that could blow them off the landscape once their true character was discovered.

BUT Hortet didn't seem to care. Straight for that third *ksar* to the left of Mouley Azziz he was leading them. Within ten minutes' gallop they had topped the rise on which it was built, and, down in a vast sandy hollow below, the *smala* of Sultan Belkacem came in sight.

There were hundreds of tents pitched there, black and low Bedouin shelters from the lower Sahara, striped conical marabouts from the Atlas, tribesmen in hundreds in and around them, big flocks of booty, camels and goats, being guarded. Ever to get out of here alive seemed the wildest of human hopes to Ike! He let out a huge *"Whoosh!"* of dismay. It was a hornet's nest, on a tremendous scale: the moment they started something, the hornets would be at them in a swarm, from every side. The most they could expect to accomplish would be to shoot down this sultan in the middle of his janissaries, and then die themselves, to the last man, as the price. Well,

it was worth it, thought Ike. He knew that Belkacem would simply move his camp when the French reached Tinghar, retreat with his hostiles to Tindouf, the next walled town down the Ziz, and it would be all to do over again. To take him *now*, would give the High Command an immense lever to work with in pacifying this savagely unruly district.

DOWN the slope toward the *smala* thundered the Légion platoon at full gallop. There were shouts of greeting, waving of burnoused arms from various picket guards, who yelped: *"Ashe koum?* (Who are you?)" and *"S'eber!* (Wait!)" as they passed: but Hortet galloped on down a lane of tents with no halt for parley—and God help those who got in the way! To stop would be fatal; a jerk of Hortet's thumb toward their prisoner officer was his sole explanation. He was aiming for a huge and gaudy pavilion under the shade of some abandoned palms that were buried halfway up their trunks with sand. Its stripes were broad yellow and green, the colors of the Prophet, and from its central pole waved a blue and white flag with gold Arabic characters enscrolled on it. Into it barged the Légion squadron, knocking down janissaries and sheiks of high command indiscriminately, carrying away tent-pegs and guy-ropes—poles, flags, and canvas going down before their pawing horses. The whole encampment burst into uproar as the central pavilion mast crashed down, and from within came feminine shrieks, hoarse shouts of consternation and surprise—then the alarm-cry: *"Franzawi! Franzawi!"*

"Out rifles!—*Attack!*" barked Hortet through clenched teeth as he flung himself from his horse, followed by Ike, the Major, Criswell, Anzac Bill, Mr. Dee. They left the platoon hastily forming square and dived under the sagging canvas. Its wrecked interior was a sort of luminous cave, with side-posts leaning at crazy angles and hardly standing-room under the cloth. It glittered with brass and silver and mother-of-pearl inlaid on Moorish furniture, was carpeted with rich rugs and draped with gorgeous hangings. Back against the rear wall towered a magnificent old patriarch with a white beard a yard long. He was trying to draw the long pistols from his girdle, but was completely surrounded by ox-eyed harem beauties, all unveiled and gripping him frantically, and all yelling like loons.

FROM outside came the vindictive and sustained crash of Lébels as Hortet and Ike sprang for him, followed by Criswell, who had snatched up a rug. The patriarch went down struggling like a lion, and for some time all three, casting aside their cumbering burnouses, had all they could do to subdue him, for the Arab is unbelievably strong. Just as Criswell had got the rug enveloping him, a yataghan pierced through the rear canvas wall, ripped it across horizontally, and through the gap peered bearded faces, a mob of them, fierce, threatening, sharp steel brandished in strong brown fists.

For a moment Ike thought it was all up with them and they would be cut down inside, while the waiting Légion without would be decimated by the volleys whizzing through the canvas overhead from all the camp.

Then Ike heard a sharp exclamation—*"Fichtre!"*—like the intaking of a breath, and the Major's automatic raved, ten aimed shots, *spang! spang! spang!* as fast as trigger could be pulled. That mob of rescuing tribesmen fairly wilted before it! The crash of Anzac Bill's carbine added itself to the din. Then Hortet had finished binding the Sultan, and the rug that enclosed him like a caterpillar was rushed outside.

"A cheval! Vitesse!" gasped Hortet, flinging his burden over the saddle. *"En avant! Pas de galop!"*

The square pushed forward, gathered headway. Its leading squad trampled the press in front under hoof, lunged with arm-driven bayonets down at the screeching tribesmen slashing up at them with keen yataghans. The side files chattered rifle-fire two deep, snatching loaded weapons from those within as clips ran out. Like a blazing tank the platoon sheered forward, faster and faster through the riot of curses and hacking blades. The Arab camp was a mob of self-appointed leaders, without discipline or organized resistance and through it the Légion plowed like a frigate running forts. It was all over in less than fifty seconds, that traverse of the milling *smala* of Sultan Belkacem! But to Ike it had seemed like fifty years. His carbine was too hot to touch when they reached the high ground above the camp. *"Whoosh!"* he said explosively. "Aint got clothes enough left on me to flag a tote-train! 'Twar like a stampede of steers back in li'l ol' Texas, Maje! An' put her thar, leetle feller! Ye done fine!"

That was all, by way of congratulation, but it was a good deal for Ike. Major D'Erlon rode beside Ike now—on a spare horse, of which there were, alas, no less than ten—and he took the proffered paw gratefully. He was calm, quiet as ever, imperturbable, seemingly; but his small nostrils were expanded and he remarked hungrily, as they galloped: "More! . . . . I like the Légion—fighting with it!" he added. "I shall apply for active duty with you fascinating *garçons*, Sergeant Ike!"

"Aint it so?" asked Ike, of no one in particular. "Arter they gits the fust taste of it! An' don't it feel good, Maje?" he concurred cordially.

"You have done much for me, Sergeant Ike!" said D'Erlon with the emphasis of suppressed feeling.

And that was all that passed between them, for they had by now labored up the slope—pursued by a yelling mob and whanged after with pot-shots—and had reached the high ground near the *ksar*, where all the plain of Tinghar came to view.

It was a stricken field, by this time, the French infantry occupying all the palmeries around the town, its artillery shelling all this region where they rode, its cavalry rounding up the fleeing tribesmen far out on the flanks.

"Where do we go from here?" asked D'Erlon of Ike.

"Search me! Ask the Looie—he knows!" Sergeant Ike indicated confidently Hortet at the head of their column.

"Ah, yes—the Looie!" said D'Erlon, and smiled. He got out that brevet and tried to scrawl a signature on it as they rode. "*Bien!* On the field of battle!" he remarked, putting it away again.

THAT Hortet knew exactly where they were going, Ike was convinced by the order to take off those burnouses that was passed down the line. The little zou-zou had no intention of seeing his command demolished by artillerists as it neared the French lines! It was a proper Légion platoon that rode for Tinghar; and presently it swerved off, to head for a ruined *ksar* on the left flank, over which the Légion headquarters flag was waving. Knecht and his staff rode out to meet them from it. The big man raised a bellow of joy as he recognized Hortet, Ike, all the rest of his beloved gang of thieves and liars.

"Name of a name!" he thundered as they rode up. "Where have you been, Sergeant Ike? Is it that you got lost, *coquin?*"

"I dunno, Commandant," grinned Ike. "Ask the Looie, here! He's runnin' this outfit."

Knecht looked on Hortet, comprehended, smiled saturninely. The boys had elected him their lieutenant, evidently, without waiting for any brevet! And they had been up to something idiotic, of course, by way of celebration. Dear to Knecht was this particular platoon of malefactors! "*Oui!*" he jerked out. "The Lieutenant! You been taking a little exercise, my zou-zou?" he cooed upon Hortet.

Hortet grinned an ironic and Gallic smile, such as Julius Cæsar must have known well. "But yes, my Commandant," he replied. "*V'là! Un petit cadeau* for you! Unwrap him, Corporal Criswell."

Knecht's eyes popped as the squirming rug was unlashed and the old patriarch came to view, gagged and bound ungently. There were three gold crescents on his chest, upheld by a system of chains; at sight of them Knecht leaped in his saddle with rapture.

"But it is the Sultan Belkacem himself, my Hortet!" he yelped. "*Mon Dieu!*"

"'Pears thataway!" put in Ike. "He shore hed conkeybines enough around him to be Solomon hisself! Hortet's done raided his camp, Commandant—with us birds along to sorter help. *I* aint sayin' we wanna go thar ag'in ef we done snaked out the wrong party! Them Arabs fit right smart, I tell *you!*"

The Commandant turned on Hortet, gasping. "*You* raided the *smala* of the Sultan Belkacem, my zou-zou!" he demanded, bereft of breath. "Holy pig!" For some seconds Knecht sat his horse, gaping like a fish and reaching down into his vocabulary for suitable words, but the French language is sadly deficient in superlatives—it takes English.

"But yes, my Commandant!" grinned Hortet. "There was a helio from Intelligence. . . . . These *garçons*, you comprehend—" He waved a satisfied hand over the platoon.

"*'Cré nom de Dieu!*" exploded Knecht. "Is it that he celebrates his promotion by a feat of audacity unparalleled?" he demanded of his staff. "*Ouff!* The brevet commission, and at once, messieurs!" he decided impetuously. "*We* wait for no formal parade! *Now* it shall be—on the field of glory!"

A Soldier of the Legion

HIS eyes sought out Major D'Erlon, who sat inconspicuously beside Sergeant Ike and was saying nothing. "You have done your duty, M. le Vicompte?" Knecht asked. His tones implied that the Major, being a prig and a royalist mighty careful of his own skin, could not possibly have taken part in this raid, but had joined them somehow on the field. D'Erlon was quick to feel that; he remained silent, while his eyes flashed, and the hatred between republican and royalist stabbed out between them like a pair of swords. But Ike was equally quick to sense that attitude of Knecht's, based on his opinion of D'Erlon before his baptism of fire with the Légion, and he proceeded at once to set it right.

"Nawsir, Commandant! None a-tall!" he demurred, chewing vigorously. "Yo're all wet, see? This leetle feller was right with us an' fit like a hellcat—didn't he, boys?" He turned to the Légion for corroboration and got it. "Y' oughter seen him pluggin' them Arabs when we was hog-tyin' this here shriner, Commandant!" Ike indicated the Sultan with a horny forefinger. "Us rough-necks wouldn't mind him for adjutant, now that Duveyrier is ordered back to Algiers," he added—which was a weighty commendation when it came from Ike representing the platoon.

Knecht was a very wise man. The Légion was an altogether exceptional command; and when they chose anyone to lead them, their colonel would make no mistake in acting on it. They seemed to have chosen two of them this day!

"*Bien!*" he said, and looked on D'Erlon with a new light of appreciation in his eyes, for he knew that he could depend on Sergeant Ike's homely common sense. "Pardon, D'Erlon!—You have the brevet, my Major?" he asked, offering his hand.

D'Erlon drew it out and showed him the scrawled medical endorsement that made the thing complete.

"Promoted—on the field of battle," he said, crisply.

The Légion cheered wildly as Knecht snapped Hortet to attention and tendered him the brevet. They liked Ressot, their St. Cyr lieutenant, immensely; but if ever man had won the right to a commission, it was their own Légion-graduated lieutenant, One-eyed Hortet, old soldier of the Line!

"The Poste in the Riff," another spirited story of adventure with the "Foreign Legion," will be a feature of the next, the June, issue.

The Weigh of All Flesh

By

JOHN PEERE MILES

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

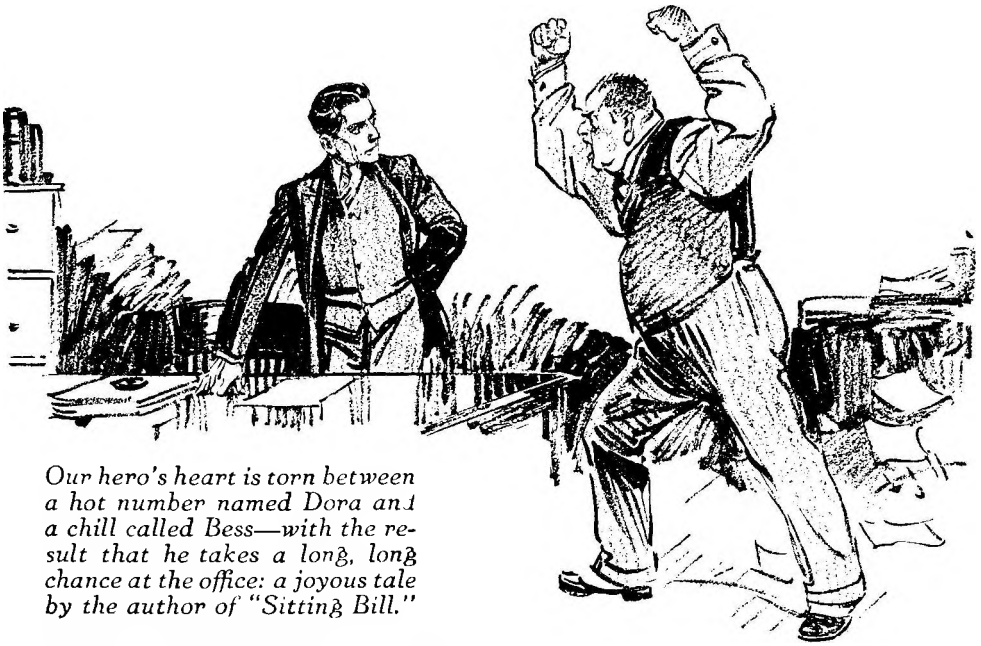
ONCE upon a time I was an ambitious kid of twenty, drawing twenty-eight dollars and loose postage-stamps weekly down at the safety-pin and belt-buckle factory, bookkeeping department. My knowledge of figures made me acquainted with a hot number called Dora who breezed into my heart after I had stood up a chill by the name of Bess, who worked in the office. This Dora was on a diet of lobsters and caviar served on silver plate. She stood this diet for two months before my pocketbook folded up with the cramps, and shortly afterward my stomach followed suit, which made it mighty bad, as you can see, because while maybe an army can crawl on its stomach, like they say, I couldn't work on mine.

So I went to a doctor and when he got through hearing my organ recital he said he thought maybe I had eaten too much lobster and caviar and that I would have to go on a diet of milk, which would cost me two weeks' wages.

"Be sure," says he, "to weigh yourself every day and see that you don't go over two hundred pounds."

So I started on that diet and weighed myself every morning, noon and night. I tried all the weighing machines in town, and as none of them seemed to agree on just what the poundage was, I would add up all the reports and then divide the amount by the number of times I got weighed.

This method should have worked out perfectly, but since I was never fast on multiplication and division, imagine my surprise the first time when I discovered that I tipped the scales at exactly seventy-five and two-thirds pounds!



Our hero's heart is torn between a hot number named Dora and a chill called Bess—with the result that he takes a long, long chance at the office: a joyous tale by the author of "Sitting Bill."

Finally the thing worked out as well as might be expected and I was hopeful of doing better, when the weighing-machine people put in a combination weighing and fortune-telling outfit on the drug-store corner and other places.

There was something magnetic about those machines, with their shiny nickel bodies and primping mirrors; and the first time I stood on one of them I felt like I must have been inside of a church, all alone and with a sort of sad happiness. I slipped my first penny in the slot, and there was a grinding noise, and a white card came out which, when I saw it, made me tremble all over from excitement. I looked at the card, which in addition to giving me my correct displacement, had my fortune printed on it. The card is now framed on the wall of my parlor, and it says, besides the weight and date:

> You are a square peg in a round hole. Awake to your potentialities and go after bigger things. You have the stuff that wins.

I wasn't superstitious, and I didn't believe in signs, but that bit of pasteboard seemed to have been reading my mail, and as I didn't know then what potentialities were, I guessed they were things you wouldn't be ashamed to be seen in public with.

If I took that card out to read it over once, I must have done so fifty times. The words, *"go after bigger things"* and *"you have the stuff that wins"* made the biggest hit with me, and that afternoon I slapped my hat on my head at quarter to five and walked out of the office.

"Mr. Ford," I says, "I have canceled the order. My business instinct tells me Mr. Steel is a wife-beater and a forger. There is no use working up a fever about this!"

Just as I was leaving, the general manager saw me, and did I look like a guy that had been caught in a social error? I did not! I walked by that man like he was an outcast.

"Young man," he says, "the office clock says quarter to five, and I haven't ever known it to be wrong."

"You are quite right," I says, "in saying it is always right." I pulled out my dollar ticker and studied it slowly. "My watch," I tells him, "minus two minutes fast, is exactly quarter to five."

"H-m-m!" he says. "And are you going home?"

"Yes sir!" I answers cheerfully. "Can I drop you off anywhere?"

"No," he barks. "Do you know, young man, that the regular quitting time around here is five o'clock—or later?"

"I do," I says. "But let me be frank with you. I am a square peg in a round hole."

"What!"

"I am going to wake to my potentialities and go after bigger things. I have the stuff that wins." Wouldn't I give everything I own now to have gotten a picture of the

old man as he took it in? He stood off for a couple of minutes and looked me over like I was a prize exhibit whose cork had leaked.

"Do you mean," he says slowly, "that you are going to leave the firm that gave you your start?"

"I do," I says, "I am going where the opportunities come in bunches. I am sorry to leave, but I must say, ere parting, that I have enjoyed the atmosphere of your safety-pin factory beyond expression."

"Have you another job?" he asks.

"I have," I lies, "accepted an offer of forty dollars a week to start on, with a chance to become a partner if I like the business; and I've got a hunch I'm going to admire it."

You'd have thought he was posing me for a portrait, the way he sized me up. The spiel, I'm not ashamed to admit, took all the breeze out of his whiskers. Get the situation! There was me, practically an office-boy, telling the general manager of the safety-pin factory where to get off.

"Young man," he says, "no one has ever said that this works has ever been unmindful of services rendered, or stingy with deserving employees."

I had in mind my own twenty-eight dollars a week, but I felt something in the wind, so I just shut up and nodded my head.

"Good," he continues. "Now, I have observed your work lately, and I was just about to place you in a position of great responsibility and trust, but I fear me now that it is too late."

BUT for the fast brain-work of which I am capable in a crisis, I would have showed the great disappointment I felt at the way I chucked my job; but the great heart didn't go back on me, and did I weaken? I'll say no! I acted as up-stagey as before and said something about being sorry to have to leave the works (and I was sincere), but that a young fellow had to look out for his future, and how I would be a sap did I not take advantage of my big chance.

"You're right," he admits, "and I should have taken this thing in hand days before, but if it is not too late, would you consider continuing on our pay-roll at forty dollars weekly, with, of course, new and added responsibilities?"

I could have shouted "Yes!" with a six-tube amplifier, and it wouldn't have been loud enough for the way I felt, but I stalled for a couple of minutes, figuring out how I could overcome my natural feelings to fall on his neck. However, I controlled myself, and putting on a stiff front, I said that I had thought the matter over very carefully, and I would accept the new position, which was for me to take care of the orders that came into the factory for safety-pins and see to it that they were shipped out on time.

Now, I don't mind saying that I was all swelled up over the lay-out, for as I saw it, I could say "Yes" or "No" on these orders as they came in. Did I think a man's handwriting didn't look artistic, or did he use bad grammar, I was to use my own judgment about risking several carloads of pins on his chances of paying for them.

AS I was walking home I decided to try the machine once more.

"Well," I says, looking the thing over, "you earned me exactly twelve dollars a week on your advice. Let's see what the dope is now." So I stepped on the weighing machine platform, put my penny in the slot and out came the little white ticket:

> You are always ready to take good advice, but be sure that your friends do not override your own convictions. Be ready at all times to back your own judgment. This particularly applies to a big deal in which you are to be a guiding factor.

This sounded kind of foolish to me, since my success in getting a better job was because I had taken this weighing machine's advice about being a square peg in a round hole. No harm had come to me. I guessed that this fortune was intended for some persons that had flaws in their upper stories, but the card had my correct weight on it, and it didn't seem logical to me then, how it could be wrong, knowing such an intimate thing about me as my poundage. Thinking it over later, I remembered several instances where I had come in last because some dodo had made me change my mind.

Kept a date with Dora that night, and did she hold out her arms in loving embrace? She did not! She received me as if I were her annual spell of hay fever that had to run its natural course before it blew. It made me sore, seeing as how I had blown my roll and health on her yen for ritzy food, but being a perfect gentleman even then, I didn't let on I knew anything

was wrong, and anyway I wouldn't have done anything to hurt her feelings, because the truth was I was sort of stuck on her even if she did think an epistle was a female apostle.

"Would you like to hear some good news?" I asks her after the usual formalities had been gone through. We were sitting on the sofa then, but at a distance—because of the cool feeling that she had been showing me.

"Would you like to hear the good news?" I repeats.

"Oh, I suppose so," she answers, in a far-away voice. "I should like to hear some *good* news."

"Would you like to have me start at the beginning?" I asks eagerly.

"No," she says, "there is no need to, unless I know what the ending is."

"Dora," I says, "what is it you said I needed more than anything else in the world?"

"Did I say it just like that?" she snaps. "Because there is some mistake. There are three or four things you need."

I didn't like that, but I was in love, understand, so I let the crack go over my head.

"All right, if you insist on giving up," I says. "I got a raise today at the safety-pin works."

She perked right up at that, and looked me over with real respect, but then she got sort of cold again, like I had been handing her the bologny.

"How much?" she snaps.

"The raise or the total?" I asks.

"The total," she answers, "is how much?"

"Forty bucks a week," I says. "Isn't it grand, Dora?"

FROM then on, need I say that the distance between us was conspicuous by its absence, and that I played all my cards for what they were worth. When it came two o'clock A. M. I could see by her actions she was sorry I had to leave on account of the house rules, but I can't say exactly that I was sorry, because it was quitting-time in more ways than one. I'm no sap, but I had promised that girl a box of candy, two movie shows, two swell lobster dinners and an invite to the Shriners' annual ball—all for one week. I'll say it was about time to quit!

However, all this didn't bother me as much as it sounds, for I guess after all I was too tickled to have the extra twelve dollars just so I could spend them on Dora.

On my way home I passed the weighing machine, and that darned contraption looked so appealing with the street-light shining on its nickel plate that I couldn't resist the temptation. I drew a puzzler which read something like this:

> You have missed the one great chance of your career. You should have embraced your opportunity when you had it so near to you. If you don't watch out, others will beat you to the royal road to happiness.

Queer, wasn't it?

I was trying to dope it out the next morning at my desk when an order came in from a Moe Steel, of Watts, California, which called for us to ship him two carloads of safety-pins on the next freight-train out.

Pinned to this order there was a note from the general manager to me which says:

> *This is your first responsibility in the new position. I know that you will expedite the shipment and otherwise confirm my high opinion of your ability.*

That kind of made me feel good, and why wouldn't it? Only the day before I was just a bozo, and now I was a man with responsibility who had to see to it that two carloads of safety-pins got safely to California. I reminded myself again I was a big executive, and following the example of some bosses I had drawn pay from, I studied the order carefully as if trying to make up my mind what to do in the shortest time. You get the situation? I knew all the time I was supposed to rush the order through, but I wanted to enjoy the idea that maybe if I was a man of responsibility I should look a little farther into the matter.

"Who," I says to myself, "is this Moe Steel, of Watts, Calif., that he should order two carloads of pins from us without sending a deposit?" I didn't know, and it seemed like none of the office gang had ever heard of him.

"This," I argues to myself, "is a problem for you to decide. Suppose this safety-pin man is a crook and pays for the goods with a rubber check, who would be to blame?"

I would be to blame, of course. It was a tough spot for me to be in, if you get the situation. Here was this crook from the West Coast trying to work a fast one on the company, and did I stand for it, I'd be biting the hand that raised me. Just then

I spotted the fortune card which said to be sure your friends do not override your convictions. Wasn't the general manager my friend? If he wasn't, he wouldn't have given me a responsible job, would he? I read the other words: "Be ready at all times to back your own judgment. This particularly applies to a big deal in which you are to be a guiding factor." That settled it. "Do I get fired for it," I says to myself, "I don't ship this order!"

So I wrote, *"This order not approved. Don't send it. Steel is a thief and forger,"* and with a happy feeling I stuck the order in a pigeonhole to roost and took other matters in hand.

EVERYTHING went along fine until noon when the boss gave me the grin and asked did I lose my mother-in-law, I looked so happy.

"How could I have a mother-in-law," I says, "when I'm not married yet?" And he smiled and said it was through devious ways that a man acquired title to mothers-in-law, and I would maybe some day learn.

"By the way," he says, "that order for Steel must be a couple of miles on the way to California by now."

"Not," I says, feeling trouble was coming, "unless safety-pins can fly and somebody disobeyed my explicit orders."

"What do you mean?" the boss shouts. "Didn't you get my note?"

I rose to my feet, because, if you get the situation, you can see that was the smartest thing for a man to do who was going to fight for his principles. The boss was too mad to get my side of the matter, and so I tried to calm him down with my best smile, which rates with the best of them, but all the good that did was to make him wilder.

"Answer me!" he growls.

"Mr. Ford," I says, and I took the right distance for an important executive who might have to rush somewhere, "I have canceled the order."

"What!" he screams. He didn't believe me.

"I have canceled the order for Moe Steel, of Watts," I explains coolly, "for three very important reasons."

Ever hear a dummy trying to speak—that was the general manager right then!

"I have three very good reasons," I repeats between explosions. "First, my business acumen tells me Mr. Steel rates eighth place in the safety-pin league; second, my instinct whispers he is a wife-beater and a forger; third, do I overlook all those bets and let the order go through, I'm a poor man to have any responsibility."

Of course the boss couldn't see it that way, and I can't say that I can blame him now. He said something you couldn't put even in a modern novel, and so as to keep my self-respect, I dialed some choice words myself that you can't find even in the dictionary.

"There is no use working up a fever about a little thing like this," I says, "and insulting my mother and father like you're doing—because I simply wont stand for it, see?"

"And what," screams the boss, sarcastic-like, "are you going to do about it?"

"I am," I says, with dignity, "going to quit!"

"How noble of you," he laughs, "quitting so we wont have to pay you any salary." And with that he threw me my hat, which I speared out of the air before it reached the open window.

"Thanks," I says, "see you later."

I MUST admit the prospects didn't look so sweet, but I walked out of that office like a prize Russian wolfhound that's got the wind of a mess of alley mutts. However, when I reached the air outside, I couldn't seem to keep up the bluff, because if a fellow ever was downhearted, that was me. No job, two dinners, ditto two shows and a dance date, and me with less money than a stuffed owl.

My wandering feet carried me to the machine that had been the cause of all the trouble. The funny part was that I didn't want to go anywhere near it—not, mind you, that I was afraid it would tempt me, but because I figured that it was all the bunk and that I had been a sap to believe the penny advice the cards gave.

A couple of fat girls were getting the sad news, and to cheer me up I made a bet with myself they each scaled two hundred pounds or I was a gazelle. I was a gazelle! Would you believe it, my getting so near the machine seemed to work a spell over me, and while I tried to fight it off, I knew all the time I was going to try my luck on it once more.

"You're a bozo for wasting your money on that fool thing," a voice inside me said. "Keep your pennies." Another said: "Take a chance; what's a penny amount to?" I guess I must have stood there for ten min-

utes without moving, and then all of a sudden I jumped on the weighing platform and pushed my penny in the slot, and out comes the fortune card, which says:

Above all things, you should be philosophical. Don't be harassed by petty trials, for remember, the hardships of today are but stones laid by the All-wise Providence along the roadway to Success to try your fortitude and courage. Have good cheer; for tomorrow, as the Albanians have it, is another and brighter day.

"I'm dated up," I says. "Sorry!" Bess just looked at me. "With the same frill, I suppose?"

Tomorrow couldn't have been any worse than that day, and so I shrugged my shoulders like a fellow does when he's hard up against it and went back to my room, which was my only consolation, excepting Dora. Thinking of Dora made things look tougher, and I got to wondering if there wasn't some way I could tear her from our dates.

"I'll tell her the truth," I decided, and so I called her number on the phone, and as is usual her mother started the conversation by asking who it was and what did I want and what for.

"She isn't in," she says after the preliminaries, and you could feel the business of her getting ready to slam the receiver.

"Hold on," I shouts. "I know Dora isn't at home this evening, but would you mind telling her when she *is* at home that I want to know is she all set for the party tomorrow?"

"Dora will call you right back," she says sweetly. "Don't you dare leave your telephone for a minute."

In ten seconds the bell rang, and it was Dora, and she flattered herself telling me I was lucky, because she just got in that moment.

"I knew you would be home soon," I says, speaking from experience. "You always do that, you little devil."

We got to talking nonsense like that for an hour before we reached the stage where you don't know what to say and you wish you could. I couldn't stall her off any more, so I says: "Dora, I have something important to tell you. It says in the papers that we're going to have showers tomorrow night, which means we'll be wetter than a pair of perspiring tunas if we go to the show."

"Since when," she says, with poison in her voice, "do you go round hatching rains before they cloud up?"

"Aw, say, Dora," I pleaded with her, "you got me wrong. It's going to rain, sure enough, and I don't want you to catch a bad cold just to see a show the critics are panning. Don't you understand?"

"I don't," she says, "but I've got suspicions. What's the bad news? Broke?"

"Yes," I admits fiercely. "I'm flatter

than a flounder at rest, and that's what I've been trying to tell you."

There was a minute when nobody said anything, and being that I had a strong imagination, I could almost see what was going on at the other end of the wire, and it wasn't anything comfortable for me to think about. "I'm sorry," I says, "but it isn't my fault, Dora. I did my duty as I saw it, but—"

"Never mind," she says. "I guess I've been a fool, like most girls who put their faith in men. And to think I let you hold my hand—and—and—k-k-kiss me!" (I didn't remember kissing her.)

"Dora," I cries, "I'll take you to a show tomorrow night if I have to print my own money. Now don't cry, honey."

She changed her tune like a radio and sounded more like herself. "I wont cry," she sobs. "No, I wont, but you've got to admit you've been just a teeny bit mean to fool me like you did. Remember, now, I'll be waiting!"

IF it wasn't for Dora, I'd have been the strongest-minded man in this world, what with all my resolutions and other great advantages, but I fell hard for her blonde hair and taking ways. That dame could have made me wear a monocle, adopt a Pekingese and talk in a high voice and like doing it. In disgust I threw myself on the bed, and while I wouldn't like to have this get any farther, I actually wept myself to sleep.

The telephone bell woke me late in the morning, and I recognized Bess, the safety-pin-factory office secretary, the ex-flame I'd steadied enough to earn a pension, and while I'd stood her up, she still thought I was her main support.

"Wait a minute," I yawns insultingly. "Who wants to see me?"

"The boss," she says, "and make it snappy."

"Do you realize," I snorts, "that your boss' wishes are my don'ts, and that I'm an important free-lance business man with no time to haste?"

"Can that guff," she growls. "You may be a hero to some, but to me you're just a bum out of work. Hurry!"

And hurry I did, although I could have kicked myself for being such a fool without tuning her out with the good comebacks I had on the tip of my tongue. On the way to the works I invested my last penny in the weighing machine, and I drew this:

Remember! Today is the day of days. Your opportunity is knocking. Grasp it!

It cheered me up; and when I got to the office, I was actually smiling. The boss met me as I got in, and were I an American philanthropist in France, I couldn't rate a finer reception than he gave me as he put his arm around my shoulders and marches me through the crowded office to his private conference room.

"Be seated," he says, and he pushed a chair under me. "Take a cigar!"

"I don't choose to smoke," I lies. "It's bad for the health." My play, understand, was to make out I didn't like the situation. There's nothing like making the other man lead to you in these ticklish conferences.

"The safety-pin works and myself humbly apologize," says the opponent, "for having misinterpreted your splendid motives in refusing the Steel shipment. Had we the foresight and wonderful business acumen that you possess, it would never have happened."

"Of course," I says carelessly.

"Yes, of course," counters the enemy, "that is plainly understood."

WE clinched. The boss tried to draw me out, and then smiled foolishly at me. I'm sitting there getting my second wind and wondering what I should do have I got to make some kind of a decision in a hurry, but all that would come to my mind was did I or did I not kiss Dora like she said I had?

"We have decided to make full restitution for the grave wrong we have done you," he says, "and we wonder would you consider coming back to us in a position of increased responsibility at fifty dollars weekly—with a slight bonus, of, say, fifty dollars, in token of our esteem. Of course, you understand, I really didn't mean anything when I called your relatives—er—names?"

"I must have several seconds to think this matter over," I says, and I slumped in my chair and rushed my brain for an idea on how I could raise the ante five dollars. While this head-work was making painful progress, Bess slipped in and shoved a note in front of me.

"For you," she says. "Read it!"

I opened it up, and reads: *"Idiot! Take the fifty smackers now or pick your spot in the poorhouse."*

"This," I says, glancing coldly at Bess, "looks to me like it was typed by you.

I hit a bee-line for the nearest weighing-machine, and grabbed the paste-board dope-sheet. It says: "You are on the verge of a momentous decision. . . . . Be careful what you do!"

However, I have decided to take the job—and the bonus."

The boss reached over and congratulated me and asked how was it I knew that Mr. Steel, of California, was taken to jail for forgery on the very same day that I refused to send him the order. It seemed, according to what the boss said (and much to my own surprise), that the Western agent of the safety-pin works had wired him to lay off the Watts man because he was in the pen for passing boomerang paper, and couldn't receipt for the order anyhow.

"Well, sir," says I, "it's just like this. . . . . I—er—"

"He's bashful," interrupted Bess in time. "I know just what it is that made him know Mr. Steel was a forger. It was divination!"

"That's wonderful," applauds the boss. "That's just what we need in our office, a little divination. But I would like to know one thing more: how did you know Mr. Steel was a wife-beater? Our reports didn't mention that interesting item."

I looked helplessly at Bess. She gave me a sly wink.

"That also is easy," she answers for me. "That was pure prescience."

LIFE looked to me then like it was to be a bouquet of roses, with fifty dollars weekly and prestige as a starter, but no sooner did I get seated at my desk than Bess came prancing up with one of those queer smirks on her face.

"Aren't you going to thank me?" she asks.

"What for," I says, "do I want to thank you?"

"For faking that report on Mr. Steel from California," she snarls, "when as a matter of fact he's only a respected deacon in the Baptist church, has no wife to beat, and owns two banks and a twelve-tube radio. I took pity on you, you poor sap! Once more will I ask you: are you going to thank me?"

You can imagine that this was humiliating to me to be getting a calling-down from a mere secretary that used to be my steady before Dora came into my life. I remembered, however, that Bess, with all her faults, was still a lady.

"Thanks," I says, "thanks, very much."

"Now that we have got that settled," she smiles, "we'll take up another pressing personal matter. How many times have you stood me up? Speak quickly, or I'll raise my voice."

The way she said it was painful to hear. Would I refuse to answer, I'd be out in the gutter. "Three times," I informs her, "when Dora was sick."

"I'm air-proof," Bess laughs, "so don't waste that gas on me. Sick girls, as I hap-

pen to know, don't go to the movies to have their pulses felt. Know what I'm going to do?"

I admitted that I didn't.

"What I'm going to do," she says, "is make you a proposition that calls for a yes vote with no amendments. Do you take me to the Shriners' Ball and to a show?"

"I'm dated up for them," I says. "Sorry!"

Bess stood there with her hands on her hips and just looked at me. "With the same old frill, I suppose?"

"With Dora," I says hotly, "and she isn't any old frill."

"No, I suppose not," she snaps. "That dame only keeps from getting older by dyeing younger. But we're getting away from the subject—do you take me?"

I hesitated, hoping there was some way to bluff her out of it.

"Remember," she says, stamping her foot, "fifty dollars a week! Going . . . . going . . . . go—"

"Wait a minute, Bess," I pleads with her. "Don't you go away feeling sore at me. There must be some way to settle this, and anyhow I have got to have time to stall Dora off—give me until one o'clock."

I FIGURED out that this was my only chance to test out if the fortune cards were any good when a fellow got in a tight hole like I was in; and I was going to take that gamble while out to lunch. Bess agreed to adjourn the shooting, and she backed off to the boss' office with a funny smile wrapped all over her face.

Twelve o'clock came, and I hit a bee-line for the nearest weighing machine, stuck a penny from the bonus in the slot and nervously grabbed for the small pasteboard dope-sheet as it came out. It says:

> You are on the verge of a momentous decision. Your entire future, and possibly your health, rest on your selecting the proper course. Be careful what you do.

Of course I knew all that, but I wasn't there to get blah! I stuck in another penny. This time it read:

> Remember that Rome was not built in a day; nor was the world fashioned by the Creator in a moment's time. Plan things well in advance, and refuse to be hurried.

I was getting desperate. "Please, please," I begs, "tell me something." Again I tried the machine.

> If a woman, you do not, as a rule, seek employment in the business world, but much prefer domestic life.

WHEN I read that one I calmed down and it came to me real hard how much of a fool I'd been to trust a weighing and fortune machine with my future; but as I had one more penny left, and couldn't think of anything to spend it on, I put it in the slot expecting it would produce some more literature to make me laugh at myself. The dope was this:

> It is leading you astray to be thinking and wondering at the way in which women play with men, and coax them and win them and drop them. Why not settle down to the one you love and be happy? Gentlemen prefer blondes, but can you afford to be a gentleman? Think this over!

I did. I thought the matter over on my way back to the office, and the layout seemed perfectly plain to me. There was Dora, a dame with a figure that had shamed poor old Venus into the museum along with the other freaks—Dora, who could say "Gimme" at a charity bazaar for the crippled blind and not blush. Dora was a blonde.

Bess was a brunette with a face that belonged to some one's sister. She liked bedtime stories because they fitted in with her retiring nature, and she gave woolen mittens for Christmas presents. Bess thought peroxide was something that healed cuts.

Bess was at my desk waiting for me.

"It is one minute past one o'clock," she says, "and I trust you have made up your mind."

"I have," I says, "and my decision is this—" Reaching for the telephone I called Dora's number and while I'm waiting for the wrong ones to get off the line, I could see that Bess was getting pale.

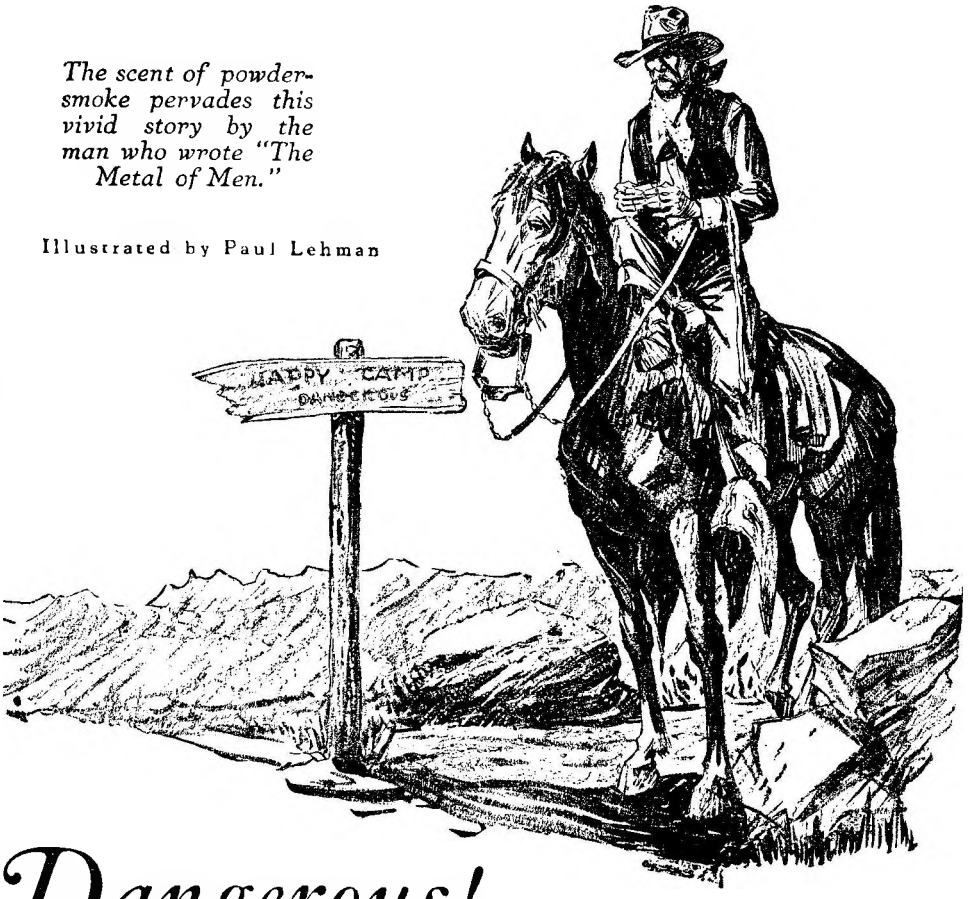
"I know Dora isn't home," I snaps out quickly when the mother answered, "and what's more, I don't personally care. Just tell this bimbo daughter of yours that I'm changing my color scheme. Good-by and ta-ta!"

We clinched, Bess and me, and it wasn't long after that before we were married, and for a wedding present, what do you think the safety-pin works gave us—the combination weighing and fortune-telling machine you see in the parlor! The next week Dora got spiteful and married a Russian Count with a Kansas pedigree. By and by she had twins.

Dora always was extravagant.

The scent of powder-smoke pervades this vivid story by the man who wrote "The Metal of Men."

Illustrated by Paul Lehman



Dangerous!

By

JOHN MERSEREAU

WELL to the west and north of Delhi, Nevada, in the long shadows of the Funeral Range, some considerate pilgrim had placed a sign. Twelve miles off the main road, so read the sign, was Happy Camp. And beneath this optimistic legend was printed the word "DANGEROUS." But a discreet silence was maintained as to whether the warning referred to Happy Camp or to the road—a mere track winding away and away into the purple mysteries of the Amargosa Desert.

Sheriff Bill Boden reined in his big, clean-limbed dun at the forks and threw one leg over the saddlehorn while he rolled a smoke. He was a man of about forty, thickset, deliberate of movement, especially remarkable for a pair of alert slate-gray eyes. They were smiling eyes by nature, too, but just now overcast and serious.

"Dangerous, eh?" Boden murmured, his lips setting in a tight smile devoid of humor. "Well, anyway, they give fair notice."

Shrugging, he lit the cigarette. Yet he could not quite banish the puckering frown from between his brows. Virtually unknown to the north half of the county, he had eased himself into office while the politicians squabbled. He was out now on his first official case, with his courage and resourcefulness still to be proven. And it was an added strain to know that even his own staunch friends were wondering, with due respect for his nerve, just how he would pan out with a mighty mean job of law enforcement.

In a way, Sheriff Bill was wondering too. Luck had given him a sure enough tough break for a starter. Hardly a week after taking his oath, he had been called upon to make this trip to Happy Camp. And Happy Camp was all that the signboard hinted of—dangerous. It had better than an A-1 rating among hardboiled sagebrush villages, and officers of the law were less welcome there than smallpox. In fact, such

visitors were habitually discouraged by "persons unknown." Boden's predecessor in office had been gracious enough to give him the mortality rate and similar encouraging data.

"Keep away from Happy Camp!" was his sincere advice. "You have nothin' to gain by buttin' in and everything to lose. I grant that it's a hellhole; and perhaps they do shoot each other up onct in a while. But they wont come whinin' to you with their troubles. They mind their own business and leave outsiders alone, generally speaking. So why stir up a fuss? Let sleepin' dawgs lie, that's been my policy!"

"But I hear it's wide open," Boden had protested, his honest eyes narrowing ever so slightly. "I reckon it's my duty to stop that up."

"Why? They aint hurtin' anyone but theirselves. Besides," the other had explained, "practically the whole town is the old stage station. They built it fifty-sixty years ago to hold off the Shoshones and bad whites; and gentle*men*, it was built to last! 'Dobe walls, with barred windows and doors. Goin' in alone is O. K., of course, if they don't tumble who you are. But you'd never break through with a gang of deputies—not till the last bit of evidence was destroyed." He shrugged. "And how in hell can you close a place without witnesses and evidence?"

SHERIFF BODEN had let it go at that —for the time. But his heart was set on putting an end to the wild orgies at Happy Camp. Not at all because he was a padlocker, for he was as liberal-minded as they came. Poker, for instance, was his favorite pastime—though played, as classified by Nevada law, as a game of skill!

However, Happy Camp did not confine its indulgences to legal gaming according to report. There were ugly rumors of poison liquor, dog fights to the death and even old-time skull-butting contests between men. Sheriff Bill certainly proposed to give the village some merited attention when he got things running smoothly.

But his hand had been forced. It had suddenly become necessary to pay an official visit to Happy Camp; and Boden was not the sort to send a deputy where he would not go himself. So now, at the crossroads, he was taking final stock of himself before going on. In one of his pockets was his recently acquired badge of office; and hidden in his waistband, beneath an innocent vest flap, was a heavy-duty revolver. As far as he could see, that about checked over the needful preparations.

With a sigh, Sheriff Bill urged his dun into the side road. Night was coming on. Off to the west the snarling mountains lay in the red wash of the sunset glow. And somewhere amid the intervening dunes and bad-lands was hidden the lawless little settlement that was the sheriff's goal.

"Well, old hoss," he affectionately addressed the dun, "this may be the last time me and you ride together. But like the *hombre* says, here's hopin'! Every cloud has a silver linin', especially in Nevada—and there's more'n one way to skin a rabbit!"

Boden was not afraid, understand. He had never been to Happy Camp, and there was good reason to suppose that he could pass unrecognized. No thought of peril caused the frown to pull persistently at his brows even when he tried to tinge his thoughts with humor. And he believed that his friends would have no call to be ashamed of him if he should run into action. Yet he was undeniably depressed, and with some reason. The cause, as briefly as possible, was something like this:

Before venturing into public life, Boden had been a rancher. On the side, he had dabbled to some profit in slightly arid real-estate. That is, he had rented and sold on commission. And among other deals, he had leased a small market-garden piece out of Delhi to a broken-down rodeo buster and pal of old, one Slim Pettis.

Now, there was nothing wrong with Pettis except an impulsive trigger-finger and a perverted sense of humor—and, as it developed, a neighbor who was running hogs. As surely as quicksilver will unite with gold, those hogs were destined to mingle with the thriving Pettis market patch. They did! It was, of course, inevitable.

The crippled buckaroo protested, not once but several times. Then, patience exhausted, he peppered a razorback with birdshot. The beast ran home, only slightly damaged; but its owner, far from taking the hint, had Pettis arrested for cruelty to animals. And the honorable court ruled that mayhem to a hog's delicate posterior called for a fine of nine dollars. This case, be it understood, is actually of record.

PETTIS paid up and bided his time—but more suitably armed with a thirty-thirty. When his property was again in-

vaded, he nailed six hogs through the heart in as many running shots; which, he contended, was not only humane but also pretty fair shootin'. A short-tempered justice contended on the contrary that it was contempt of court. There was an added charge, too, of failing to appear. The penalty was set at two hundred dollars or one hundred days in jail!

Not having two hundred dollars, Pettis lit out. In due time, he was reported in the vicinity of Happy Camp; and Sheriff Bill, hardly used to the shine of his new badge, was ordered to execute the court's judgment.

So it was that Boden was on his way to Happy Camp under conditions contrary to his every wish. He was not yet ready for a cleanup of the settlement, and he rebelled at arresting a *hombre* who had put over such a breezy—and merited—comeback. Still, there was the official order to be carried out. . . . .

Sheriff Bill urged the dun into an easy lope. Afar off now, across miles and miles of desert, he could see the faint glimmer of lights at Happy Camp. And while the road alternated between bad and worse, the village drew steadily closer. Inexorably, the officer was approaching a meeting with a gang of sagebrush citizens who liked their law a long ways off!

Boden, however, was banking heavily on the fact that he was a practical stranger to this barren end of the county. He did not believe that he would be recognized. And once he found his man, a high sign should be sufficient to call Pettis aside for a confidential chat. They were old friends to begin with; and the rodeo rider had nothing to lose by a parley. Moreover, the sheriff was prepared to pay the fine himself—if certain guarantees could be agreed on. The crippled buckaroo had been given a raw deal according to his way of thinking.

It was after nine o'clock when Sheriff Bill at length struck Happy Camp. Riding past a few miserable hovels, he drew to a stop in the shadow of a roofless ruin that once had been the stage station's wagon shed. A goodly number of cayuses were already standing there, but none had the clean lines of the big dun. Boden observed that with some satisfaction. If it should come to a running fight, he had a big edge in speed.

Perhaps a hundred feet away was the station itself, a big 'dobe building dimly outlined in the night. Save for the light of a lantern above one door, it stood in darkness. Metal shutters were drawn tight over each barred window. If the citizens of Happy Camp did not fear the law, they evidently feared each other. Scum of the desert, outcasts at best, they were gathered to prey each on his neighbor—dog eat dog. And no sound of laughter filtered through the cold gray walls. It was like a prison or a tomb, the play-place of men who had lost their hearts and souls.

Drawing a long, deep breath, Sheriff Bill dismounted and sauntered over to the ancient structure. Quite at his ease, apparently, he brushed past a big, hard-faced puncher who sat lolling on the steps. Boden was conscious that he was being subjected to a furtive once-over, but he did not falter. Nor was any move made to halt him. Alone and unchallenged, he passed within the forbidden portals of Happy Camp.

ONCE across the threshold, he paused momentarily in the blinding glare of a hanging gasoline lamp. Before him was a barnlike room, swirling with tobacco smoke and reeking with the stench of "rot-gut" liquor. A score or more of slit-eyed men sat hunched grimly over tables piled high with stakes; while to one side was a makeshift bar presided over by a palsy-handed wreck.

But as the newcomer entered, a scowling giant of a man rose from his place at the nearest table. A dirty apron was bound about his waist, but, noticeably, he wore a six-gun outside the apron and thonged low down on one thigh. In common with several others, he treated Boden to a long and suspicious scrutiny. Then, apparently satisfied, his thick lips relaxed into a mock smile of welcome. He came forward.

"Flannery's my name, stranger," he boomed. "I run the joint. Make yerself to home."

"Thanks." Boden stepped up close, lowering his voice. "Flannery," he said, "I'm lookin' for Slim Pettis."

A curtain seemed to descend over Flannery's little eyes. Instantly, he was on guard.

"Mister, I didn't ketch your name."

"I didn't mention it," the sheriff responded easily. "But Slim's a pal of mine; and I'm bringin' him some news—good news, mebbe—from down Delhi way."

For a long moment their eyes held. Then Flannery shrugged.

"I reckon Slim kin allus take care of himself—here," he remarked significantly. "Just stick around, and I'll try to get word out to him."

"I will," said Sheriff Bill. "And thanks."

Flannery returned eagerly to his place at the stud table; and Boden, to kill time while he waited, wandered over there to watch the game. The play was surprisingly high and fast, he noted, and—to his way of thinking—not particularly good. Stud poker was his game of games, the gift of the gods to test men's skill and courage. He hated to see it desecrated, particularly when he had not sat in for a session since those recent and hectic pre-election days!

Sheriff Bill watched a pot of over fifty dollars claimed by an ace-high show. He clenched his hands to keep control of a wavering resolve. This was no place for him to indulge his hobby, surely, even though such games were altogether legal. On the other hand, why not? He had sized the place up, and there was nothing left to do but wait for Pettis. Still . . . . . Flannery, who had claimed the pot, flipped up his hole card with a flourish.

"A dirty deuce," he boasted. "I bluffed you-all purty!"

"Not me!" Sheriff Bill blurted out. "I had you figgered from the first jump!"

Flannery shoved around slowly in his chair. There was an ugly puff to his lower jaw.

"Money talks!" he sneered. "If you're so damn' slick, sit in! We only draw the color line for pikers."

AN angry flush overspread the Sheriff's face. But he ignored the insult—and accepted the invitation. With a fifty-dollar stack before him and easily a thousand more showing among the other players at the table, he was admitted to the freemasonry of Happy Camp.

It was a queer and equivocal position for an officer of the law to be in. None the less, Sheriff Bill was entirely within his rights according to every frontier precedent. And his dander was up! He had been touched on the raw by that surly reference to pikers. He was out gunning for the boss of Happy Camp; and that individual made no secret of his intention to take the stranger for his roll.

But Bill Boden had a canny way with cards. He played them close to his fifth vest button, and he knew when to fold them up. Luck was with him from the start, luck and that indefinable "poker sense" that marks the difference between haphazard betting and true skill. Yet his pile grew slowly at first, while the others at the board felt him out. Sheriff Bill watched and waited, ever on the alert. For like a pack of wolves, the men of Happy Camp were hungry for new blood.

To Boden's left was a swarthy Mexican, face pock-marked and repulsive; a sheepman, perhaps. To his right sat a pallid-faced youth who, curiously enough, spoke the jargon of the underworld. Next was a bearded pocket-hunter, referred to by the others only as "Death Valley." And directly opposite glowered the blatant Flannery, one big paw covering his hole card with the snarling suspicion of a greedy cur.

All of them were armed, of course, and all played with a virulent intensity. Smoke hung like a filthy pall about the table, swirling and eddying with each movement of a hand. And Flannery rose at regular intervals to bring fresh cards and collect his tithe of house money from the players.

Gradually the stakes increased. At ten o'clock, however, Sheriff Bill was holding tenaciously to his original fifty, not to mention a most enviable dividend! The Mexican cashed in then, but the game went on—with Flannery a consistent loser.

The proprietor of Happy Camp had run into heavy weather with the start of Boden's play. It had been a long time, evidently, since so much cash had circulated in his resort; and, a plunger by nature, the big money went to his head like green wine. Within another half an hour, he lost close on to two hundred dollars; and the lips that held up his sagging professional smirk were white.

In as little time again, Flannery dropped a second pile. Boden took practically all of that, along with a similar amount from the grumbling pocket-hunter. Playing on velvet, Sheriff Bill was opening up!

For the first time in his life, he was actually out to break a man—and he was making better than fair headway in that direction. Altogether, Boden estimated that he had garnered well over a thousand dollars' profit, with more than half of it Flannery's cursing contribution. There was still to be considered, though, the little matter of getting it safely back to Delhi!

WHILE Flannery crossed over to the bar to scrape his money till, Sheriff Bill shoved back and built a smoke. But as he

struck a match, he looked up. Across Death Valley's hunched shoulders, he saw a tall, cadaverous puncher entering at the outer door; and the newcomer, meeting his glance, drooped his left lid in a quick and furtive wink of warning.

Without the tremor of a finger, the Sheriff carried the light on up to his cigarette. But as he did so, one eye squinted protectively—a habit common to many smokers.

Instantly Flannery was on guard. "Mister, I didn't ketch your name!" "I didn't mention it," the sheriff responded.

"Howdy, Slim!" he drawled. "I been waitin' on you. In any hurry?"

"Well—" Pettis came on over to the table. There was a slight limp to his walk, but he handled himself easily enough; and unlike the other habitués of Happy Camp, he bore himself with an air of forthright and rugged honesty. "Well," he repeated hesitantly, "I don't want t' bust up yore play, but I got t' make it on over the ridge yet tonight. Flannery's man caught me jest as I was forkin' my old paint."

"Then I'll shag along with you if you don't mind," Sheriff Bill decided. "Got somethin' to talk over, Slim."

Flannery came hurrying back.

"Aimin' to drag out with yer winnings, hey?" he snarled. "Quittin' cold without givin' us a chancet to play out on you!"

"Not so s you'd notice it," Boden drawled. Deliberately, he counted two hundred and fifty dollars in crumpled bills from off his pile and stuffed it in a pocket. "I got use for just that much," he said decisively, "and it's sunk for good! But the rest of my stack is wide open—for one last draw. You asked for action, Mister. Now let's have it."

DEATH VALLEY and the pale-faced youth sat impassively behind their stacks, waiting for the first two cards that cost nothing but the ante. It was Flannery's deal. Licking dry lips with a dry tongue, he riffled the cards and offered them for a cut. He had only about a hundred dollars showing, presumably the last of his ready cash. However fortunately the cards fell, he stood to finish up a heavy loser.

Fumbling just a little, he slid a hole card to each of the other players and to himself. Then he dealt around a second card face up: a five spot to Death Valley, a king to the boy, a ten to Boden and a king to himself. He paused a moment, breathing heav-

ily, to examine his hidden card. His face was utterly expressionless; his hands had steadied. Like Boden, he had himself now under perfect physical control. But unlike the sheriff, he did not remain silent.

"Well," he said, impatiently, "it's up to the first king to talk."

The boy opened for five dollars, and Boden saw the bet. But Flannery was not satisfied with such a modest start.

"And up ten," he said. "I got 'em layin' back to back."

The pocket-hunter merely grunted and met the raise—as did the others. Flannery dealt again: a seven to the prospector, a deuce to the boy, a queen to Sheriff Bill and a black ace to himself.

"Ace-king says twenty bucks," he announced, tossing in a bill. Death Valley hesitated for the fraction of a second, then counted in the necessary chips. The boy rapped out, turning down his cards. Imperturbable and silent, Sheriff Bill called the bet.

Again the boss of Happy Camp licked his dry lips as he flipped the cards around. The pocket-hunter drew a king. An ace fell to Sheriff Bill. And Flannery dealt himself a trey. Once more it was his first bet, by virtue of the best hand showing on the table. His lips drew back from his yellow teeth while he briefly studied Boden's cards.

"Fifty!" he leered, shoving in most of the remainder of his pile.

Regretfully, Death Valley folded up his cards.

"You got me niggered," he confessed. "I aint that interested."

"I'll just ride along," grinned Sheriff Bill, "and pull for a jack to fill this inside straight of mine!"

BEADS of sweat were forming on Flannery's brow and upper lip. He turned his bloodshot eyes away from the brilliance of the gasoline lamp. With a moist hand, he dealt a last card to his opponent.

"Up hop a devil!" Boden chuckled as the bit of pasteboard dropped—a jack of hearts! He had called the turn. Lacking only a king, he had the makings of an ace-high straight! Against that Flannery could have at most a pair, for he had dealt himself a nine.

"Looks like I take the marbles," said Sheriff Bill; "but I'll check the bet and let you contribute if you want. I said I'd call to the last dollar of my stack."

Flannery swallowed hard.

"You're bluffing, damn you!" he accused unsteadily.

Sheriff Bill treated him to a tantalizing smile.

"Money talks!" he mimicked. "If you're so damn' slick, sit in!"

FLANNERY leaned across the table. His face was almost black with congested blood. His fists were clenched.

"I'll put up my note for thirty days against your pile," he said. "It's good as gold. I own this place all clear."

Boden shook his head in a decided negative.

"Notes I don't take in a poker game," he said; "notes and I. O. U.'s and wooden money. Nothin' personal, you savvy; just a little rule of mine." He paused, glancing appraisingly around the room. "But I will do this, if you don't know when you're licked: I'll let you put up a deed to your dump here—even Steven, against my pile."

"It's worth double that!" the owner roared. "More'n double. I'd be a fool!"

"Shore you would," admitted Sheriff Bill. "But I figger a *hombre's* entitled to some edge when he backs an inside straight! Besides, I'm willin' enough to quit—"

"I'll go you!" Flannery accepted hastily. "Shove in your stack."

"It's your bet," Boden countered. "Shove in your deed! If you'll get me a pen and paper, I reckon I can make one out."

In response to a snarling order, the flunky brought materials for writing; and on a sheet of soiled white paper, Sheriff Bill proceeded to pen a deed to Happy Camp. Once he looked up to find Flannery staring at him with a puzzled, questioning, suspicious frown. It was, moreover, the glance of a man striving to piece together some jumbled picture of the past—a memory, perhaps, reawakened by the sheriff's posture as he wrote.

But Sheriff Bill met the probing eyes with cool composure.

"Married or single?" he inquired.

"Single," was the growled response; and Pettis attested to the truth of that.

Nodding, Sheriff Bill wrote on. When the document was done, he shoved it across the table along with a silver dollar taken from his stack.

"Just to make it binding—for value received," he drawled. "Sign there."

Flannery quickly scanned through the written page. If he was disappointed to

With a drum of hoofs Sheriff Bill and his friend went racing out of Happy Camp.

find only a blank space where he had hoped to see the stranger's name, he gave no sign. With a steady hand, he subscribed his name.

"Slim," requested Sheriff Bill, "just put your fist down there as witness, will you?"

The buckaroo scrawled his signature in the appointed place. Then he shot a quick look at Boden.

"I'll be bringin' up the hosses while you showdown," he said; "and I'd like fer you t' shake a laig *pronto*—when yore cards are up."

"I'll be there on the jump," the Sheriff promised. He understood clearly that he had been warned to expect instant danger if he should win, but he faced about with the coolest of cool shrugs. Flannery sat there, still studying him; and close to one side, directly beneath the big pressure lamp, were bunched the denizens of Happy Camp. To a last man they had quit their tables to watch this play, and obviously enough they were partisans of the big, uncouth owner of the place.

"Well," asked Sheriff Bill, "what's a-holdin' up the parade? Aint you goin' to make the play?"

Flannery tossed the deed to the center of the table.

"There it lays," he sneered. "Yer bluff is called!"

WITHOUT an instant's hesitation, Boden shoved in his entire pile. A sort of expectant sigh rose from the group of tense onlookers. Big Flannery, however, leaned back expansively.

"Mister," he jeered, "you had me figgered from the jump all right! But even a wise guy like you can't make a ace-high straight without a king. Two're in the dead hands, and the other two lay right here—scratchin' backs!" His exultant laugh boomed out as he turned his hole card to make, as he had claimed, a pair of kings. With eager hands, he reached for the rich pot. "You didn't have a chance!"

"Easy there!" warned Sheriff Bill. His voice was low, but it had a steel edge of command. "You played me for a sure-thing sucker, but I crossed you up. My hole card gives me a better pair. Aces, Flannery, if you're strong enough to look!" He showed his fifth card and, reaching out quickly, secured the deed. "When can you move out?"

Flannery sprang, cursing, from his chair. His face was livid. Without dignity when

victory seemed his, so he had in defeat no shame.

"To hell with you!" he rasped. "That deed aint worth the powder to blow it up. I know the law. To be legal, I'd have to sign my name before a not'ry public!"

Sheriff Bill's expression was one of utter loathing and contempt. To him no dog was lower than a man who tried to evade an honest gambling debt.

"Flannery," he said, standing there alone behind the table, his legs braced wide apart, "I *did* have you figgered from the start. I knew you'd try to welch. But I knew, too, before I called the play, that I could collect. It happens that I've dealt some in real estate, and I found out long ago that it pays when you've got 'em backed up to the dotted line to be prepared. It happens, Flannery, that I'm a notary myself!"

Remembrance and recognition leaped suddenly into Flannery's widening eyes.

"Boden—that's the name—Bill Boden!" he cried. "By God, he's the sheriff, boys!" And his hand jammed downward to his thigh, as his patrons surged forward to attack the apparently unarmed officer of the law.

Sheriff Bill's right thumb was already hooked into his belt. The thumb slid over with an elusive, easy speed. Before Flannery had more than reached full down, Boden's big six-gun was out and up. He fired once—not at any of those who sought his life, but at the big lamp overhead. With twenty merciless men between him and the door, it was his only chance. And as the room went black, he flung himself across the bar top to the floor behind—just as the punctured lamp exploded and sprayed the room with flaming gasoline.

Protected as he was, a blazing clot struck Boden on one sleeve. He smothered it with a wet, foul rag hanging there behind the bar and, rising up, went plunging for the door. After him fled a panic-stricken troupe, all answering to a single urge—to save themselves from that patchwork of raging flames.

AT the door only did Sheriff Bill meet further opposition: the big lookout coming in. Boden straight-armed him as he drew; and Flannery's man went sprawling flat, his gun whirling from his hand!

Pettis was waiting astride his paint, barely clinging to the bridle of the sheriff's plunging dun. And as Boden struck the saddle in a running leap, the buckaroo let go. With a muffled drum of hoofs, Sheriff Bill and the wanted man who was his friend went racing out of Happy Camp. A single wide shot came drilling after them as they took the turn by the wagon shed. Then they were in the clear, the paint pony keeping easy pace with the fast dun, side by side under the desert stars.

Sheriff Bill looked back presently at the blazing beacon for which he now held a worthless deed.

"Just my luck," he bemoaned, but with twinkling eyes. "I win a Class A building, except as to roof an' floors, and then have to burn it down to save my hide. Didn't even have time t' cash my chips!" His face sobered. "But I managed to sink two hundred—fer you, Slim. I want you to stay straight. You played up like I knew you would, and I want to pay yore fine."

BUT Pettis shook his head, his stubborn jaws clamped tight.

"I don't take money, Bill, fer helpin' out a friend. And I aint a-goin' back to get beat outa my rights again, tryin' t' raise garden truck."

"Now looky here, Slim," Sheriff Bill put in, "you got me wrong. I meant that money fer a loan, but with all the time you want. And you'll make good yet on that place of yours. There's more'n one way to skin a rabbit, that's what I've always said. Why, fer instance, take tonight! I was plumb up against it fer a scheme to close Happy Camp—and now I own all that's left of the doggone joint! And you'll get a good break, too, if you'll just wait and play the game. Besides," he added persuasively, "I passed yore place the other day and saw yore ornery neighbor plantin' green hog-feed of his own."

The other's set frown suddenly relaxed. A grin overspread his homely face.

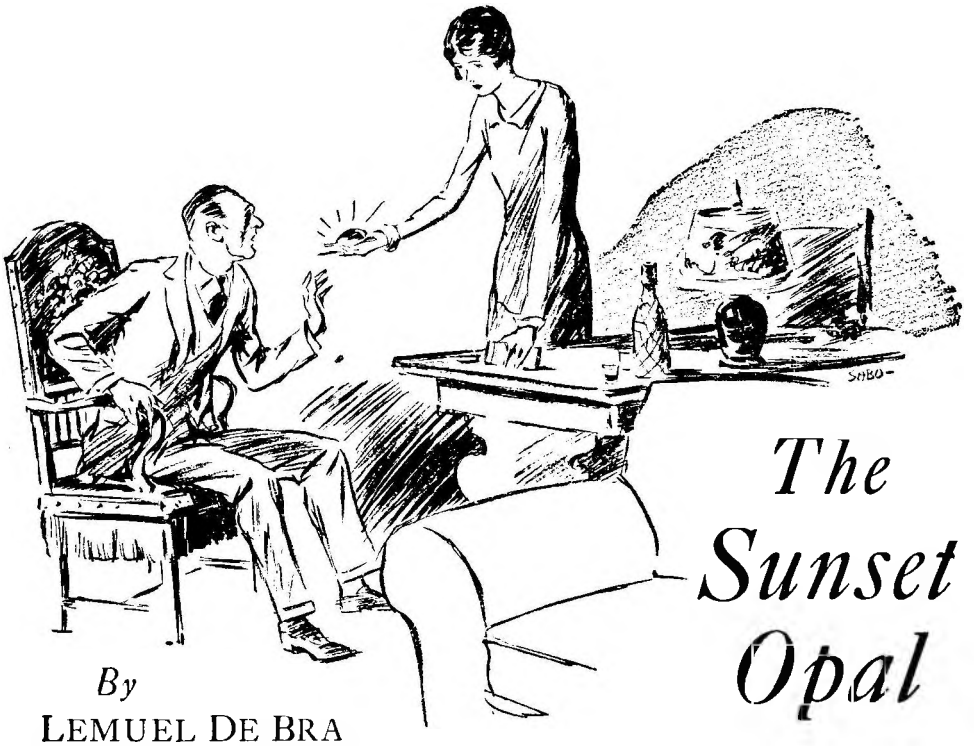
"I'm licked, Bill," he said. "You got me sold. I'll give the old farm another whirl."

Sheriff Bill held out his hand.

"Shake!" he applauded. "And if my speak-easy hadn't burned down just now, I'd set 'em up to a bigger an' better garden patch!"

Slim Pettis clasped the extended hand. He was grinning from ear to ear.

"Thanks, Bill," he said, "but save the good wishes fer my neighbor and *his* garden patch. Me, I'm goin' to start to raisin' hawgs!"



The Sunset Opal

By LEMUEL DE BRA

A vividly dramatic tale of the San Francisco underworld, by the gifted author of "Crystals of Crime."

SPOT CARNEY, known to the underworld of Limehouse and Barbary Coast as the "Blarney Kid," paused at the curb, flipped away the stub of his monogrammed cigarette and with a graceful gesture of his slim, carefully manicured hands adjusted his tie. Everything was ready for the big play. The diamond he had decided to "borrow" had been selected; the imitation stone he intended to leave in its place reposed in Spot's vest pocket. Within a few hours crookdom would be chuckling over the neat way the Blarney Kid had nicked San Francisco's swellest jewelry store out of a five-thousand-dollar "rock."

Just as Spot started for the store-entrance a woman came out—and Spot stopped short. She was a woman of about thirty, slender, stylishly dressed. At sight of the Blarney Kid her face suddenly took on a ghastly pallor; then over the space between them her dark eyes flashed the man a message.

Spot Carney, about to lift his hat, passed his hand across his face and touched his left ear. The woman hastened down the street. Watching her out of the corner of his eye, the Blarney Kid lighted a cigarette, and followed.

Ten minutes later Spot saw the woman enter the Channelview Hotel, a small, exclusive hostelry on the hill above Chinatown. Turning into a stairway, ostensibly to light another cigarette, Spot surveyed the street. His experienced eye quickly assured him that Grace had not been followed.

HE found her waiting in the lobby. Again her eyes flashed him a signal; then she turned past a group of chattering women and mounted the stairs. Spot dropped his cigarette into a cuspidor and entered the elevator. When he left it at the second floor he found Grace waiting in the hall.

Observing that they were alone, Grace smiled, and beckoned to him to hurry.

In her room, she greeted him most effusively:

"Spot Carney! You dear old boy! What are you doing in San Francisco? When did you leave London? Did heaven send you just to help *me?* Here—take this *man's* chair! And wait until I pour a nip of

Scotch! I have a million things to tell you!"

Spot sat down. He watched the woman as she fluttered about the room, setting out cigarettes, glasses, and a bottle with a foreign label.

She had changed but little, he saw, in the past year. Her attractive figure still had that suggestion of easy, tigerish grace; the beauty of her pale face, accentuated by her dark eyes and black hair, was still marred—for Spot Carney—by that touch of hardness about the lips.

"Where's George?" the Blarney Kid asked abruptly.

"Then you haven't heard?" Bottle in hand, the woman flashed him a searching look.

"Last I heard of you and George was that Brower Street jewel case. Heard you rumbled the job and skipped for China. About a year ago, wasn't it?"

"It seems like a lifetime!" Grace sighed. "I'll tell you all about it." She moved the tabouret close to Spot's chair and sat down facing him.

"First we drink," she remarked, "—to old times!" She picked up one of the glasses and offered it to the man.

Spot Carney moved as if to take the glass, then halted. A queer expression flashed over his face.

"I'm off the stuff," he said, almost gruffly. "Go ahead yourself, but excuse me. And tell me about George. Scotland Yard get him?"

A puzzled, displeased frown wrinkled the woman's brow, but vanished instantly. She smiled.

"No. Nothing so bad as that. We've separated. That's all. It was a mistake from the beginning—our marriage. George was too—well, too slow. You—"

"George Weatherby was the best friend I ever had," Spot Carney put in quietly. "I'm sorry you two didn't get along, but perhaps it's for the best. Is George still in China? And what's up that you say you need my help?"

THERE was a faint tinge of color in Grace's cheeks as she slowly lighted a cigarette.

"If you had known George as—oh, well, what's the use? You men stick together. Yes, he's somewhere in China. Where, I don't know—nor care. We pulled a trick in Shanghai. George cheated me on my share when we parted, but I was a thousand miles at sea before I discovered it. You ever hear of the *'Sunset Opal'?"*

Spot shook his head.

"Not superstitious about opals, are you, Spot?"

"You mean do I believe that old bunk about opals being unlucky? I should say not!"

The woman leaned over and carefully knocked the ash from her cigarette.

"Spot," she said, "you have the rep. of never throwing down a friend. I believe that at least for George's sake, you'll play square with me. So I'm going to show you—"

Instead of finishing, she sprang up and stepped into an adjoining room, returning quickly with what Spot supposed was an ordinary talcum-powder can. Sitting down again, the woman turned the can over, spilling powder on her dress, and began tugging at the bottom. This snapped open presently, disclosing crumpled tissue paper. Removing the paper, Grace inserted thumb and finger and drew out something wrapped in more paper—something almost the size of an egg. Unwrapping this, the woman held out her hand—and Spot Carney gasped involuntarily.

IN the woman's palm lay a gem that sparkled and flamed like a glowing ember. It was the largest, and most beautiful opal the Blarney Kid had ever seen.

"The famous Sunset Opal!" breathed the woman. "Look, Spot! You can see the water, the waves dancing, the sun going down in a cloud of fire! It—"

"Looks like blood," Spot put in. "But it is beautiful. I've never seen anything like it. Certainly wouldn't call it unlucky to own a gem like that."

"Take it," the woman said quickly. She put the opal in Spot's hand. Picking up her untouched glass, she drank the Scotch in one gulp. Slowly, she set the glass back on the tabouret.

"Listen to me, Spot! That thing is all I have left. I've been here a month, but I can't sell that—I don't dare try. That opal belonged to an old Chink in Shanghai. Every jeweler in San Francisco has heard of it. Any of them would recognize it at once as the Sunset Opal. There's a superstition against that thing ever being taken out of China. George told me nothing about it. I've learned all that since then. He gave me money to get to San Francisco—and that thing. Said it was worth

fifteen thousand. It is—but I can't get it. And I want to get out of here—back to New York where I belong. You take that thing off my hands, Spot. You're clever. And you can take your time. Get some Chink to pay you a fat chunk for 'recovering' the opal. See?"

Spot Carney caught the note of eagerness in the woman's voice. He studied the opal carefully. An expert judge of precious stones—as many dealers had learned to their sorrow—he had already formed an opinion as to the value of the Sunset Opal.

"How much do you want for it?" he asked, his face betraying not the slightest interest.

"All I want is to get back to New York," reiterated the woman. "I don't care how much profit you make. Supposing you give me—say—"

A SHARP rap came on the hall door and immediately afterward, the telephone shrilled loudly.

Grace Weatherby sprang to her feet. Her face white, she flung a frightened glance at the door, at the telephone, then turned to Spot Carney.

"The opal! Quick!" She snatched up the talcum can.

"Here!" whispered Spot. "It's wrapped just like you had it. I'll come tomorrow and take it off your hands."

The woman jammed the bottom shut again. "Hide in there!" she whispered, motioning to a closed door. "This may be a pinch."

Again came a rap on the hall door, loud and imperative this time. Spot stepped quickly to the door Grace had indicated, opened it, and found himself in the bathroom.

Locking the door, Spot turned to the window. It was open from the bottom. The fire-escape ladder was within easy reach. Spot turned back to the door, and listened.

A man was speaking authoritatively. Grace was protesting with well-feigned surprise and resentment.

There was a silence—then:

"Madam, I am Special Agent Larsen, of the Customs Service," Spot heard the man say. "And this gentleman is Detective Lieutenant Lyons, of the San Francisco Police Department. We are obliged to ask you a few questions. Do you recognize the woman in this photograph?"

"I do not," replied Grace promptly.

"That's strange! When we showed this photograph to the clerk downstairs he immediately recognized the woman as the one occupying this room. She is registered here as Miss Ardice Mortimer; but in Shanghai and London she is known as Mrs. George Weatherby. The man in the picture is her husband, a notorious English jewel-thief. Have you ever heard of them?"

"No, I have not. Until I came here, I had never been out of New York."

"Is that so? Queer that you bear such a striking resemblance to Mrs. Weatherby. She was Grace Gregory, known in New York crook circles as 'Gold-digger Grace.' Did you happen to know her in New York."

"Indeed not!" replied Grace. "I don't associate with crooks."

"No offense intended," the Customs officer hastened to say. "Do you—"

Suddenly, the knob of the bathroom door turned; then the door shook violently. "Hey, Larsen!" Spot heard a voice just outside the door; "she aint alone! See them two glasses, there! An' this door is locked!"

"I have nothing to do with that door!" spoke up Grace angrily. "It belongs to the adjoining apartment. And I am alone. My friend left just before you came. If—"

"Let that rest a minute, Lyons," the first speaker intervened. "I can't afford to make a mistake in this case. Madam, I am going to ask you point-blank: Aren't you Mrs. George Weatherby?"

"No," said Grace with but an instant's hesitation. "I'm sorry, but—"

"Let me refresh your memory," interrupted Larsen. "About two months ago, a wealthy Chinese resident in Shanghai was brutally murdered, and robbed of quite a fortune in precious stones. Among the gems was the Sunset Opal. Police finally traced the robbery and murder to this English crook, George Weatherby. They located Weatherby's hiding place and watched a day and a night for him or his wife to show up. When neither showed up, the officers broke into the house. The woman—and all the jewels—was gone. But the man was dead. He had been murdered."

DURING the silence which ensued, Spot Carney crouched close to the door, scarcely breathing.

"He had been murdered," went on Lar-

sen. "We found a half-empty bottle of Scotch containing enough poison to kill a dozen men. Not a pleasant story, is it? No wonder you appear agitated, *Mrs. Weatherby!*" The speaker paused.

"Well!" spoke up Larsen sharply; "what have you to say?"

"Nothing," Grace's voice came faintly. "I—I guess—it's all up. I knew it was coming. That opal—there's a curse on the thing! I—"

"Then you admit that you are Mrs. George Weatherby?" snapped the voice of Lyons.

"Yes."

"I arrest you for the murder of George Weatherby!"

Larsen spoke up eagerly. "And you have the opal—the Sunset Opal?"

"Yes," the woman replied, so low Spot could barely hear her. "I'll get it for you. Wait just—"

One of the men broke in with a sharp command. Then—the pound of hurried steps—the crash of glass—both men shouting.

Then—queerly muffled—the sound of a pistol-shot.

A FEW hours later, the Blarney Kid was reading the story in an afternoon extra. When he had finished, he nodded slowly—and poured another drink of Scotch.

"A good ending," he mused. "Queer—the way I had that hunch I didn't want to drink with her!"

Thoughtfully he read the closing paragraph again:

"The woman admitted her identity and stated that she had the Sunset Opal. Saying that she would get the opal for the officers, she turned her back and drew a revolver. Before Larsen or Lyons could get to her she fired a bullet through the roof of her mouth, dying instantly."

Laying the paper aside, the Blarney Kid dipped a hand beneath his vest. With a graceful twist of his wrist—like one throws dice—Spot rolled something over the table-top—something that sparkled and flamed like a glowing ember.

"The Sunset Opal!" he breathed eagerly. "I can see the waves dancing, the sun going down in a cloud of fire—or is it blood? I wonder if this beautiful thing is going to bring me bad luck? And"—he smiled as he turned to pour another drink—"I wonder if those dicks will find my phony rock in the bottom of that can?"

Captaincy

A story of men and the deep sea, and of their ways with one another, by a distinguished sailor-man writer.

By

CAPTAIN DINGLE

Illustrated by
Otto E. Hake

THE *Narwhal* rolled sullenly. Railway iron stowed too low made her roll. There was a smell of weather outside, but in the saloon, where the weather did not enter, there were other smells which told of churning bilges. Sounds, too, of groaning bulkheads, or sorely tried frames and floors. A lean rat, frightened by a hurrying bare foot, was pinched to death by a closing crack beneath a door. His squeak added a brief shrill note to the rest of the chorus. The owner of the bare foot, a skinny, serious lad with burning eyes of young hope almost quenched, staggered to the table and set a sparsely filled dish of hash before the second mate.

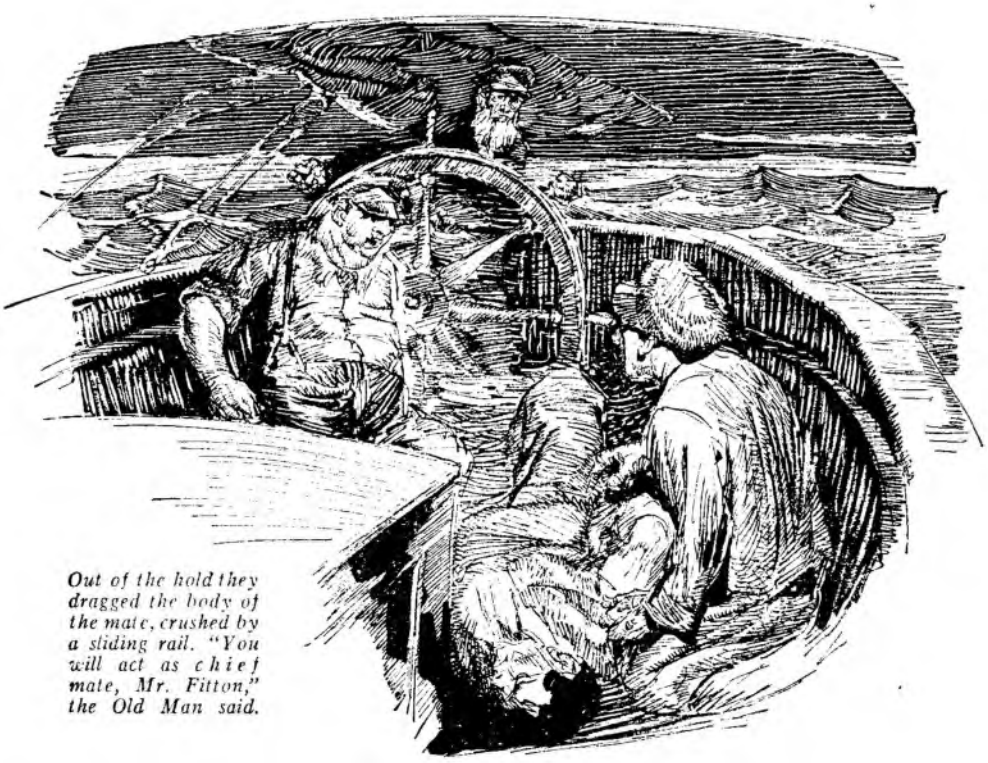
"What d'ye call this? What else is there?" snarled Mr. Fitton.

"It's all the mate left, sir. There's a bit o' cold pork, if you want it." Jimmy, the boy, was afraid of the grossly fat, loose-lipped, unfriendly second mate. Nobody in the ship liked Fitton. He looked like a seaworn *Nero* slouching there at the reeling table, greedily spooning food from the dish.

"You stowed away a whack for yourself, y' little swine!" he growled.

The boy stood for a moment, expecting the abuse to go on. When Fitton became absorbed in the business of eating, Jimmy went to his little pantry and began the dreary business of cleaning up.

Mr. Fitton ate noisily, greasily. He scraped out the dish, cursed the cold pork but ate all of it, emptied a pot of marmalade and ate it with a spoon, and drained



Out of the hold they dragged the body of the mate, crushed by a sliding rail. "You will act as chief mate, Mr. Fitton," the Old Man said.

the half-gallon coffee-pot. Then, noisily sucking his teeth, he lurched from the table, whistling tunelessly. Jimmy lightened his sordid toil with a quavery stave of a ringing old sea-song, sublimely oblivious of all but the soul of the immortal sea expressed by the song:

Flying with flowing sail, over the summer sea,
Sheer through the seething gale, homeward bound is she—

"Stow that hellfired racket!" wheezed Mr. Fitton, filling the doorway. Jimmy's song ceased.

Fitton peered around, saw a plate on a shelf, and dragged it down. It was Jimmy's supper. Poor enough—a scrap of hash, a ragged slice of fat pork, and some broken cabin biscuit.

"I thought so!" said Fitton, savagely. "Damn' boys eating before their betters!" The second mate scraped up the hash with two fat, greasy fingers and stuffed it into his thick-lipped mouth, flinging to the floor the bit of pork and the biscuit. Then he slid the plate into the sink, and lurched off to his room swearing.

Jimmy sorrowfully picked up the remains of his supper, and went on with his work, all song temporarily choked out of him. Fitton hooked his door and lit his pipe, humming between puffs that most gruesome of chanties, "Hanging Johnny." Fitton was always singing, humming, or whistling "Hanging Johnny" when awake and not incapable through a mouthful of food. The song in a measure fitted the morose nature of the man.

A DISMAL survivor of the days of sail, was the *Narwhal*. Old, ill-found, under-manned and cheaply officered, she dragged out her last days a tramp of the Seven Seas. Often she made an outward passage in ballast in order to gamble on a cargo of nitrates or guano home. Sometimes she took a deadening load of coal; sometimes she caught a clean lumber cargo; this voyage she had been lucky, and her aged bowels were in the throes of a burden of rails—valuable, though hurriedly and badly stowed.

She belonged to a couple of aged, miserly brothers, neither of whom would agree to selling her when she might have brought a price. Her earnings barely paid them a profit. Their notions of maintaining a ship stopped with the stores list, of the poorest Navy stores auctioned, and as little paint, rope and canvas as would pass her to sea. She had the smallest crew the law permitted, and the poorest the ports afforded. Her skipper was a doddering has-been, only too glad to hold on to command at any price. Her mate was capable enough, and young, but only making the voyage to get in his time for master.

Mr. Fitton was neither young nor a has-been, but a disappointed man who had held command, and had been forced down the scale through sheer vanishing of sailing-ships. He had never bothered to pass for steam when he was worth something as a man; now he had lost any ambition he might have had, through long years of nursing a grievance. Facing ultimate discard, Fitton relinquished himself to his baser appetites. Ashore, his small earnings went for food, women, and liquor. Latterly he had cut out women. They were expensive, and cost money that might better satisfy the growing cravings of a greedy appetite. At sea, he would borrow tobacco from a seaman, and keep the plug. Stealing Jimmy's supper was only one of many little tricks he had. Early in the passage the skipper called all hands aft and accused them of broaching cabin stores after Jimmy had reported missing a case of fine canned foods, the skipper's own private stock. None of that food ever went into a forecastle stomach. But the helmsman one evening, stepping to the rail to spit, saw a can go into the swirling wake from a cabin porthole; and there was not much doubt whose porthole that was.

YET Fitton was a good sailor. He was a better watch officer than the mate, in sheer knowledge of his business. He could handle the *Narwhal* better than the skipper. And that, to harassed seamen weary of worrying the big ship shorthanded across the lazy latitudes where only the winds were lazy, went far towards compensating for his unpleasant disposition. The second mate might work up the men with holystone and slush when the weather ought to have made those things impossible; he might keep men on their feet and moving all through the night-watches when other officers would wink at their napping; he might curse them, bully them, steal their tobacco; but when all was said and done, Fitton could and did handle the ship in his watch with his own men, and that with the least useless effort. It was the mate who always called all hands. When Fitton turned out the watch below it was necessary, and the men knew it.

"Perhaps some Judy give him the dirty mitten," a man once said, defending him. "He never stole my tobacco."

"Hell, he's a fat pig!" was the retort. "He can't help bein' a sailorman, can he? Jimmy got hell from the Old Man because the hens aint layin', and I bet my boots it was that fat swine stole the eggs! I see yaller on his chin when I come from the wheel."

"Huh! You're just sore because he had you slushin' down and made you go over the holidays you left!"

Thus there were men who defended Fitton and men who never would. In general, he was hated. Sailors are notoriously generous. Much can be forgiven a man at sea; but starved though he may be, gluttony will not be forgiven him; a man who steals his shipmate's whack will have to fight. And since they might not fight the second mate with impunity, the men of the *Narwhal* fell back on hating him, much as they recognized his worth as a seaman.

WHEN the ship pully-hauled her sluggish way out of the light variables and into the bustling westerlies, she started a spell of rolling that made life miserable. Like a pendulum she swung, wallowing down the long seas with squared yards. She dipped the seas aboard, first one side, then the other. Her maindeck was a hellish welter of thundering brine. Her washports could not clear her. She rolled tons of water aboard over one rail, and rolled it back over the other. And her aged gear began to part. The stout steel masts threatened to buckle. They worked the partners loose and flooded the hold. The midship-house, solidly built into her structure, gave before a murderous sea and tore up a part of the deck. The carpenter and bosun and sailmaker moved out in panic, taking their gear into the dreary forecastles. And to the other soul-numbing labor was added the toil of the pumps.

There was no song to that pumping. Men hove at the brakes sullenly. It's a way men have when embittered by cold and hunger. Not one of them but knew how inevitable it all was; the ship's age, her bad stowage, the fierce seas of the lower forties made it so: and they might as well pump and warm themselves as shiver in idleness where there was no lee shelter: but pumping a steel ship is bad business when rails are the cargo. A wooden ship may possibly tighten up; a steel ship never. They pumped like doomed men, knowing they must pump to the end of the passage unless that gaping crevasse about the midshiphouse were filled: and Chips said it could not be done. Chips was scared out of his few poor wits.

"What d'ye call this? What else is there?" snarled Mr. Fitton.

"Make 'em sing, Mister; make 'em sing!" the skipper urged.

"Hell! There's no song in 'em!" retorted Fitton savagely. The galley had been washed out. He had just eaten a cold meal, not half enough. And Jimmy had hidden his own dinner. The hardtack Fitton had filled his pockets with was sodden and salt. But he ate it, filling the Old Man with futile rage at his indifference. And between salt mouthfuls, as if to harass the Old Man more, he hummed his chantey:

They call me Hanging Johnny,
Hooray! Hooray!
Because I hang for money,
So hang, boys, hang!

"Mr. Fitton, will you stop singing that murdering old ditty?" the skipper bleated. "It gets on a man's nerves!"

"You wanted a song a minute ago!"

"I want the men to sing to help the work! Things are bad enough without that evil thing in my ears!"

Fitton filled his mouth with biscuit and stolidly squinted into the spray-lashed wind. And at the change of the watch, before eight bells had well died away, he was at the companionway door waiting for the mate to show himself. No lingering for Fitton when his watch was up.

He went below, scoured the empty pantry for food, and cut a pipeful of tobacco from the mate's plug. He went to enter up the happenings on the watch slate, and took the skipper's matches. And he undressed before turning in. No turning in all standing for Fitton. Let the mate and the skipper do it if they liked. He had stood his watch. He would have his rest in Bristol fashion.

Before he was properly warm in his blankets, the ship rolled down in a whistling squall and pitched him out of the bunk. In his ears were the shrill cries of men on deck, the flogging of canvas as the halyards were let run, and the bawling of the mate for all hands. Fitton cursed the mate, and cursed the skipper for shipping a mate like him. Then he felt the ship shudder. She lay down and did not come back. Thunder filled her vitals, crashing thunder that shook her like an explosion; and Fitton knew all about that.

"There go the blasted rails!" he snarled, and clawed his way up the steep floor to his clothes.

"All hands, sir!" shrieked Jimmy, white with fear but daring to face it.

"Go to hell—I'm up!" Fitton dressed, bracing himself in the angle of floor and bulkhead, expecting every moment to feel the ship turn turtle. But he knew those seas of old. As long as the ship was not actually going, it was a wise sailor who made sure of his clothes. Boating or swimming or clinging to a wreck, a clothed man had a chance—a naked man, none.

On deck a hell-broth raged. There was sleet and icy rain. The *Narwhal* lay buried to her hatch coamings, and the gray seas hammered her. Only sheer miscarriage of evil had hove her down on the side where

the decks were unbroken. Men who had been hurled from the pumps clung like black and yellow bats to fore and main fife-rails. The topgallant yards stuck midway, unable to slide down the almost horizontal masts; the sails hung heavy with flung water close above the sea. The skipper was at the wheel, beside an open-mouthed helmsman.

"She will not pay off! She will not pay off!" he quavered.

Fitton glanced around, seeing everything in one appraising sweep. The mate was up in the weather mizzen rigging with an ax, shouting to the men to follow him. None obeyed; none dared obey. The lower masts were steel, the topmasts pine. The shrouds and backstays were steel wire. And it was the after pressure that was drowning the ship.

Jimmy clung shivering to the companionway door, his blue lips quivering, his eyes alight with a spirit that wanted to fight fear, but was scarcely strong enough. The mate crawled up the narrowing shrouds, still shouting for men. The old skipper clung trembling to the wheel, bleating that she would not run off. Fitton lurched to the companionway.

"Gimme that fire ax, sonny!" he rasped, unclinching Jimmy's cold fingers from the door lintel and supporting the boy on the giddy deck to where the ax was becketed. Nobody could have gone through that door without first removing Jimmy, so tenaciously did the lad cling with both hands to the only security he had found.

GRIPPING the ax in his teeth, his thick, greedy lips clapped grotesquely to the ash handle, Fitton clawed his way to the rigging and climbed after the mate.

Another squall screamed down upon the ship, with a change of direction. Everybody else was concerned wholly about the ship. Jimmy only knew that Mr. Fitton had called him "sonny." It was Jimmy's eye which never left those two steadily mounting figures, half hidden in the swirling sleet of the squall. It was Jimmy's eye that detected the little gesture of impatience with which Fitton went ahead of the mate and began to swing his ax on the wooden topmast.

Above the rumble of the shifted rails below came the ring of the axes. Then another blinding squall from the lee quarter. The blast caught the ship by the lee. Her sails, filling with furious wind from the forward side, jerked her partly up, and one after another they burst. Then the mizzen topmast cracked, splintered, and crashed, the shift of strain finishing what the axes had started. Men were flung, sprawling, from their holds.

FITTON flashed to the deck by way of a backstay while the mate was yet climbing down the lower rigging, and while the skipper hove up the helm, bleating unheard commands, Fitton led the men from brace to brace, swinging the yards and getting the laboring ship before the wind. The mate and Chips started to clear away the wreckage of the mizzen topmast with all that had come down with it; and then she went winging down wind like a mad thing, rolling, rolling, full of thunderous death inside her as the rails hurtled from side to side.

"Get some hands below! Secure those rails or they'll go through the side and murder us!" the Old Man cried. Blue he was, and shivering; quavering his voice was, and pitched like a girl's. But there he stood at the helm, where all his aged strength scarcely sufficed to steer the weltering windjammer, crying his orders with sure discernment.

The mate was still hacking away at the mizzen gear.

"My watch on deck. That's the mate's job," said Fitton, his fat lips writhing in a grin. It was indeed the mate's job to see to the cargo. In this case it was everybody's job, if everybody were not to drown with the ship. But the wreckage of the mizzen top-hamper had to be cleared too, for every sea that leaped after the ship's flanks hurled the broken spars against her to the peril of rudder, ports, hull itself.

Fitton took the mate's place. The mate collected the men. It was impossible to raise hatches. Access to the hold was had by way of the pantry, which opened into the sail-room, which had a manhole through the after bulkhead into the main hold.

"The ship is a wreck. The owners will never refit her," the Old Man moaned. "She will be lucky to carry her cargo to port."

"Refit her yourself! Haven't lost anything but a stick or two," growled Fitton, and attacked the snarled wire with ax and bar, humming his lugubrious chantey:

Oh, first I hung my brother,
Hooray, hooray!
And then I hung my mother.
So hang, boys, hang!

What unspeakable toil was accomplished in the hell of the main hold could never be properly known. Sailors sometimes exaggerate. But after four hours the ship's rolling was more silent. There was less thunder. Less shock. Fitton and Chips had cleared away the menace of the broken spars, and secured the crojick and spanker for future use. There was a laboring in the rolling that spoke of unchecked water among the rails. That would be the next task to tackle. And still the Old Man steered, ice on his beard, his eyes sunken, willing to die on his feet to spare another hand for the saving of the ship.

Then men crept out of the hold, gasping and shaking. They dragged the body of the mate, crushed by a sliding rail when all seemed secure. Another line was seared into the Old Man's face. They buried the mate in a sea cold as death itself. And the men went to the pumps, silent, shaken.

"You will act as chief mate, Mr. Fitton. Please pick a man to act as second. There will be no increased wages. The voyage will not stand it," the Old Man said plaintively, going with bowed head to enter in the log one disaster, one death, and two promotions without advanced pay.

Jimmy tried to smile wanly when giving Mr. Fitton his supper that night. Hadn't he heard the men say that Fitton might be all right if he had a better job? And hadn't Mr. Fitton called him sonny?

"Is this all the hash tonight?" growled Mr. Fitton.

"No, sir. I put a bit by for the second mate," said Jimmy.

"Damn the second mate! He's used to fo'c's'le grub. Bring it out!"

Jimmy hesitated, still trying to smile.

"What're you gapin' at? Don't stand grinnin' at me, you little swine! Get it."

Mr. Fitton took the mate's chair, and the second mate's supper. Then he took the mate's room, and the mate's tobacco and most of his clothes. There would be an auction of the lot, for the benefit of any relatives that might be left: but since nobody knew what a man had owned, who was to miss anything?

THE only change noticeable about the ship after the mate's death was greater shorthandedness and increased hatred of Mr. Fitton. Men who had defended him before, openly damned him now. He used his higher station to harass and bully more efficiently the men beneath him. Jimmy's life was a nightmare. The Old Man was ill from worry and hardship. The ship leaked so badly that the pumps cleared her only by incessant labor. Somebody said a rail had gone through her side in the knockdown.

It might have been better for all, had the Old Man promised Fitton more pay. It was not certain that was the trouble: but it might have been better. The saloon table was a dreary thing for the second mate when the skipper started to have his meals in his room. Only twice a day did the Old Man appear on deck, for the necessary observations by which to navigate the ship.

He took sorely to heart the damage to his old ship. The slow passage she was making, and the continued bad weather, bore hard upon him. The persistent leak, with the endless clank of the pumps, ground on his nerves. But Mr. Fitton put on flesh. He ate what his hands could seize—the rest might go short. Jimmy rationed him, daringly, after the second mate had grumbled. Jimmy was cruelly shaken, his ear was almost twisted off, and the saved rations looted anyhow. The second mate, a young fellow, had the temerity to protest; Fitton smashed his nose with the water-bottle.

Jimmy ran to tell the skipper, and came out crying.

"I think the Captain's ill, sir!"

"Let me know if he dies," said Fitton, and stumped on deck humming "Hanging Johnny," while the snuffling second mate promised all sorts of bloody reprisal. . . . .

That night the howling gales softened to a breeze. The swell heaved. The big ship rolled. Men believed their pumping toil would be diminished. It was not. There was first a dull rumble below, as the deadly rolling started, loosening the rails again; then Chips with his sounding-rod appeared, ashen-faced and chattering, before Mr. Fitton.

"She's filling! Call the Old Man! Look, Mister, gained four feet last watch!"

"Go and tell him. He's not so sick he couldn't take care of his ship. Sojering there in his bed!" said Mr. Fitton sourly.

Chips went. And the Old Man came up, looking like a ghost.

"Surely the pumps will clear her," he bleated. "Make the men sing as they pump. They're not pumping."

But the men would not sing. The pumps would not clear her. All hands were there,

three gangs relieving each other at half-hour intervals. The mates pumped. The Old Man steered though steering was little needed. The ship lay low, dead, and the small breeze would not move her at steering speed.

"Eight feet in the well, sir, and makin' fast!" Chip cried, waving his jointed rod from which all the chalk was gone. The Old Man trembled. He looked over the heaving swells, where the rough waterlies should have made crested seas. Those seas were cold. The *Narwhal* kept to the old sailing-ship routes; and she was one of the last. Steamers held far to the northward of her track, not caring about winds. And his old ship was sinking. Jimmy brought up scalding coffee. That was Jimmy's hourly job now. Fitton took two mugs, nodding towards the second mate at the pumping gang. And he drank both. He was warm in the late mate's clothes, too, while the second mate had little but the rags of his slop-chest shoddy. But the second mate was pumping. He would keep warm without coffee, if he pumped hard enough.

THE ship lurched. Her lower yardarms dipped. She had rolled before, but never with that peculiar tremor. A groan came up through the ventilators; imprisoned air forced up by actual hydraulic power.

"She's going! She's going!" the Old Man whimpered. Every man knew that. Fitton suddenly turned and ran to his room, taking the stairs at a jump. He too knew the ship was dying. He dragged out a drawer, capsized it on his bed, and snatched up a small package. In it were discharges, and his master's certificate, and two yellow letters around a faded photograph. He stuffed the package in an inside pocket; then snatched up his tobacco. On his way out he looked into the Old Man's room, and pocketed a dozen plugs of tobacco from an open stores box. Jimmy whimpered in his pantry, dropped mugs rolling all about his feet. Fitton paused to cuff the lad, and to swallow the mug of emergency coffee Jimmy had made for the second mate, then went on deck to face what might come in his own way.

"Get the boats ready, Mr. Fitton," the Old Man said with quiet dignity. There was no plaintiveness now. Plenty of deep emotion, yes; but the grave, calculating wisdom of the shipmaster in charge of human souls. "Men, you have time to clothe yourselves. You'll need clothes. Mister," —to the second mate—"no use pumping! Take a couple of hands and help the boy break out stores. Be calm, but be quick, my lads!"

FITTON needed no advice about boats. He had left a stricken ship before. There were two boats. He would command one, the Old Man the other, the second mate going with the Old Man. The boats were raised from their chocks on the gallows. That alone was a titanic labor, the ship rolling like a doom bell tolling. With the gripes they were held in to the rail, a bit above rail level because of the rolling which threatened to dip and destroy them.

"Hurry, lads! I see a sail away to the northwest. She's passing. Hurry!" the Old Man said.

Every eye looked and saw that tiny flash of white which might be a bird, but which the Old Man knew was a fleeting hope. Fitton intercepted the stores as they were brought up. And he saw to it that his own boat was stored first. The dying *Narwhal* moaned at every deepening roll, the air soughing from her ventilators as if from laboring lungs.

"Come, lads! It's time to leave her!" the Old Man said.

Fitton hummed, shifting a breaker of water from the Old Man's boat to his own.

"Which is my boat, sir?" Jimmy asked, trying not to whimper. He had his skinny arms loaded with blankets.

"You go in my boat, and stow your sniveling," said Fitton.

The ship quivered. The sea was at deck level, and sluicing through the scupper holes. She staggered drunkenly. The midshiphouse carried away, crashing through the bulwarks, leaving a gaping crater in the decks through which the air roared.

"There she goes! Away with you, my lads, and may luck go with you!"

The Old Man, standing at the poop rail, his gnarled, thin old hands gripping the teak, his sunken eyes full of pain, gave the order in a thin, steady voice. And the men tumbled into the boats. The gripes were cut. The falls unhooked. The boats floated and were shoved clear.

"Wait! Come on, Captain! She's going!" the men in the second mate's boat yelled. Already men were bailing out water flung into the boats by the death flurry of the ship.

"He's too scared to move!" yelled Fitton. But the Old Man was not scared; the ship plunged and the old graybeard went with her, gripping the rail as he might grip the Cross.

Fitton backed his boat clear of the eddies. He stared at the Old Man, standing there, his white beard beaded with ice, his old knees braced against the rail, his hands white with stress, his aged face lifted to the sky.

"Back water! He's too scared to move!" yelled Fitton.

But the Old Man was not scared. The ship began a slow, wallowing swing. Her head went down. She hung at the end of a roll for a long moment, and the Old Man was flung to his knees. But his face was set, and no fear was there; only a supreme resignation to the inevitable law of the sea. The ship plunged, and the old graybeard went with her, his upturned face unafraid, gripping the teakwood rail as he might grip the Cross.

"Gawd!" moaned a man as old, who had never known responsibility. Jimmy cried, shamelessly.

Mr. Fitton stared. His thick lips writhed —it was no grin now; he licked them as if parched. The sea heaved and smoothed over the drowned ship.

"My lads," he said at last, "she's gone, and peace be with the Old Man. Follow me and I'll try to pull you through. Out oars. Got to find a breeze. Go easy on rations, and keep in sight of me. And don't stop rowing, or you'll freeze."

The men in the other boat began rowing, muttering: "The big fat hog! Got most o' the grub an' all the blankets—"

"Tells us to row or freeze!"

"An' go easy on th' rations!"

But they followed. That was all they could do, for Fitton was the navigator. Also his boat was loaded deep with stores. Yes, they had to follow him.

BEFORE sunset on the first day, while the oars were still necessary, Fitton rowed back to the other boat and transshipped a share of stores and blankets. And during the night a breeze came, driving the boats through showers of freezing spray.

"He knew it! Scared o' getting swamped! That's why he unloaded grub on us!" the grumblers swore.

Jimmy was put in charge of stores in Fitton's boat. The lad shivered under his wet blanket; but the men shivered too, and they had blankets not so thick and heavy as the one Jimmy drew. He saw Mr. Fitton steer through the night, and Fitton had no blanket around him. It was cold, too. And the breeze grew. In the chill of dawn the other boat flew distress-signals. She was filling with water. Fitton put about to go to her, but she rolled over before he could reach her.

The boat had simply capsized through careless handling. Fitton looked grim at the loss of food and water. He helped right

the boat, got the men aboard again, soaked and subdued, and made another apportionment of stores.

"Watch yourselves," he growled as he left them again. "Better go on half rations, or you'll be hungry and thirsty yet."

"All right for him, in his bigger boat. He aint wet, nor hungry, nor cold!" men grumbled.

Jimmy wondered. Fitton seemed to be impervious to cold, and to hunger. Icy seas slopped over the boat's gunwale, keeping men bailing. There were salt-water boils, and cramps; salt-scalded eyes and frost-bitten toes; cracked fingers and grievous sea cuts that opened the flesh of palms and finger-joints to the bone. Jimmy told one of the men in his boat, who complained, to follow Mr. Fitton's example.

"He don't moan!" said Jimmy.

"Why should he?" the man demanded, glaring at Fitton's bowed back as the officer dozed in one of his rare rest spells. "I bet he eats his belly full when we're sleepin'. Got three or four lots o' clo'es on too, I betcha. Hog, he is!"

Not a speck on the sea, not a smoke smudge. Twelve days of it. Twice Fitton went back to the other boat; twice he gave them water. The second time he had almost to fight his own crew over it. He gave the water, and kept a boat ax beside him afterward. He transferred two men at the same time, putting two sound men in the smaller boat and taking out two weaklings who were pitifully ill.

Jimmy's eyes followed every movement of Mr. Fitton. Soon the time came when Jimmy could no longer hide his fear and frozen misery. Fitton wrapped him in a huge jersey, replacing the sodden blanket, and gruffly bade him lie in the bottom of the boat and stay there. Only Jimmy's pain-shot eyes saw where that sweater had come from.

FITTON issued water and biscuit, bullying the men into activity with grim jest.

"Row, my sons! More you help the breeze, the sooner you get home!"

"Can't row on empty bellies!" growled one.

"Pull your belt tight; then your belly wont feel empty," laughed Fitton.

Men cursed him by night and by day. His fat face seemed to hold its fatness. His ungainly body didn't look as if *his* belt was hauled tight.

Every evening before dark, he ran his boat back to see that all was well with the other. The second mate was out of commission—ill, and all but giving up. Fitton did not take him into his own boat. He gave him a tiny swallow of rum, obtained none but Fitton knew where, and bade him buck up.

"Can't leave the men without a leader, my lad! Bad for discipline," said Fitton.

"He's got rum!" the men whispered, that night.

But Fitton had no rum. He had brought that one tiny dram in a medicine-bottle from the cabin of the late mate of the ship. He may have intended to drink it right away; but he had not. Perhaps he had forgotten it; anyhow, it saved the second mate's life.

His own men hated him. Only Jimmy, warm in his jersey, watching him always, harbored a kind thought for the grim, fat, profane man who laughed at the men's tortures and bade them row. When a fierce snow-squall burst upon the boat just after he had issued scanty rations for the day, bursting the sail, half filling the boat and spoiling the rations, Fitton only stuck his head lower against the blast and growled:

"Muzzle the sail, lads! Out oars and pull! Got to keep warm, and got to keep moving. Row, my sons!"

BUT human endurance had reached its climax. Men who had obeyed while grumbling, now left the sail and left the sloshing water, to scramble towards Fitton.

"Smother nothing! Row yourself! Give us some o' that rum you're hidin' for yer own greedy belly!" they croaked, fists lifted in palsied threat. He sat at the tiller, his puffy eyes unwavering, bidding them act like men and do his bidding.

"Give us rum—we're all in!" they rasped; and one man had a knife in his shaking claw.

"I have no rum, men. Go to your duty," said Fitton, gently. The knife was raised. "Liar!" said the man. Fitton pulled the tiller from the rudder-head, brought it down dully on the knifer's head, and threatened the others. They crawled back, secured the sail, rowed; while Fitton revived the man he had struck down, bandaged his head, and put him beside Jimmy for security.

"He'll take the grub and water from the other boat," the men murmured next day, when the rations were smaller. "That's why he stays by her. It aint for no kind-heartedness, the pig!"

But he did not rob the other boat. He cut down on the ration in his own boat until men could live on no less. Then one night he raised Jimmy to help him tally the stores. The moon was up, and the air not so chill. The men slept, fitfully, but determinedly; the boat sailed on a smooth sea.

"Only twelve biscuits, sir," Jimmy said in a frightened whisper. Fitton was tenderly turning the water-keg over. The bunghole was almost underneath before a drop fell into the pannikin.

"And the water's out," said Fitton.

Now Jimmy knew why Fitton had so often scooped up snow to eat, after issuing the water ration. Now he knew why those thick lips so often seemed to be writhing in a sneer when men cursed him for a hog.

On the second day after that, the fourteenth of the boat voyage, the second mate's boat sank. The men could not keep the water out of her. Fitton took her men into his boat, telling each one before he hauled him from the sea:

"No grub left, and no water, my lad. Might as well stay there and drown. It's up to you."

"Rouse up, bullies! Give 'em a shout!
All together: One, two— Let 'er go!"

Every man chose starvation. Men will do that. And as they peered at his baggy face and writhing lips, they again cursed Fitton afresh for a heartless lump of flesh.

"What'll we do, sir?"

"You take charge of the biscuit, Jimmy, and give each man a quarter of one every morning. Cheer up, sonny! Almost in the track of shipping now." The big man whacked Jimmy on his narrow back until he coughed. Then in the moonlight Jimmy lay watching again.

Fitton groped in the stern-locker, and brought out a bottle full of water. Jimmy stared. He had stuck up for Fitton all the horrible boat voyage. Now what? The moonlight fell on Fitton revealingly. He was not as fat, not as well fed as Jimmy had believed, or as the men insisted. In that pitiless light Fitton's skin sagged in bags, his big body was shapeless with loose clothes. And after squinting through the bottle at the moon, his thick lips writhing thirstily, he shoved the bottle down beside Jimmy.

"Hang onto that with your life, Jimmy, my lad! It's the last!" he said hoarsely. "They might tackle me for it, but not you."

ON the third foodless day, when only a spoonful of water per man went round, and then the bottle went into the sea, Fitton produced two soggy plugs of tobacco, and carefully cut them into equal shares.

"He's had it all along!" they grumbled, chewing on it with hungry sailors' zest. "Bet he's got a ton of it!"

But Jimmy saw that Fitton's jaws were not working, even if his lips did writhe. . . . . And Fitton sat heavily at the tiller, blue with cold, sagging low in his seat. Every day when possible he took a sight of the sun, keeping a reckoning on the wood of the thwart. Every night he lighted the boat lantern, and kept it trimmed from the little oil tank kept in the lifeboats for possible use as a sea-anchor slick. Fitton watched constantly. He slept, if at all, in

daylight hours. And he was gray of skin, humped of shoulder, grim.

A fog came down. It drifted like strings of cobwebs. The boat rose and fell on a sleek swell. There was no wind. The men were no longer able to row. The second mate sang interminable verses about a farmer's boy who couldn't keep flies off turnips. Crazy, he was, or soon would be.

Fitton seemed to tumble over in a swoon. Jimmy tried to push him upright. The baggy eyes fluttered half-open for a moment.

"All right, Jimmy. Just sleepy. Keep watch, my son. Might as well snatch a wink while we're not moving," mumbled Fitton.

Jimmy grew warm with responsibility. He sat upright at the useless tiller, and tried to sing his own song:

Flying with feathery prow, bounding with slanting keel,
And glad, and glad, was the sailor lad, as he steered and sang at his wheel!

That song had been frightened out of him by Fitton in those seemingly distant days aboard the *Narwhal*. But Fitton slept. Jimmy dared another stanza:

Only another day to wander, only another day to roam;
Then safe at last, the harbor past, safe in his father's home—

One of the men, wearied of the second mate, with his farmer's boy, hurled a curse at Jimmy, bidding him hush. But Jimmy was listening to something else, something astounding: Mr. Fitton was singing, as if in his sleep—Fitton, whose only song had been "Hanging Johnny!"

He was singing Jimmy's chorus, and Jimmy finished it with him:

"Safe in his father's home!"

"Huh! That's a hell of a song to sing out here!" snarled a rasping voice in the bows.

Jimmy fell into a doze too—he was only a boy—and he let go the tiller. He was awakened by a grip on his shoulder that hurt. Fitton was shaking him fiercely.

"I fell asleep, sir. Sorry!" Jimmy whimpered.

"Never mind! D'ye hear that? There! Hear it? Rouse up, lads! Listen!"

The mellow boom of a steamer's fog siren came down the light breeze that stirred the fog again.

The signal was answered. Two steamers! Under no other circumstances would a steamer bother to sound her fog signal in those barren latitudes. They were close, too!

"Rouse up, bullies! Give 'em a shout! All together: *One, two*— Let 'er go!"

That was a shipwreck of a shout. It wavered and shook, and went forth in ragged splashes of rickety sound. But it went in between the blasts of the siren, and was heard.

Then a steamer slid out of the murk, a steamer in Aberdeen green, with a yellow stack that looked like gold. Voices, a ladder, and helpful seamen. Slings, and security, up the steamer's glossy side!

MR. FITTON mustered his shivering men, tottering along the line to count them. The steamer's captain and passengers looked on curiously. These castaways seemed unable to stand; yet the flabby scarecrow put them through the formality of a muster.

"I'll have your men cared for forward, Mr. —" the steamer's skipper said, leaving Fitton to fill in his name.

"Fitton's my name, sir. Ship *Narwhal*. Master went down with the ship. I'm in command, and report—all—present—and none missing, sir. The *Narwhal* foundered in latitude—"

Fitton pitched forward among the steamer's wondering crew.

"Take him up to my room," the steamer's captain said, with a snap. "He's done a good sailorly job, I'd say!"

The *Narwhal* crew shambled forward, smelling food and warmth. The steamer's crew asked curious questions.

"That fat hoodlum?" a *Narwhal* man echoed, his blood responding to a mugful of scalding coffee. "Him? That's Fitton, the mate. Greedy hog, he is! Ask young Jimmy, there. Talks as if he was skipper o' the *Narwhal*."

"Well, aint he?" shrilled Jimmy, desperately trying to attract attention. "Aint he been skipper ever since the Old Man was drownded?"

"Huh! S'pose he'll eat in th' s'loon, too!" grumbled the *Narwhal's* crew. But Jimmy knew. He had seen. The disappointed second mate of the old windjammer *Narwhal* was not the same man as Captain Fitton, in command of a shipwrecked crew, answerable for their safety while breath remained in his own body!

"Yes—and I hope he gets fat again!" said Jimmy stoutly.

Worthless

By BIGELOW NEAL

Neither dog nor man amounted to much, perhaps—but you'll not soon forget their story as told by the author of "The Night Hawk."

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

KENO JOE, wanderer, outcast and living exponent of the wasted life, glanced from his rifle to the dog and then to the five-dollar bill that dangled from his time-knotted fingers. Keno was not a bad man in a criminal sense. He was merely no account, and as he would say himself, worthless. Once he had been offered a chance at the best of life, but he had not taken it. True, he had gained a smattering of an education, enough to render himself incapable of speaking either very good or very bad English, consistently, but beyond that point he had not gone. He had simply drifted, taking always the easiest and pleasantest path. Now the years had taken their toll; dissipation had imposed a surtax; and as Marion Crawford might say, he was a gentleman of no value.

Keno had promised to kill a dog. He had accepted five dollars as his compensation. Now something had gone wrong: twice he had worked himself to the point of shooting, only to fail at the last moment. For once the old man was sober, and when sober his word was good. A promise was a promise, and he raised the rifle again.

The weapon was of heavy caliber and Keno knew that the dog would feel no pain. Very slowly he drew the sights fine; his finger took the slack out of the trigger; his hand tightened upon the grip. And then it happened again. Instead of holding the sights of the rifle, Keno's eyes wandered ever so little. Bleary eyes of gray looked into friendly eyes of brown.

"Doggone," muttered the old man, "doggone, it's hard to shoot a dog."

For a third time the rifle wavered and came to rest across the wanderer's knees.

EVENING had come; behind the old man a golden flare hung above the varicolored peaks of the Bad-lands, and before him the prairie stretched like a tossing green-capped sea. A "Tom show," working westward, striking the shores of civilization and finding them sharply defined by a land of chaos, had changed its course on the very beach, and was now rumbling away to the North, a long twisting line of red under a blue-gray haze of dust.

A few minutes before the old man had been sitting his horse by the side of the trail, watching the passing wagons. From one of them a man descended, leading a big dog. He handed the chain and a five-dollar bill to Keno Joe.

"He's worthless," he said, indicating the dog, "and he eats too much. He's getting meaner every day. Shoot him and keep the change."

Climbing back to the high seat the stranger picked up the reins and spoke to the team, then evidently struck by an afterthought, turned again to the old man.

"Come to think of it, Mister, better keep your eyes peeled. News came along this morning that a real tough customer got away from the 'pen' last night. They think he's heading into the Bad-lands. Anyway a feller down the road a bit lost a suit of

clothes and a bunch of grub last night and picked up nothing in the trade but a pair of barber-pole pants like they wear in the 'pen.' There's a couple o' thousand up for the bird's return which you might pick up and add to the five I just gave you. But look out—he's a killer and a bad one."

FIVE dollars was a lot of money. It meant something to chew, something to smoke and possibly an agent of forgetfulness. Keno had accepted the dog, the bill and the commission, but for the third time he had failed to execute his part of the contract.

He fell to studying his intended victim. The dog was very large, powerfully built and of the general appearance which conforms to the popular though erroneous idea of a bloodhound. Far too large for that breed, he yet carried some of the famous human-trail hound's blood, for there were traces of wrinkles across his nose; his upper lip was cut from an overgenerous pattern; and his ears were long enough to fold upon the ground when he lay flat. His color was blue-gray tinged with brown—dulled now, by improper food and long confinement.

"'Worthless' is right," mused the old man. "Too big to run, too old to fight, with an appetite like an elephant and a carload of fleas."

Hearing the muttered words, the dog looked up at his would-be executioner.

"And yet," went on the old man, "I dunno as there is much difference between us, at that. Seems as if we was a good deal alike—no family, no friends and."—as the dog sat up and began to scratch himself,—"danged if we don't itch in the same place."

Keno Joe seemed to reach a decision. Getting to his feet, he extracted the cartridge from the chamber of his rifle, stuffed the bill into the watch-pocket of his trousers and turned to the dog.

"Worthless, you've got one more night to live. Danged if I aint developed a curiosity to see what you look like with your belly full. We'll just lengthen this chain with a lariat and lead you along behind. Tonight we'll eat and be merry, for tomorrow you're going to be shot and I'm going to be half-shot or pickled."

Climbing swiftly to his saddle, Keno kicked the Roman-nosed pony in the ribs. Worthless arose as stiffly as did his captor and followed in the trail of the pony.

With the coming of dusk, they were well within the Bad-lands. In the bottom of a winding cañon where a lone cottonwood marked the presence of a spring, Keno Joe made camp. Leaning his rifle against the tree, he unsaddled and hobbled the pony, tying the end of the lariat to the tree, as well, which allowed the dog the liberty of a circle whose radius was the length of the rope and chain. From a choke-cherry patch on the hillside above, Keno carried dry wood for a fire and made his supper from the meager contents of various bundles dangling from the saddle, plus loin and hindquarters of a cottontail.

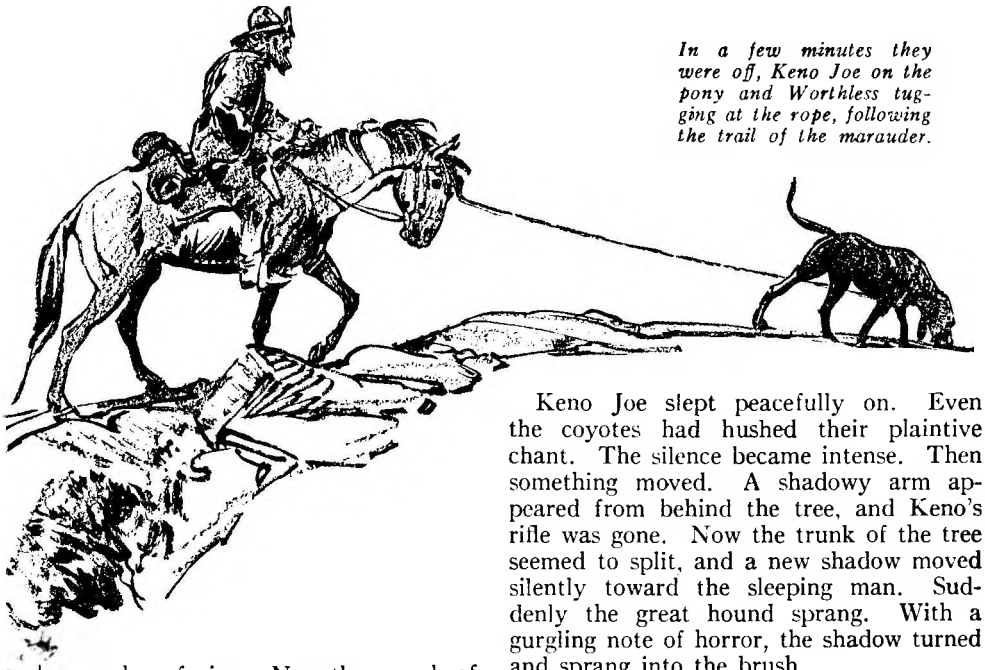
Worthless was not forgotten. Aside from the cottontail, the evening ride had netted two jackrabbits, and one of these Keno threw to the dog. When the man thought to look again, the sole visible remnant of the rabbit consisted of one ear, one foot and a patch of white fuzz on the grass. The concavity of Worthless' sides had become convex.

"Too much rabbit makes people jump in their sleep, feller, but I promised you one good meal!" And Keno contributed the remains of the cottontail. But Worthless had reached his limit. He made a gallant attempt on the cottontail's shoulder, but failing to make much headway, picked up that which remained and set out to find a spot in which to bury it for future use. Every likely-looking place seemed to be just beyond reach of the rope; and so in the end he gave over the attempt and deposited the remains in a clump of buckbrush. Returning to the fire, he lay down.

"Well, old-timer, if you're too full to eat, you ought to be safe to sleep with anyway," observed Keno, and paying no further attention to the dog, he made a bed of his saddle-blanket, slicker and coat. The fire died down to a glow. No sound but the munching of the pony and the deep breathing of the old man broke the stillness.

HOURS passed, and the great dog lay quiet. For the first time in years his stomach was full. Waves of heated air came from the fire and lulled him to drowsiness; but later on there came a change. As the fire died to ashes, the air on the cañon floor grew damp and chill. From somewhere out of the darkness came the short shrill cry of a weasel, and from farther away, the weird tremolo chorus of a coyote symphony.

Worthless had never known what it was to be alone. His life had been spent in the atmosphere of many men, of noisy bands



In a few minutes they were off, Keno Joe on the pony and Worthless tugging at the rope, following the trail of the marauder.

and general confusion. Now the sounds of the night-mantled Bad-lands reacted upon his nerves. Then too, and for the first time, he had come into the possession of one who did not beat him, and the heart of the great dog had gone out to his new-found friend. When a current of air set up a low moan on the slopes of the wind-carved buttes above, he rose and moved forward until he towered above the form of the sleeping man.

Standing there and looking down into the upturned face, Worthless saw only kindness in the haggard countenance, and was tempted to lick the tangled mass of hair and beard; but heretofore his overtures of friendship had met with small encouragement, so, whimpering a little, as dogs do when in doubt, he lay down and edged himself forward until his nose rested against the shoulder of Keno Joe.

Some time during the pre-dawn hours of the night, the dog opened his eyes, for a sound had come from the low-growing brush beyond the tree, and there was just the faintest suggestion of a movement among the shadows. A small dog would have burst into a hysterical fit of barking, but Worthless was cast in a different mold. Lifting his head, he drew a deep breath, and his supersensitive nostrils caught the scent of man. A ripple of contracting muscles ran along the big dog's frame. Slowly, cautiously, he lifted himself until he was clear of the ground; then he crouched ready for a spring.

Keno Joe slept peacefully on. Even the coyotes had hushed their plaintive chant. The silence became intense. Then something moved. A shadowy arm appeared from behind the tree, and Keno's rifle was gone. Now the trunk of the tree seemed to split, and a new shadow moved silently toward the sleeping man. Suddenly the great hound sprang. With a gurgling note of horror, the shadow turned and sprang into the brush.

The old man was wide awake now and sitting bolt upright. The crashing in the brush ceased; soon Worthless appeared, carrying a piece of cloth in his mouth.

"You danged fool, didn't I tell you what would happen if you ate so much rabbit? Lie down now and let a fellow sleep!"

Morning came, and the sun turned the scoria slides on the highest peaks to dashes of green and crimson. Keno Joe finished his breakfast. It was time to go. . . . .

Keno turned to the dog: "I hate to do it, but the time has come when you and me has got to part company. Like the other fellow said—in the first place you are no good; in the second, you eat too much. If I can't keep myself more than half alive, how'm I ever going to rustle enough feed for both of us? No, dog, you got to die, and the sooner we get it over the better."

With the air of a man who must perform an unpleasant task, Keno Joe turned toward the tree and his rifle, then stopped in perplexity. Surely he had leaned his rifle against the tree the night before, and yet there was nothing in sight. Pivoting on one heel, he swung until his eyes had swept the entire camp. Still no rifle. Keno had never heard of a dog stealing a rifle, and yet a show dog might do almost anything. He searched the brush in every direction far beyond the reach of the rope, but the result was nil. Coming back to the tree, he walked around it and stopped on the side farthest from the fire. There in the bare

ground at the base of the tree were the marks of heavy shoes. Before him, hanging from a clump of buckbrush, was a piece of cloth. He picked it up, and his puzzled expression deepened to consternation. The cloth, about the size of his hat, had a seam down the middle and was polished with hard wear.

"Danged if it don't look like the seat of somebody's pants!" murmured Keno. "Looks as if they had been jerked out by the roots, at that."

Keno looked at the footprints under the tree, then to the dog.

"Worthless, come here," he called.

Worthless came. "Do you happen to know anything about this?" asked Keno, holding out the cloth.

Evidently Worthless did, for his heavy upper lip drew back, and he growled savagely. In an instant his whole nature seemed to undergo a change, and the bloodlust of his trailing ancestors came uppermost. Rushing about, he exerted all his strength in an effort to break the restraining rope.

The dog's excitement during the night became easy to understand. The convict had visited the camp, and taken the rifle.

ANOTHER sunset found the wanderers deep in the heart of the forbidding land. Through the weather-beaten and age-worn halls of the Bad-lands, they had plodded hour after hour, and in the gathering twilight had come to a hidden valley, where a tiny cabin nestled among the cottonwoods. And it was here that Keno Joe faced another heavy loss. The door of the cabin stood open, and there was nothing in sight but a blanketless bunk, a few empty boxes and torn papers scattered about the floor. Everything of value had been taken.

For a while he studied the ruins about him. It had never been much of a home, it was true, but nevertheless it was the one place in the world he had called his own. Now it was bleak and bare, and all the worldly possessions left him consisted of his horse and saddle and the clothes he wore. He could find no evidence as to the thief, and since he had been away for more than a week, there was no way of judging the time which had elapsed since the robbery.

For a long time the old man sat on a battered cracker-box, and sadly contemplated the empty room; but with the coming of darkness he spread his saddle-blanket on the rifled bunk. Tired after a long day's ride, he was just dozing off to sleep when he heard a scratching at the door. The night chill had set in, and Worthless was cold and withal a trifle lonely. And then, as Keno opened the door, the thing happened. A gust of wind picked up a discarded newspaper and flung it full in the face of the dog. Instantly he became rigid. The muscles along his sides and back drew taut; his hair bristled from head to tail, and his lips drew back in a savage snarl. He had caught the scent of the man whom he had encountered the night before. From somewhere along the blood-lines of his heritage came the savage call of the bloodhound. He was no longer the big, gentle dog; rather he had become a beast, a thing of vengeance and of fury.

Hastily, Keno Joe found the lariat and chain. It was all he could do to snap them in place, for the powerful beast lurched and writhed in maniacal fury. The old man knew that the time to strike was while the iron was hot. By morning the dog might calm down and lose some of the rage-stimulated power of scent. So in a few minutes they were off, Keno Joe on the pony and Worthless tugging hard at the end of the rope, head down, nose following, step by step, the trail of the marauder.

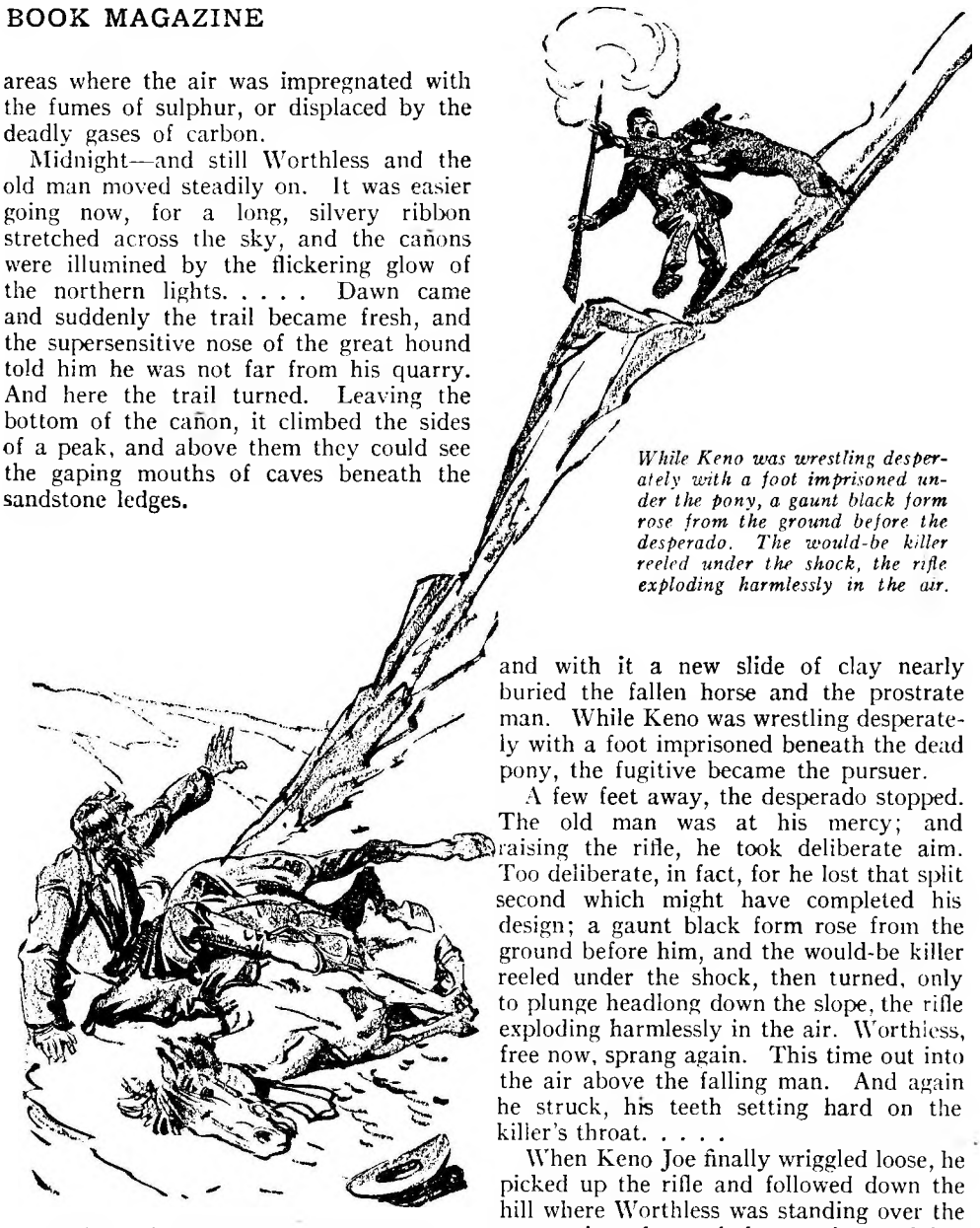
The night-prowling folk of the Bad-lands are accustomed to strange sounds. Against a stage setting that is all too real, coyotes and wolves broadcast notes of anguish and loneliness from the highest peaks. Wildcat and weasel add sharp screams of fear or triumphant pursuit, and the night wind whines and moans among forests of petrified wood or over slopes of rain-carved clay. But that night a new sound was abroad: a low, pitiful, anguished sob, the trail-cry of the bloodhound.

Strange shadows too, moved among the hills. A great beast from whose lips flecks of foam dripped in simulation of saberlike fangs, and the figure of a mounted man following steadily, wherever the hound might choose to lead. And now the other sounds died away, and only the ceaseless whine of the wind endured. Coyote and wolf, even the tawny form of the cougar, crouched low and held their peace.

Through cañons and valleys, across wash-outs and wind-swept hogbacks, the shadows held their way. Past blubbering sinkholes where a misstep meant certain death, under shadows of peaks whose hearts of lignite were slowly feeding the steady glow of fires, and sometimes through

areas where the air was impregnated with the fumes of sulphur, or displaced by the deadly gases of carbon.

Midnight—and still Worthless and the old man moved steadily on. It was easier going now, for a long, silvery ribbon stretched across the sky, and the cañons were illumined by the flickering glow of the northern lights. . . . . Dawn came and suddenly the trail became fresh, and the supersensitive nose of the great hound told him he was not far from his quarry. And here the trail turned. Leaving the bottom of the cañon, it climbed the sides of a peak, and above them they could see the gaping mouths of caves beneath the sandstone ledges.



While Keno was wrestling desperately with a foot imprisoned under the pony, a gaunt black form rose from the ground before the desperado. The would-be killer reeled under the shock, the rifle exploding harmlessly in the air.

The fury of the hound increased, for not only the trail but the very air he breathed was permeated by the scent of the night-prowling convict. Worthless charged to the end of his rope, but finding escape from the hated chain impossible, he gave vent to a long, savage cry of anger.

Above them, on the peak, something moved. A rock bounded downward, followed by a rippling slide of clay. Suddenly a crimson flash,—the sharp report of a rifle,—and a bullet hummed above the head of Keno Joe. Then another, coming low, dropped the pony dead in his tracks, and with it a new slide of clay nearly buried the fallen horse and the prostrate man. While Keno was wrestling desperately with a foot imprisoned beneath the dead pony, the fugitive became the pursuer.

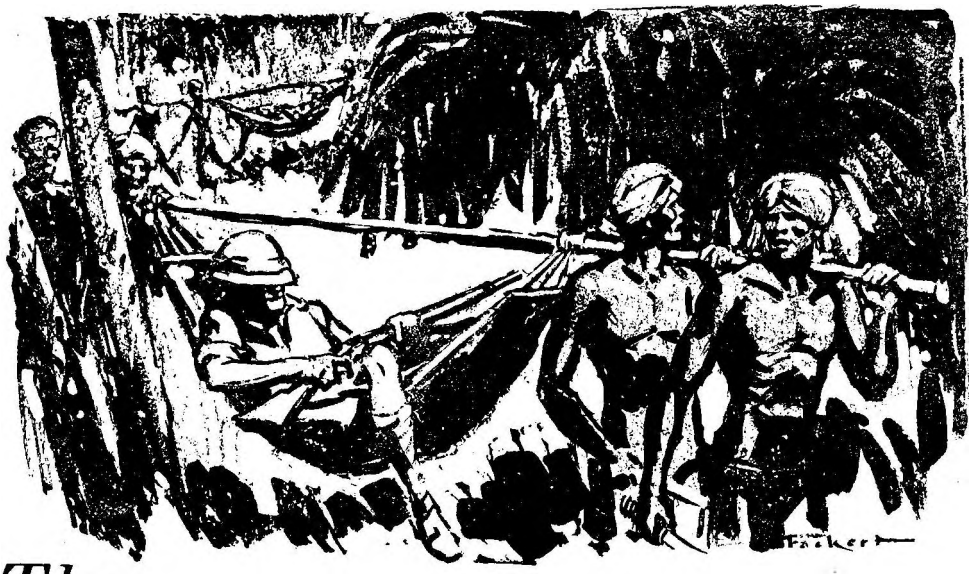
A few feet away, the desperado stopped. The old man was at his mercy; and raising the rifle, he took deliberate aim. Too deliberate, in fact, for he lost that split second which might have completed his design; a gaunt black form rose from the ground before him, and the would-be killer reeled under the shock, then turned, only to plunge headlong down the slope, the rifle exploding harmlessly in the air. Worthless, free now, sprang again. This time out into the air above the falling man. And again he struck, his teeth setting hard on the killer's throat. . . . .

When Keno Joe finally wriggled loose, he picked up the rifle and followed down the hill where Worthless was standing over the unconscious form of the convict, and but for the protection of a leather collar,—once before, and now again the property of the old man,—his teeth would have finished the outlaw forever.

Keno knelt and put his arms around the big dog's neck.

"Old-timer," he said, "you sure saved my life that time: and from here on, son, we hit the trail together!"

When the killer returned to consciousness, he was tied hand and foot. Keno Joe and Worthless were munching bacon and hardtack by the smoke of a sage-brush fire.



Galt lay dozing in a hammock; behind came Gillespie, damning himself for yielding to the temptation of a trip.

The Bad Man of Beroema

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

Illustrated by O. W. Fackert

Deep in the jungles of Borneo the American Dr. Galt encounters a series of tremendous adventures with wild beasts and wilder men.

THERE were stretches along that trail in the Bornese jungle where little or no sunlight filtered through the mass of foliage among the tree-tops, and everything below was shrouded in a twilight that would have been grateful enough except for the excessive humidity and the slinking, noiseless menace from the predatory creatures in it. Dr. Galt, an American physician famous for his adventuring in the Orient, lay in a hammock suspended from a long pole which rested upon the shoulders of two Malay bearers in front and two behind—an automatic rifle across his lap ready for instant use. The peak of his sun-helmet rested upon the bridge of his nose; his bare arms and knees were wet with perspiration which spread the oil of citronelle somewhat unevenly upon them yet left enough of it to discourage the voracious mosquitoes. Even the Dyaks were sweating a little from their exertions in the enervating humidity. Just behind the Doctor came Colonel Gillespie in another hammock—damning himself the hundredth time for yielding to the temptation of another botanizing expedition with the American medico, yet feeling instinctively that his chances on such a trip for picking up stray bits of information from the Malays concerning those who were spreading radical propaganda among them were better than under almost any other conditions he could think of. There were perhaps a dozen men in the Straits who knew that he was connected with the Indian Secret Service—not more.

For half-hours at a time there would be no word exchanged between the two or among their Dyaks—merely the faint slithering rustle of bare brown feet among the grasses and mosses, or the swishy hacking of the *parangs* where jungle lianas and undergrowth had choked the path since the last party had passed that way. Following the two white men were a dozen of the hill Dyaks with the camp and scientific impedimenta. And although Galt's hearing was

pretty acute for a Caucasian, the Bornese either heard or sensed, instinctively, little murmurings and whisperings from the jungle surrounding them which Galt did not get at all. Once, at the edge of a little glade in which the tall grasses grew shoulder-high at either side of the trail, and a single beam of sunlight shot down its dazzling illumination close to a low opening in the undergrowth on the opposite side, the two men in advance suddenly stopped, with upraised warning hands for those behind them. Though he had been dozing in his hammock, the sudden stoppage of motion instantly roused the Doctor, who swung his feet over the edge and was out alongside of the two leaders in a moment, his rifle ready for use under his arm. He had drowsily noticed that none of the monkeys were chattering among the branches overhead, but had been too sleepy to realize its significance. His inquiring look at his head-man drew a slowly uplifted arm with a finger pointing toward the opening just beyond the ray of sunlight, and a muttered: "*Pandang,* O Tuan!"

As he looked, a snarling, ear-flattened face with four saber-teeth appeared in the dark opening, and a deep growl came booming across the little glade as a dark spotted body came sinuously after it—crouching low among the grasses so that little but the menacing head was visible. It was not "tiger," as the head-man had called it (tigers have not been seen in Borneo); but the dark, reddish leopard of the Bornese jungle, with glossy black spots stenciled downward from the black stripe along his back like so many prints of different sizes from his own pads.

Galt fired two shots so rapidly that his "Number One" thought he didn't even aim. The leopard sprang five or six feet into the air with a roar of pain, but was practically dead as he fell back again—one bullet having gone straight through the gaping mouth into the neck-vertebræ, and the other through the roof of his mouth into the brain. When they stretched him out, he measured over eight feet from his nose to the end of his tail, and he was suspended by his paws from a long pole so that they could carry him along to be skinned when they made camp.

GALT'S head-man had spoken of open ground an hour farther along the trail, where camp might be pitched with reasonable safety, and they were near enough to this to see light between the tree-trunks when the Number One again stopped, looking into the branches of a great tree which hung low over the trail. He also appeared to be listening for something beyond—and when Galt stood by his side again, said:

"A memsahib, O Tuan—with two bearers who walk before her. And in that tree under which they will come, one of the jungle people—a great *ular!* The Tuan will see one of his coils about that limb. And the *ular* is angry. He thrashes the leaves with his head and neck!"

"Python, eh? Yes—I see him now! If you're right about a memsahib coming along, we'd better get him out of that—*pronto!*"

Raising the rifle to his shoulder, he sent a couple of bullets into a coil as thick as a man's thigh. Instantly there was a furious thrashing of the leaves, from which a gaping head and some twelve feet of neck suddenly darted out in their direction. Galt fired again—straight into the yawning mouth. For a second or two, good-sized branches were snapped from the tree in all directions; then the confusion subsided; the head and neck gradually drooped until they rested upon the trail, while a hundred pounds of body and tail slid down after them with a sickening flop just as two Malays, with a graceful figure in khaki behind them, stopped in the trail a few feet beyond.

"I say, you chaps! Deuced unpleasant way you have of meeting one on the trail—dropping pythons on one! What's the idea?"

The Doctor grinned.

"Why—we rather thought you might prefer 'em this way to having ten or fifteen feet of snake come suddenly down out of the leaves and coil about you without any warning. That python had a pretty good grip on the limb with his tail—and he'd have crushed you like an egg if he'd managed a couple of coils before you realized it. It's really safer for whites to hit the trail in hammocks, you know—in such a climate as this."

"Oh—quite so! But—you see—there were reasons. I say! Would you mind looking after my two boys, here, while I get forty winks? Haven't slept for about sixty hours, I fancy. I—ah— My word! All in—you know!"

The girl sank down among the grasses, apparently in a dead faint—but the professional fingers on her wrist sensed the fact that it was merely the sleep of utter

exhaustion after keeping up to just about the last second of her endurance. Picking her up in his arms, Galt deposited the boyish figure in his hammock, and directed the head-man to get out of the jungle and pitch camp in the open as quickly as possible.

When this was done, by the side of a clear little running stream, the Doctor bathed the girl's face and hands, took off her laced shoes and leather puttees—made a soft bed of leaves and grass for her, then told his China boy to make her bearers comfortable but not to let them come anywhere near until she woke up. There was something about that hiking and camping for sixty hours without sleep which told a story of its own—even Colonel Gillespie understood enough of it to know that she hadn't dared to sleep.

IT was not until late the next afternoon that she opened her eyes upon the Colonel's broad back as he sat just outside the opening of the Doctor's small tent.

"I say! How long since I passed out?"

The Colonel smilingly slewed himself around until he could peer in at her.

"Nearly twenty-four hours, I fancy. I'm Gillespie, of the Governor's staff—Singapore. My friend's an American scientist, Dr. Galt. Er—where were you heading for when we met you, Miss—er—"

"Jacqueline Rossford—or Jack, to my friends. I was trying to make the coast as quickly as I could, or run across any decent white men who'd have made it safe for me to sleep awhile. Some of the more trustworthy brownies told me this was the shortest trail out—across that pass in the mountains, yonder, and down through Sarawak, where I knew Rajah Brooke would help me. How much of that trail back of you was jungle?"

"A good eight hours of it to the first open camping-place, Miss Rossford. You'd not have gotten through! And we've seen no whites for a week or more. Topping bit of luck we happened to meet you! Those bearers might have proved of the decenter sort—rather diffic'lt to be sure without some acquaintance; but we can well understand your not sleeping as long as you could keep going. Can we be of assistance?"

"And I've no right to ask a postponement of your scientific work to help me—if you're on that sort of an expedition."

"Here comes the Doctor now—he's been looking after you pretty carefully. Suppose you give us the story?"

Galt squatted down in the tent-opening as she smilingly thanked him for what he'd done.

"Do either of you know anything about the Rajah of Beroema—or where his state lies?" she then inquired.

"His land runs along the farther slope of those mountains south of us—the Kapuas Range; and his river is a tributary of the Kapuas. They go out by way of Pontianak, as there are no roads in the center of the island—but it's a pretty long trip down the Kapuas by boat. This trail over through Sarawak is much shorter, as they told you—but very few of the Dyaks will cross the pass. They believe the upper parts of all mountains are inhabited by devils, you know. As for the Rajah—well he was educated in Holland. Not so impossible as a young man, but they say he's reverting to the old type as he gets along toward forty. We've seen him in Singapore; and I've been in the neighboring sultan's state, farther east—but neither of us has been in through Beroema."

"Had you heard he is a drug-addict?'

"Oh, they all use hashish—*afyum* or *bhang*, as the Malays call it—usually as a fever-tonic, and not noticeably to excess except in cases of low resistance."

"The Rajah appears to be pretty fa along—manages to get a regular supply o stuff which reacts like heroin or one of th new derivatives—makes him utterly irre sponsible, practically insane for days at a time, fills his mind with brutal cruelty an —oh, impossible things! I fancy you ca imagine some of them. Last year—h made a contract with Dad, whom he me in Colombo, to act as his business manage —said his palace was comfortably fitte up according to Western ideas, and that suite in the guest-wing would be placed a our disposal—entirely safe for our family

"Dad came out here as engineer for development scheme that went on the rock for lack of sufficient capital, and th Rajah's offer seemed to fit in very nicel for a year or two until he got some good sized bit of engineering construction. S he and the Mater and I came across t Pontianak—up the river to Beroema. Mat ters went very well for the first six month Dad saved a pot of money for the Rajah– made a good bit more for him by carefu investment, got enough out of it for hin self to put something by in the Hongkon and Shanghai.

"Then the Rajah began drifting into fi

of depression and irresponsibility, which made him difficult to handle in any sort of business decision. When Dad protested, he got ugly. All that was unpleasant enough, but he presently got it into his drugged brain that the Mater was a very handsome woman, entirely in his power. All of the sultans have been repeatedly warned against meddling with white women in any manner, but Ismaud Ibrahim has seen enough of Europe, read enough of the European news-sheets, to doubt very much

Galt fired two shots so rapidly his man thought he didn't even aim.

that any government would go to the expense of sending a military force up into the interior of Borneo to punish him for doing what he pleases in his own rather inaccessible state."

"How about his datos?" inquired Colonel Gillespie. "Some of them should be fairly decent."

"One was our very good friend, really fine character, with a good deal of influence among the others. Well—the Rajah had him poisoned last week! Two or three others were men we could have depended upon—but that little incident has shaken their nerve. Under the surface, I fancy they'd do what they could for us, but they know that defying the Rajah openly would be a death-warrant. Dad, of course, was the main obstacle. He was taken frightfully ill just after dinner, Monday evening. We gave him mustard and warm water to drink, at once—got his stomach emptied—"

"I wonder if coffee occurred to you?"

"That was my first thought—one of the Singapore medicos had mentioned it to me. I made a pot of it—strong and hot, kept him sipping it while we walked him up and down the floor. He was much easier before morning, but too weak to stand."

"You undoubtedly saved his life—that time, anyhow! What happened next?"

"I went to the Rajah—told him about Dad—said I was going down to the coast for a medico and any other assistance I fancied I might need. Said if he tried to stop me I'd shoot him without further argum'nt—that if anything happened to Dad and the Mater while I was gone, I'd see he was hanged on the terrace of his own palace! Then I got two bearers I fancied I could trust up to a certain point—loaded them with food and a pup-tent—saw that the Mater had an *ayah* who'd sleep in her room while she was looking after Dad, and give an alarm in time for Mother to get her gun. She's a pretty good shot—almost as good as Dad or I. He taught us both, but I've practiced a good bit more."

"And the Rajah didn't try to stop you from getting out?"

"Apparently not. I've been expecting an ambush somewhere along the trail, though!"

"It wasn't necessary, Miss Jack. Ismaud Ibrahim is no fool, even when he's more than half drugged. He knew, of course, that you were attempting to get down through Sarawak, and was practically certain you'd never make it. Knew you wouldn't dare sleep and must collapse in a couple of days at the most. It would have

taken you more than eight hours to get through that jungle back there, with miles and miles of it beyond the few open spaces. Even with a fire going all night, you wouldn't have been safe pitching a camp.

"Well—suppose we have a council of war? As we understand it, all three of you are about fed up with this job of the Rajah's—not? You're sufficiently in funds for your father to take his own time looking about for construction-work—there's plenty of it out here, one place or another. So if you all get safely out to Singapore, you'll call it a day and be satisfied? Eh?"

. "Oh—quite so! We're none of us the sort to throw up a job we've taken on, you know—quite willing to put in another year under reasonable conditions, and unquestionably would do very well for His Highness if we stopped on. But with the sort of notions he has in his drug-crazed brain, it's really out of the question. Point is—how am I to get the Mater and Dad out to the coast, when he's unable to fight, or trek over any such trail as this? Properly, we should go in hammocks, as you said yesterday—but in a hammock one is at a beastly disadvantage if one's bearers are treacherous, d'ye see? And if I were on my feet eight or ten hours in this humidity, Dad would have to relieve me for the next watch. I fear he'll not be up to it!"

"Looks as though the Colonel and I should come in on this—see you through."

"But—really—I can't ask you gentlemen to give up your scientific work indefinitely, you know! And there's a good bit of personal risk in it; also the question as to how far your Dyaks will stand by you. I notice you're permitting six of them to carry automatic rifles—are you safe in doing that?"

Colonel Gillespie grinned.

"Prob'ly you've not heard much about the Doctor, Miss Rossford—though his name is bein' mentioned quite frequ'ntly in these waters just now. Nobody understands the reason for it,—haven't grasped it fully, myself,—but he seems to have a most widespread an' dependable influence among the brownies all through Malaysia. As far as they're concerned, what he says —*goes*. Can't make out whether they consider him a reincarnation of some great man in the past, or fear him like the very devil —but it's cold fact that if he told our Dyaks, here, one of them had done something which deserved killing, they'd simply run a *parang* through the man without argum'nt. So that our little force of sixteen Dyaks an' two China boys—plus the Doctor's peculiar influence—should do a good bit toward getting you three down to the coast, I fancy. Rather more, in fact, than any small Governm'nt force, which would have all the brownies against 'em at the start. But it'll be somewhat a game of wits if we pull it off. Chances would be against us if we trekked into the Rajah's *kampong* an' issued any ultimatum about takin' you people out. It'll not be quite as simple as that, I fear. What? As for the scientific end, that'll be a matter for Galt to decide Eh, Doctor?"

"No obstacle in that direction. I've already picked up, photographed and packed for transportation some fifty specimens of plants I was none too sure of finding at all. On the way out, I'll doubtless find a few more—so the trip would be a scientific success if we made no further search in that line. Aside from this, however, we came in here partly for other reasons—a sort of vacation from the affairs of everyday life. with some idea of picking up bits of political information on the side, which we'll be more apt to hear in the Rajah's town than anywhere else in this vicinity. You Rossfords may be able to give us a few hints in that direction. So I guess we might as well consider the expedition as being in our mutual interests—from here on."

"Mighty decent of you both! I fancy I can tell you a number of things on the political side, because I've noticed some for which I can't account, myself."

BY the time they were ready to start, in the early morning, the Colonel and Galt had been able to size up Jacqueline Rossford very thoroughly and were increasingly pleased with her. They decided the girl was probably older than she had first appeared, possibly twenty-seven or eight, but in such perfect physical condition that she looked younger and had almost as much wiry endurance as the Doctor himself. She wore whipcord breeches which the mosquitoes found it difficult to penetrate, and a khaki-colored flannel shirt, pretty well open at the neck—leather puttees that would have stopped any snake which struck below their tops—a pith helmet, light but impervious to solar rays and with an air-space all around the inside band. On her right hip hung an automatic which that afternoon she gave evidence of knowing how to use.

They were trailing along through tall

grasses on either side in a quarter-mile stretch of more or less open ground when one of the Dyaks almost stepped upon a cobra sunning himself on the edge of the trail. The man jumped three feet into the air, convulsively, but the snake would have struck him coming down if Miss "Jack" hadn't flashed out her pistol and fired from her hip—sending a soft-nosed bullet through its head.

Next day, when they had just crossed the border of Beroema at the other end of the mountain pass, they came upon the first evidence that they were getting into a somewhat more populous district. In one space about a hundred feet square the jungle trees had been felled, the undergrowth cleared away, and a house with walls of bamboo-matting on a bamboo frame, with nipa thatch overhead, stood upon sawed-off trunks of six or eight small trees twelve feet above the ground, a ladder hanging down from its narrow veranda. Around the supporting tree-trunks was a fence of tough young bamboos held together with rope twisted from bamboo strips. Inside this space were a sow with her litter, and two goats, also a few hens and two fighting-cocks. Under a nipa shelter at one side of the clearing a carabao—the householder's beast of all work—was chewing his cud; and near him stood a baby elephant not much larger than a donkey. Captured a day or two before, he was already learning to eat the food offered him, but was still lifting his voice in occasional trumpeted wails of lonesomeness. Just beyond the house-clearing was a smaller one—diked around the edges to hold a shallow covering of dirty water, in which a healthy growth of rice was almost ready for cutting.

As the party trekked along the trail at the side of the clearing, the Malay wife came out upon the veranda and smilingly called to them as she came down the ladder with her baby slung upon her back.

There was nearly a gallon of coconut-milk in a porous jar hanging from one of the roof-beams of her house—deliciously cool from the evaporation. This she hospitably offered to the three whites. To the Dyaks she gave cool water from a little spring and cheroots of her own making from a small tobacco-patch beyond the rice, in the jungle. Although the Colonel and Miss Rossford had seen hundreds of such little homes, the Doctor gave them a new slant on it.

"Takes a fairly good brand of nerve, you know, to go out into jungle like this, miles away from any *kampong*, and make it support your family in what is actually comfort, according to their ideas. Plenty of good wholesome food—if you're forehanded, and don't let the stock run down; perfectly adequate clothes and shelter—enough resource to invent a certain amount of amusement—something to offer the passing traveler by way of courteous hospitality—and to keep one from being bored or blasé, enough constant menace all around you every minute of the time to keep you guessing. How many of our city men at home do you suppose could get away with a stunt like this? Look at that baboon up there on the veranda—trained to climb after their coconuts and throw them down—trained to do a lot of useful things about the house, quite one of the family!"

AS they were talking, the head of the house came running noiselessly in from the trail and called out something, excitedly, to his wife—who instantly ran up the ladder and fetched down what were probably her most valued possessions, including a girl of four, and two monkeys. The man had been speaking in one of the Bornese dialects, but Galt's knowledge of Malay was sufficient to catch the gist of it, including the word *gajah*—repeated a number of times. As the little family hurried down to a boat they had in a near-by creek, the man called back an excited warning to Galt's Dyaks, who were starting to run nervously down the trail when he stopped them. As Jack Rossford asked for an explanation, he said:

"There's a whale of a big elephant coming this way, hell-bent—probably the mother of that baby under the nipa shed—has just heard it trumpeting. Of course it wont be healthy around here when she arrives—but she'll make kindling-wood of this poor Malay's comfortable little house that he's worked so hard to get just right—if we don't stop her! Seems a shame to let her do it! You go on along the trail with Ling Foh while the Colonel and I get behind some of these biggest trees and see what we can do! Get a move on you, Jackie! I hear her coming—now!"

Miss Rossford grinned in a boyish way that gave her slightly up-tilted nose a piquant sauciness. Then she calmly stepped behind the nearest big tree and fished her pistol out of its holster.

"Fancied you'd have all the fun to yourself, did you, Doctor? Rather not!"

"Say! Did you ever see a big lady-elephant when she was plumb annoyed about something?"

"Can't say I have—but it looks as though I might now, you know. Don't get directly opposite my line of fire if you can avoid it! Nor you either, Colonel!"

With deafening roars and the crashing of small branches, a monstrous gray body came surging across the little rice-paddy, ruinously trampling a good third of it into the mud, and then into the clearing around the house. One blow from the powerful trunk stretched the carabao on the ground with a broken neck, and as it tore loose the rope holding the baby-elephant, a huge shoulder leaned against the nipa shed until it was nothing but débris under foot. All this had taken less than a minute—after which the enraged beast turned her attention to the house, pushing her head against two of the supporting tree-trunks until one corner of the dwelling sagged down three or four feet. The elephant's head, however, was now directly facing the big tree behind which Jack Rossford had taken shelter, and not more than twenty feet away. It seemed to Galt and the Colonel like a couple of rapid snap-shots just before they themselves fired at a spot behind the fore-leg—but the girl had given herself the fraction of a second needed to make her aim certain, sending a bullet through each of the elephant's eyes. There was a roar of rage and pain—a moment or two of blind staggering about the little clearing, during which the two men pumped half a dozen heavy-caliber bullets through the great beast's heart; then she sank down.

The pair of tusks couldn't be divided very well among three of them, and so they decided to leave these for the master of the house, as liberal compensation for his carabao—each taking, instead, one of the great feet to be made into a waste-basket when thoroughly cured. Then Galt had his Dyaks cut some tree-trunks and prop up the sagging corner of the house. When the Malay stole cautiously back to see what had happened, he found himself in possession of meat enough for an entire *kampong*, with sufficient value in prime ivory to buy half a dozen carabaos and forty times the amount of rice he had lost.

AS the Doctor and his party approached the Rajah's town, the little scattered clearings and houses became more numerous, though nowhere sufficiently close to be within sight or sound of each other. Consequently the wild life of the jungle was very much in evidence right up to the edge of the big *kampong*, which lay along one bank of a river three hundred feet wide—fairly deep in summer and autumn, but nowhere over twelve feet in the dry monsoon and forming bars in many places with very narrow channels around them, through which it required a good deal of exact knowledge to get the Rajah's hundred-foot power-yacht down into the Kapuas. At the upper end was the palace, built of concrete and colored tiles—ornate and disappointing from an architectural point of view. It might have been less offensive with a small cleared margin between jungle and building, but the branches of the trees were within fifteen feet of the walls, and the rooms retained a good deal of dampness until the dry monsoon was half over. At the lower end, six miles of mangrove swamp hemmed in the *kampong* on the south—forming a convenient and secure place for the Dyaks to build and keep their boats of various types, but detracting from the sanitary condition of the town.

When they were within five miles of it, Galt's efficient China boy Ling Foh, and one of the more intelligent Dyaks, hurried on ahead to get in communication with the Chinos and some of the most dependable Malays. To these Ling Foh communicated the fact that his Tuan Hakim was an affiliated member of the Great Tong—a Chinese benevolent society governed by delegates from all the lesser *tongs* and having supreme authority over them.

When professionally attending a number of Chinese plague-victims in the Philippines—several years previous to this—Galt had found upon one a small cube of the finest ivory with a peculiar Chinese ideograph inlaid with gold in one of its faces, and had asked a mandarin friend if it were safe to carry the thing about with him—the upshot being that Galt had been given backing and protection by the Great Tong in consideration of his services to their nationals. To the lower grades of affiliated Malays, Tamils, Singalese, Burmese and Siamese, it was enough that the Tuan Hakim was known to have that little ivory cube always upon him in one pocket or another. Several of his Dyaks had seen it—knew the regulations and the far-reaching power of the Great Tong—and hadn't the slightest doubt that anyone who injured or offended him would die if he should so

It seemed to Galt and the Colonel like a couple of snapshots, before they themselves fired.

will it. Consequently the Doctor acquired enough power and authority in the *kampong*, before entering it, to make it very doubtful if any Dyak would carry out an order even from the Rajah against him.

LING FOH carefully spread this information among certain ones he knew would repeat it to the Rajah within an hour, and neglected to mention that Miss Rossford was with them—but did say that the Tuan Hakim had heard of a sick white man in the palace and had come several miles out of his way to attend him professionally, after paying his respects to the Rajah. As the Chinese craftily put it, the Tuan Hakim had been pleased to avail himself of this excuse to visit Ismaud Ibrahim, of whom he had heard in Singapore, and possibly have a game of chess with him. As His Highness rather fancied himself at chess, and had played with some very strong Dutchmen in Amsterdam, this aroused his interest at once, and the Doctor's reputation aside from that made him desirous of extending all the courtesies available to this prominent man from the outside world. So the expedition was met just outside the *kampong* by his chief dato —the two white men, with their China boys, being requested to occupy rooms in the guest-wing of the palace.

Jacqueline Rossford had kept in the background with Ling Foh and her own two bearers, inconspicuously making their way around to the palace from another direction, so that she was not associated with the scientific expedition by the Rajah until after cordial relations had been established with the Tuan Hakim and the Tuan Gillespie, who was recognized as one of the Governor's staff at Singapore. At the close of the interview His Highness remembered to ask how Galt had heard of the sick white man—and the Doctor casually mentioned that after he and the Colonel had been figuring whether they had time for a visit to Beroema, they had met Miss Rossford and her bearers, and her request for medical assistance had provided just the excuse they wanted. Questioned rather cleverly as to just what the girl had said, they could recall nothing but the story of her father's sudden illness and her fear that it might be fatal unless she could manage to fetch in a medico.

As far as the Rajah could judge—having taken a dose of his drug just before seeing them, his mind was working very clearly, —they neither knew nor suspected anything behind the presumable fact that Rossford had eaten something which violently disagreed with him. Knowing the amount of that "something" which the engineer had swallowed, His Highness was fairly certain the man could not recover, and for that reason he could afford to bide his time. Galt and the Colonel weren't likely to burden themselves with two women during the remainder of their scientific investigations in that part of Borneo if assured that the ladies would be sent down to Pontianak on the Rajah's yacht as soon as the rains set in and raised the river a few feet. So at the close of the interview the Doctor and his friend were escorted to their quar-

ters, where the two China boys had stowed the more valuable portion of their equipment—after which Galt was taken along to the Rossford suite.

The *ayah* opened the door just far enough to see who was outside, but Miss Jack stood just behind her and whispered that it was the Tuan they expected. With the door barred on the inside and the *ayah* on guard in the outer room, Jack fetched him through the suite to where her father lay upon a charpoy in the farther room, noticeably thinner than when she had seen him the week before, and very weak, but with a good deal of his nerve still left.

"My word, Doctor! What a topping bit of luck—Jack's meeting you on the trail, and your being willing to come, have a look-see at me! I fancy I'm really no worse than when she left—but I'm no better, either. Possibly worrying about her has kept me down a bit—we knew she'd never make it as far as the coast."

"Well, it's doubtful—but my hat's off to her for trying. Now—the first thing I want to know is the condition your wife is in. How about it, Mrs. Rossford?"

"If His Highness really wants me as badly as we fancy he must from what has happened, he'll take jolly good care that any food sent to this suite is good, and harmless, lest I get a bit of something poisonous by mistake—so I've had no hesitation about giving my husband anything I've eaten myself. That left only the risk of their forcing their way in here by surprise when I was asleep. They tried it twice—I nearly killed one of them, firing through the window, and there have been no further attempts, though I've not dared to relax in the least. A good sleep will be all that's necessary, I fancy."

"With Miss Jackie here, you can get all of that you need—and my boys will look after the outside end. All right—glad to know you're in no worse condition. It'll take some figuring to get you safely out of here, but with all three in shape to travel, I've little doubt as to our getting away with it.

"There are not more than three of the vegetable poisons which the Malays habitually use, Mr. Rossford—I can probably spot yours by the symptoms. Did you have any feeling like acute indigestion after eating it? No pain, but a sensation as if all the wheels inside of you had suddenly stopped—a faint, numb feeling?"

"No—that wasn't the sensation. More like cholera, I fancy—everything inside turning loose, with more or less griping pain—"

"By Jove! Lucky you got your stomach emptied at once instead of having that stuff go farther! If it had, all the doctors in Asia couldn't have pulled you out of it. The only good point about that poison is that it acts within ten minutes after you've swallowed it. Another one shows no symptoms whatever until after twelve hours—by that time, nothing can be done for the patient. Well—I'll have you a lot stronger by morning. There's not enough of the stuff left in you to offset the medicines. Before midnight, my China boy will have some idea as to whom we can trust among the datos and will have secured some influence in our favor."

WHILE they were talking, there came a knock at the door. Galt opened it himself, and, when he saw the Rajah outside with his chief dato, invited them in to see the patient quite as though their solicitous inquiry as to his condition could be accepted at face value. For an instant he did some quick thinking. If Ismaud Ibrahim thought his business manager were likely to recover, it was fairly certain that he would take other means to remove him at some unexpected moment—so the Doctor whispered, as he admitted them:

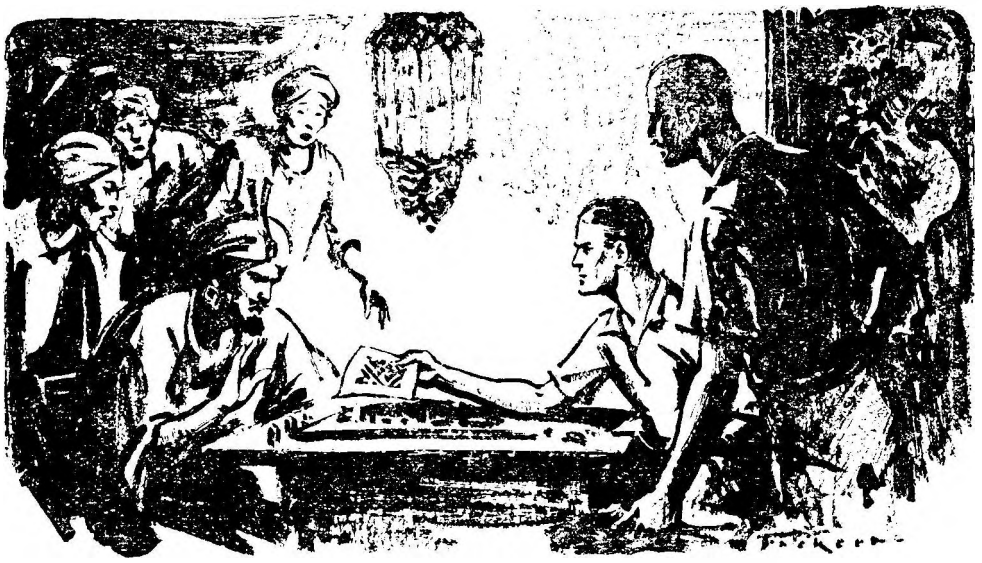
"Rossford thinks he'll get well, sooner or later—quite cheerful about it—and he's got the women believing it too. But he's really in pretty bad shape—I fear I got here too late! Whatever it was that he ate seems to have generated ptomaines in the digestive tract and poisoned him all through. Be careful not to let any of them see that you know how sick he is."

The Rajah nodded gravely—and when he stood by Rossford's bedside, was courteously solicitous as to how he felt and how soon he thought he might be up again. His Highness remarked that he had sent two or three times during the week to inquire about him, but that his wife had seemed to be apprehensive about something and would not admit anybody. Noticing Jacqueline, apparently for the first time, he congratulated her suavely upon her fortunate meeting with Dr. Galt.

To anyone not familiar with the little indications of habitual drug-use, Ismaud would have seemed to be the cordial, dignified prince that most of the Asiatic potentates try to be—adopting enough of the

Western code to assure the safety of any European visitor in his territory. But Galt and the Rossfords all knew that he must have had a dose of his drug before coming to them, and that a few hours later he would be as nervously irresponsible and dangerous as a cobra smarting from a blow.

When Ling Foh slipped in just before midnight, he told his Tuans that the situation around the *kampong* appeared to be rather complicated. Five of the datos who ruled over near-by *kampongs* spent more



"I think Your Highness would not live three hours after you had tried to stop me!"

time in the Rajah's palace than among their own people—being men past middle life who lived according to the older Malay beliefs and were bitterly opposed not only to western innovations but to the employment of any Europeans. Seven or eight other ones, on the contrary, had been outside, seen for themselves the benefits of civilization, and were strongly in favor of modern ideas. Superimposed upon all this was the palace intrigue among the harem women—each of whom had relatives and considerable of a following in the outside *kampongs*. Until the Rossfords appeared, the favorite wife had been a girl, Laoemba, from the eastern hill-district of Beroema, near the neighboring Sultan's territory on the other side of the mountains, and bearing a harem relationship to him. This girl, with a three-year-old boy who would be heir to the *musnud* in the usual run of circumstances, had been intensely jealous of Mrs. Rossford and Jacqueline from the start—in spite of their fine work in sanitation throughout the state and the general liking they had won for themselves. She had known all about her lord's attempt to have the Englishman poisoned and thoroughly approved of it, even though it would remove the obstacle to his possession of Mrs. Rossford—because she had made her own arrangements to have both of the white women poisoned immediately after the engineer's death.

This drew a remark from Galt that they must get word to her of their desire to fetch the Rossfords out of the country, permanently, and arrange for her assistance in that direction. But Ling Foh had been shrewd enough to cover that point on his own initiative—had sent back the Chino who had access to the harem, with fruit and provisions, bearing a suggestion along this line, only to have his countryman return with a contemptuous refusal.

Galt and the Colonel looked at each other thoughtfully.

"Any idea, Ling Foh, as to which of the men or women this side, in the palace, may be taking money from that one?"

"Mebbeso five—six—'leven—O Tuan. Chino-man show me—but say mos' othel one aflaid Gleat Tong—do anyt'ing like Tuan say, chop, chop. Chino-man tell'm makee little piecee those bad ones if come this side. An' they say can do."

"Well, that's about all the protection we

need, I guess—in the palace. If you get all the food yourself, and cook it for us, the Rossfords should be safe enough until we manage to get away—and those decent datos will help us to do that if we can avoid compromising them. Now, the way I size it up is that our best chance will be that yacht lying in the river. I'm reasonably certain she doesn't draw over five or six feet with her oil and ballast-tanks full, because she was built at Barrow for just this sort of river use, and has beam enough to be safe in anything but a typhoon. The rains are just setting in—river will be two feet higher in a week. Ling, did you run across anyone who knows the river-channels down to the Kapuas?"

"*Aie,* Tuan—pilot fo' Lajah-boat othel Chino, like my fliend. He say can do any time now. Can do night-time with searchlight after get lound bend where Lajah no see. He b'long bottom-side Gleat Tong."

"By thunder! That's the best we've heard yet! Either Tuan Gillespie or I can run the motors if we have to. But how about the chow? Does the Rajah keep her stocked with food and water?"

"Plenty glub, O Tuan—but no mus' eat um. Lajah fixum so no mans steal boat—any time. All glub poisoned—watel poisoned, too. Wine an' bottle dlinks not poison', cause no can live on wine alone. When Lajah go on boat, all glub an' watel on boad get thlow in river. Flesh glub an' watel come aboa'd until Lajah come back. When go asho'—that poison' too."

Gillespie had a vivid imagination—perspiration appeared on his forehead.

"My word! I *say!* Thought I knew the beggars fairly well—particularly our lot up the Peninsula, an' India way. But this bounder puts it over 'em all! Must have Borgia blood in him. I wonder we don't bait automobiles that way in our larger cities—what?"

AS the Rajah slept for three or four hours in the middle of the day, he was usually up until one or two in the morning—playing chess with one of his datos, reading and smoking, sometimes having in a *gamelan* and two or three of the nautch to play and dance for him. At the times when the effect of his drug was wearing off, his nerves became more and more ragged until he was unable to concentrate upon anything, but like most Orientals, he treated his drug with the profound respect due to it, knowing very well that there was no going back from any shortening of the time between doses or tapering back from two or three overdoses.

Galt had been expecting a summons to play chess at any time, but hadn't looked for it after midnight. Had he known the condition Ismaud was in, he would have gone at once, but he was tired, and sent word that he would play a game any time next day. In a few moments Ling Foh slipped in, trying to keep his teeth from chattering, with something almost like horror trying to show through his expressionless face. The Rajah had been so beside himself with tortured nerves that he had deliberately beheaded one of his harem women in the large upper room where he spent his evenings, on the opposite side of the palace.

Stopping only to buckle on their automatics, the two white men ran around to this room and had some difficulty in repressing the cold horror at what they saw. The Rajah was sitting on the *musnud* at the side of an ebony guest-table upon which was a chess-board with the pieces indicating a half-finished game—his face a yellowish gray, his hands and feet twitching with the effort to control his nerves. On a Persian rug below the *musnud* lay the body of a dumpy, shrewish-looking woman with the head completely severed. Ling Foh, who had seen what happened from the balcony outside, afterward told them that when His Highness was half-crazed with *bhang,* this homely shrew—presumably one of the concubines without the status of a wife—had come into the big room through the harem door and began to nag him about some of the other women of whom she was evidently jealous.

He was still chuckling crazily when Gillespie and Galt came running in, but pulled himself together, clapped his hands for some of the servants to roll the body up in the rug and take it away.

Without a word of comment, Galt pulled a flat case from the side pocket of his white linen tunic, took out a long phial and poured half a teaspoonful of powdery crystals upon a little square of white paper, which he held out to the Rajah and told him to swallow.

"Just one of the morphine-derivatives for Your Highness' nerves. It will put you right in a moment or two."

For a second Ismaud had a suspicion of poison—but he was in a condition which made him reckless, and he swallowed the

powder. In less than three minutes his taut muscles began to relax, color flowed back into his face, and he sank back in his chair with a sigh of relief.

"My nerves trouble me at times, Tuan Hakim—occasionally, they are very bad. I—er—regret that you happened to come in before the woman was removed. Such things are necessary, but unpleasant—she was getting old and very disagreeable. In fact, it should have been done several months ago. Now—will you play a game of chess with me while I am feeling in the humor for it?"

"I'll be at a disadvantage, Your Highness, because we've had a pretty long day and are both tired out—but I don't mind trying one game, if you like."

"And the stake? Shall we make a little wager—eh?"

"Well—a hundred guilders?"

"Make it five hundred. Unless—there is something else you would prefer to stake besides money?" There was a peculiar glitter in the Rajah's eyes. "Some bargain you would like to make—perhaps?"

It streaked through Galt's mind that Laoemba might have told him of the assistance which had been suggested from her in the harem, but it would have been insanity to show that he guessed the implication at that time, so he ignored it entirely.

"Oh—I can't think of anything I'd rather have than your five hundred guilders—but I'll have to give you a draft on the Hongkong and Shanghai if I lose."

CHESS is one of the very few games in which you can't stack the cards. It is the matching of one brain against another; one does not lay a finger upon a piece until he moves it; he can make no move which is not seen by his opponent and the onlookers. Ismaud Ibrahim had never played with a white man outside of Holland, and expected to make the Doctor look foolish in a few moments. But his combinations went to pieces just before the critical moves, leaving Galt's in a more advantageous position. The Doctor could have forced it to a mate two or three times but let the chance slip in order to discover more of his adversary's methods. In an hour the Rajah was fairly checkmated without understanding just how it had happened. He took from one of his pockets five notes on the Dutch Bank at Batavia for a hundred guilders each, and passed them to the Doctor.

"Suppose we had been playing, not for money, but for something else you wished very much to accomplish, Tuan Hakim? Or—say, a beautiful woman, whom you wanted very much for yourself? Would your nerves have been under as perfect control? Would you have been as sure of winning—and as sure of going away with your winnings?"

His Highness either knew something of their object in coming to Beroema or suspected it—even Gillespie saw it, rudimentary as his knowledge of Malay was, and began to think they might have to fight their way out. Galt decided to force a show-down—then and there. Drawing toward him a book from the other end of the table, he began idly making strokes with his pencil upon one of the blank pages at the back of it, as he spoke:

"One should never be too positive of anything, Your Highness. But if I had made any such wager with you, it wouldn't have made the least difference in my play—because if I won, I should certainly take my winnings away with me, no matter what they were."

"Ah! You think I would have no power to prevent your going away with them—even if the stake happened to be the handsome woman I mentioned?"

Galt carelessly pushed the book across the table and the Rajah's eyes fell upon a peculiar Chinese ideograph he had drawn in it.

"I think Your Highness would not live three hours after you had tried to stop me. There are two or three hundred men around this *kampong* who would see that you didn't. But how foolish we are to discuss a purely hypothetical case like that! You'll very likely beat me, the next time we play. Now, with your permission—the Colonel and I will retire."

BACK in their rooms, Gillespie kept muttering to himself as he took off some of his clothes.

"My word! Things are comin' a bit thick for me, you know! What the deuce are we to do about that murder, over yon? An' the cold-blooded cheek of the beggar to suggest chess after anything like that!"

"Why, what do you think you're going to do but forget what you saw? This part of Borneo is nominally under Dutch jurisdiction—actually, little sovereignties under the absolute rule of each sultan or rajah, who has power of life or death over his

subjects. Do you suppose the Dutch viceroy at Batavia would send an expedition up here to arrest and try a rajah for killing one of his own harem women? You'd find it difficult enough if it happened to be an Englishwoman! Forget it! Not our pidgin! What *we've* got to concentrate on is getting through tomorrow safely, and down the river tomorrow night! If we're all in this place after that, we're out of luck! That scoundrel can't decide just how much power I really have—he's sure to test it out if he dares."

Beckoning to Ling Foh, Galt discussed certain details with him in whispers, for half an hour, the Cantonese being quite positive about his ability to carry out all the instructions.

Next day the two white men spent a couple of hours in the Rossford suite, and found the engineer much stronger and confident that he would be able to walk as far as might be necessary that night. His wife had made up some of her sleep and was feeling much better—had walked about the *kampong* with the Colonel while Jacqueline guarded her father. Everywhere they went, Galt and the Colonel were treated with the utmost respect by practically all of the Dyaks. Nine-tenths of the *kampong* population quite evidently respected and feared them, and this made their secret preparations much less difficult.

AS soon as it was dark,—and cloudy nights in the tropics are pretty black, —every scrap of food on the Rajah's yacht was silently lowered over the side into the river, and all the water poured after it—the tanks scrubbed and rinsed inside before fresh water was poured into them. Then a couple of canoes floated alongside with fresh food and fruits of every obtainable sort. The oil-tanks were measured, motors overhauled, ballast-tanks pumped out until the yacht was eighteen inches higher out of water.

While this was being done, Galt was playing what might have been called a championship game with the Rajah in the room which still retained some atmosphere of horror about it—a game which, as he intended, drew every dato in the neighborhood to watch it. So it happened that none of the Rajah's people were aware of anything unusual going on outside.

After Galt had won the somewhat protracted game, he and the Colonel returned to their rooms and apparently retired. Two hours later, there came a tapping at their window, and they passed out their luggage to Ling Foh, on a ladder outside. The Rossfords were gotten out of their suite on another ladder, fetching along the faithful *ayah,* who certainly would have been killed had she stayed.

As they started away from the palace, there were sounds of a scuffle behind them and a bubbling groan—after which one of their own Dyaks rejoined the party, wiping his *parang* on the grass as he located them. It was so dark that objects were invisible six feet away, but by holding hands, they managed to trail along after one of the Beroema Dyaks without making any noticeable disturbance and were helped into canoes which floated them alongside the yacht. From her deck they could see lights in the palace, through the trees which lined the bank, but there was no indication that their absence had been discovered. The anchors were hauled up by hand, as they were taking no risk of attracting attention with the capstan. Then the yacht began drifting slowly downstream—the pilot in the bow with a long bamboo pole to test the depth as they went along.

At the first bend in the river the long sand-bar forced them over close to the opposite bank, but the channel, though narrow, had more than sufficient depth, and they got around the bar without mishap. When six miles below the *kampong,* they turned on the search-light, and made faster progress. By the following night, they were fairly into the upper reaches of the great Kapuas River, and two days later arrived at Pontianak, where one of the Koninklijke boats was just leaving for Singapore.

When the Rajah found his yacht gone, in the morning, he smiled in a way that made his datos shiver, and sent a couple of canoes down the river to find her, with the bodies of the fugitives—but the men he sent never dared to come back while he lived; there was no trace of the yacht.

Jacqueline Rossford and the Colonel had become very good friends by this time. Just before they got to Singapore he asked her whether she and her parents had really known what they were up against.

"Hmph! If we hadn't known it, I'd never have taken the chance I did of getting out to the coast. We knew that bounder for the fiend he is—and thought, when I started, that all three of us were about through!" she answered gravely.

A wild exploit of Merlin O'Moore, a gilded youth afflicted with moon-madness and a lively yen for adventure.

By

BERTRAM ATKEY

Miss Brown's Jewels

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

MR. MERLIN O'MOORE of the Astoritz Hotel lit a fresh cigarette and lounged back on the big couch preparatory to enjoying a liqueur after dinner.

"Touch the bell, Molo," he said restfully, watching the smoke from his cigarette as it swam lazily upward.

Molossus, the big *dogue de Bordeaux,* rose and slouched heavily to a bell-push, against which he leaned his fearsome, wrinkled head for a moment. Then he padded back to his place near Merlin, curled up on a rug, and with pale eyes watched the door.

Hardly had the *dogue* settled comfortably down before the door opened quietly and Mr. Fin MacBatt, Merlin's lank, big-headed, blue-jowled valet, entered.

"You rang, sir?" inquired MacBatt, eying them with his curious air of sardonic deference.

"I did, MacBatt!" said Merlin. "You have something to say to me, I believe—if I correctly interpreted the somewhat muffled, remotely sullen remark you made as I came in from dinner."

Mr. MacBatt looked a little less gloomy, and even managed to infuse into his eyes a certain expression of friendliness as his gaze dropped to his arch-enemy Molossus, who, looking like a nightmare carved in fawn-colored iron, was regarding the valet intently.

"Yes, thank you, sir; I *did* wish to put a small matter to you, if you've no objection, sir," responded Mr. MacBatt.

"Very well—go ahead."

The gloomy-visaged MacBatt gave an excellent imitation of a nervous smile.

"The fact is, sir, I'm thinking of getting married," he said, and paused to note the effect of this statement upon his employer. There was no effect; none whatever.

"What has that to do with me, my dear MacBatt?" asked Merlin suavely.

THE valet's smile vanished and his hard eyes hardened still more.

"Well, sir—if I may say so, sir—you were good enough once to promise me—so to put it, sir—a present when I eventually married, if you remember the remark, sir."

"True, MacBatt. I remember it perfectly. And this is the fifth time you have tried to extract that present from me. It seems to me that you are a very fickle-minded young person, MacBatt. And I

seem to remember that at the same time I added to that promise a stipulation that I should approve of the lady of your choice."

"Oh, yes, certainly, sir. I remember perfectly," said MacBatt, with a rather wolfish grin.

"Since that time you have enlisted the aid of no fewer than five fair ladies in five desperate attempts to separate me from that present."

"*Five*, sir!" MacBatt's voice was one of admirably feigned incredulity.

"Even five," said Merlin gravely. "There was the half-caste girl who was maid to the wife of that Portuguese from South America staying in this hotel last year; there was the hawk-faced French lady of uncertain age and disposition introduced to you by Henri, the head-waiter of the Mediæval Hall; there was that simple-looking country girl from Gloucester, with the complexion of a dairymaid and the soul of a Russian she-wolf; there was that needle-witted lassie from Leith; and that buxom widow who kept the riverside hotel which required a little more capital.

"Who is the lady on *this* occasion, MacBatt? And what percentage of the plunder does she expect to get?" continued the multimillionaire playfully.

"The young lady is connected—in a way—with the stage, sir," replied MacBatt dourly.

Merlin showed a little more interest. *His* best friend also was connected with the stage—being, indeed, none other than Miss Blackberry Brown, the famous white-black comédienne.

"Yes? What does she do?" he queried.

"She's Miss Blackberry Brown's assistant dresser, sir," said MacBatt rather triumphantly. "And it's genuine love this time, sir."

"What is her name?"

"Dora Downton, sir."

"I see. And you and she are in love?"

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"And want to marry and take an inn?"

"Certainly, sir; a café—not an inn, sir."

"Very well. I'll think it over and—"

AN electric bell whirred somewhere in the suite. MacBatt excused himself and hurried to the door.

Merlin smiled as the big-head went.

"MacBatt has been having a bad time at poker with Henri and Company recently, Molo," he said to the *dogue*, "and he wants some ready money."

MACBATT, opening the door, found himself face to face with a gentleman of medium height, with a very thin, very pale, clean-shaven face and a head of silvery-white hair. He wore a very ancient but rather racy-looking, curly-brimmed silk hat, and an equally ancient, deep-caped Inverness overcoat which had faded from black to blackish green. He looked like an actor retired from the stage, to live upon his wits.

"I desire to speak with Mr. Merlin O'Moore," said the man in the Inverness, in a voice of singular sweetness. "Do me the courteous favor, therefore, to convey to him the information that Mr. Fitz-Percy—the bearer of an important message from none other than the world-famous Miss Blackberry Brown—awaits his good pleasure."

The saturnine MacBatt surveyed him in silence while he spoke. Then, infusing into his tone a touch of respect which had not been in his attitude when he first opened the door (inspired, doubtless, by the mention of his master's great friend, Miss Blackberry Brown, the famous white-black comédienne), he invited the caller to enter.

"Here's one of the smooth ones," muttered the valet, as he moved away to advise Merlin of the call. "Yes, one of the deadheads—or I'm a Mormon!"

Merlin O'Moore received the ancient deadhead with the affability of a man who feels lonely.

"If you do not mind talking while I drink a liqueur, Mr. Fitz-Percy, I should be glad to hear of any way in which I can be of service to you or Miss Brown," he said politely.

"Assuredly I do not, my dear sir," returned the Fitz-Percy, running an eye, undimmed by age or usage, over the tray. "Indeed, speaking of liqueurs, I may say that *I* have not yet taken my liqueur this evening. Absurd though it may seem to you, who probably have never been in such a fix in your life, I am confronted with such an alarming deficit in my—er—personal budget—that I had decided to postpone liqueuring until some other day."

He smiled blandly at Merlin, his hand absently straying to the back of a chair, delicately indicative of his willingness and preparedness to draw out that chair and occupy it. Merlin did the correct thing, from the Fitz-Percy's point of view—he invited his caller to join him—an invitation which was swiftly accepted.

"The letters, my dear boy? Oh, evidently some she valued."

"To take a liqueur with the famous Mr. Merlin O'Moore at the equally famous Astoritz is a privilege which few intelligent people would decline," said the Fitz-Percy, with a graceful little bow. He handed his coat and hat to MacBatt.

"Bestow them carefully, my good friend," said the deadhead, "for they have seen much honorable service and deserve careful and considerate handling in their declining years."

He sat down, with something in his air which suggested that he did not propose to rise again with undue precipitation.

"YOU are a friend of Miss Blackberry Brown?" inquired Merlin.

"I trust that I may truthfully say so," replied the deadhead. "I taught the child many things appertaining to her art. Her mother was a close friend of mine years ago, years ago—in the palmy days. I think the little one would be the first to claim me as a friend, and, at risk of laying myself open to the charge of vanity, I believe the child has yet a soft spot in her great heart for old Fitz-Percy."

"I am sure of it," murmured Merlin politely, though he had never heard Miss Brown mention this old family friend before.

"And I am proud to think that, desiring an utterly reliable messenger to you this evening, she did not hesitate to pour her troubles into the ever-sympathetic ear of this old battered one whom you see before you."

"Quite so," replied Merlin. "And what precisely was it she wanted done?"

The deadhead leisurely finished his liqueur.

"She wishes you—and if you care to avail yourself of my services, myself also—to take steps this evening to prevent, if possible, a particularly sordid robbery," he said calmly.

Mr. O'Moore sat up.

"Robbery!"

"Yes, indeed—a very bad and heartless case," said the Fitz-Percy tranquilly. "Miss Blackberry has just discovered that, early this evening, her assistant dresser, one Dora Downton, skipped gracefully into the never-never—taking with her a handful of Miss Blackberry's very best jewelry!"

MacBatt, hovering at the sideboard, flushed a blue-black flush, and broke in urgently:

"Is that true, sir?" he demanded.

"If, my good friend, you will telephone to Miss Brown's dresser at the Paliseum, she will confirm it," Fitz-Percy replied.

The glowering big-head turned to Merlin.

"The wedding's off, sir!" he said, curtly, and slid out of the room.

Outside the door he ground his teeth and shook his fist.

"Laugh!" he snarled. "That's it—laugh! This is the sixth go I've had for that wedding present; but watch out for the seventh, my laddie! Next time I try I'll get it—if I have to go through it and get married before I call on you for the coin!"

"IS that really so?" Merlin was meanwhile asking of the deadhead.

Fitz-Percy nodded.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "It is that which

I came round to see you about. Let me explain: This afternoon I had hoped to enjoy the privilege of inviting Miss Blackberry to take tea with me. Indeed, I invited her yesterday. Singularly enough, the approach of the tea-hour today discovered me completely—er—without funds. An embarrassing position, you will agree, my dear boy—most embarrassing—to one less accustomed than myself to such a difficult situation. Fortunately, I have acquired, in the course of an abnormally checkered career, a certain deftness in the art of grappling with such situations; so, borrowing a nimble twopence from a sympathetic landlady, I merely telephoned Miss Blackberry and pleaded neuralgia. It was when I called in at the Paliseum this evening to explain the matter in detail that I discovered the child and her head dresser mingling their tears. Shocked, nay, stunned, my dear boy, I comforted them and asked what trouble had befallen them. So I gleaned the news. The Downton girl seems to have made a clean sweep. That poor child's jewels were in a green leather case with a number of letters she valued. The Downton had taken case and all—"

Mr. O'Moore moved uneasily.

"Letters?" he inquired. "What letters?"

The huge *dogue* hunched near the couch pricked his cropped ears slightly at Merlin's tone. Was there or was there not a slight jar of jealousy in the millionaire's voice? But whatever Molossus' opinion may have been, the deadhead showed no sign of having observed it.

"The letters, my dear boy? Oh, I don't know. Evidently some which she valued," he replied carelessly. He knew well enough—none better—that Merlin was in love with Blackberry Brown, and that the letters were from him, but he preferred that Merlin should discover the fact for himself.

He turned, pointing through the big window.

"What do you say to our sallying out in search of the deft-fingered Downton, and recapturing the jewels and letters? It is a night after any adventurer's heart—believe me, there is a moon as big as a barn rising—and who knows but that we may achieve yet another success?"

Merlin slid off the couch.

"Certainly," said he; "ring for Fin." And he disappeared into his bedroom, whence a second or so later MacBatt followed him.

Mr. Fitz-Percy, left to himself, smiled, nodded, finished his liqueur, refilled, and began to pace the room.

"Curious, very curious, that the valet should have selected as his latest bride-to-be this light-fingered lady," he mused. "We must inquire into that aspect of the case—yes, indeed!"

He then proceeded to inquire into the aspect of his cigarette-case which, being empty, he filled with some of his patron's admirable cigarettes—frankly praising the millionaire's taste in tobacco, the while.

A QUARTER of an hour later the millionaire, the deadhead and the *dogue* had departed in search of the delightful Dora and what Dora had so expertly got away with.

Having seen his employer well away, the valet mixed himself the stimulant he considered he needed, and settled down sullenly to review the situation.

"If anyone asks my opinion," he said to himself, "I should say that it serves 'em damned well right! Here Blackberry Brown—earning more money for singing a few songs and doing a white-black dance every night, than she knows how to spend, and owning so much jewelry what with the things the Boss gives her, that if she put it all on she'd have to use crutches to help her carry it—goes and leaves a box full of it lying about in her dressing-room to tempt a poor little kid that's as much stuck on Mr. O'Moore's valet as her missus is on Mr. O'Moore! Can you wonder that Dora does a bunk with the box? *I* can't! We may be 'umble, but damn it, we're 'uman—me and Dora." He took a pull at his glass—and suddenly recalled that this was his night "off" and that he had an appointment to meet the doubtful Dora at nine o'clock.

He stood up sharply.

"Of course I don't suppose for a minute that she'll be there," he reflected. "She's vanished for good—if she's the girl I take her for. But—well, *he* wont be back for hours yet, and I might as well have a look around. After all, I don't know. Put it this way—supposing the girl's so much in love with me."—he glanced at himself in the glass,—"that she's simply pinched the jewels so that she can bring a sort of dowry to me—though I must say that Dora never struck me as being the sort of girl likely to get bats in her belfry over anybody but Dora Downton. Still—while I aint any curly-wooled matinée idol, I aint so bad!

"Look here, Gus, I don't want those two to see me here—understand?"

I may look a bit tough, perhaps, but lots of women like a tough-looking man. Anyhow, I'll have a look around. May as well see how the land lies."

DULY dressed, and merely pausing for one swift "one" with Henri (on the hotel) as he passed the Mediæval Hall, MacBatt, dreaming all sorts of complex and idle dreams regarding dowries and the like, presently arrived at a retired little underground grot and wine-bar which was the usual trysting-place of himself and Dora. Taking a chair behind a discreet screen in a discreet corner, the big-head beckoned Giuseppe, the waiter—more usually known to his clientele as "Gus."

Gus, it seemed, had news for him.

"I beena look-a-out for you, Mistera MacaBatta, yaes," he said. "Thees message come at commencementa of evening today." He passed a crumpled note. MacBatt tore it open and, as he half-expected, discovered it to be a line from Miss Downton explaining that she had been detained and asking him to call for her at an address which she gave.

MacBatt countermanded the refreshment he had ordered.

"Leave it, Gus," he said. "I'm in a hurry."

Gus grinned and accepted a shilling.

"That is all raighta," he said. "Thees—"

He stopped short, staring round as the big-head ducked violently behind the screen, obviously to escape the notice of two newcomers who were descending the stairs—none other than Merlin O'Moore and the Fitz-Percy. They proceeded to occupy a table at the other end of the room, and MacBatt beckoned Gus back.

"Look here, Gus, I don't want those two men to see me here—understand? Go across and keep them occupied till I'm out of it."

The ever-obliging Gus nodded.

"Rely-a upon me, Mistera MacaBatta!" he said reassuringly, and hastened to attend the others.

"That's what I like about old Gus," mused MacBatt, watching cautiously. "You can rely on him. He's a good little Italiano, is Gus."

Then, observing that the wily Neapolitan had succeeded in drawing the attention of both Merlin and the deadhead to something interesting in the wine-list, MacBatt, shielding his face with a handkerchief, slid swiftly upstairs and out.

"Good business," he said, with a sort of sardonic satisfaction, surveying Merlin's car waiting outside; and hailing a passing taxi, he ordered the licensed brigand at the wheel to drive to an address near Putney—the address given in the note from Miss Downton. . . . .

But MacBatt was not the only one who had been busy since the deadhead had broken the sad news concerning the deft-fingered Dora. Messieurs O'Moore and Fitz-Percy, for instance, had permitted no vegetation to flourish beneath their motor-tires. They had interviewed pretty Miss Brown between "turns" at the Paliseum and the Colladium Theaters of Variety, and while Merlin had soothed and comforted her, the wily Mr. Fitz-Percy made inquiries among those most likely to know—Blackberry's other dresser, the stage doorkeeper, and so forth—and had gleaned a few suggestions as to Miss Downton's haunts.

A quick, though fruitless, run through several of these had finally landed them at the retired little wine-vault from which their inopportune arrival had speeded the sardonic MacBatt.

They proceeded to make further inquiries —this time of the reliable Gus. That "reliable" individual, who was an extremely shrewd judge not of character but of the depth of a customer's pocket and the probable extent of his generosity, speedily realized that he had to do with men of means. The careless way in which Merlin allowed the deadhead to order a bottle of the most absurdly expensive vintage in the vault, and especially the offhand way in which Merlin ignored the wine when Gus had reverently poured it, convinced the waiter of that.

So when presently the deadhead suggested tentatively that possibly Gus could tell them whether a young lady—here he described Miss Downton in detail—had been in, or was likely to be in, that evening, the reliable Gus, with a swiftness and accuracy that would have staggered MacBatt, proceeded to tell all he knew (and a good deal that he did not know) about the fair Dora and her customary cavalier, "Mistera MacaBatta."

"And where, my good young fellow, do you think Miss Downton may be found now?" suavely inquired the deadhead, exchanging glances with Merlin.

Gus did not know—at least, he said he thought he did not know. It was so difficult to remember. He was a busy man—as the signors could see for themselves. He was also a poor man, and had to work so very hard to make a little money, that he could not always remember things.

Merlin understood, and without delay he put a sovereign on the table.

"Can you remember if I give you this?" he asked.

Gus could. Promptly he reeled off the address he had read over MacBatt's shoulder when the valet had looked at Miss Downton's note and, sliding the sovereign expertly into his pocket, he unblushingly gave them full details of the circumstances in which he had learned the address, including a brief description of the big-head's hasty flight and adding that, in his opinion, arrived at after a careful study of the couple extending over some weeks, the delightful Dora loved the dour MacBatt about as much as she loved work.

MERLIN and his hawkwitted old companion were well on their way to Putney before the deadhead voiced a doubt which had been with him ever since they left the wine-bar.

"What, my dear boy, are your views about the honesty of the good MacBatt?" he inquired.

Merlin's views were caustic, and soon expressed.

"He's much too shrewd to steal or help steal anything from me or my friends on a small scale. If he could get away with an amount that would keep him in complete comfort for the rest of his life, he would. But not for less," said the millionaire. "I would trust him with five hundred or a thousand pounds in cash, but I should be extremely unwise to do so with ten thousand."

"Judging from my own short experience of Mr. MacBatt, I am in complete agreement with you," said the deadhead thoughtfully. "And therefore it is difficult to understand why he has deliberately gone to visit the doubtful Dora—knowing her to be a candidate for Holloway Prison."

"Perhaps," said Merlin sarcastically, "he loves her so much that his emotions have drowned his prudence."

Fitz-Percy laughed.

"Is that quite like MacBatt, my dear boy?" he asked incredulously. "However, we shall soon see. It may be that he will have a perfect reason." He looked up at the bulging yellow moon. "At any rate, he and his lady, between them, have given you an object upon which to work off your moon-restlessness (which Miss Blackberry Brown tells me you share with her) this very charming evening."

Merlin nodded as they slid over the bridge, and pulled up so that they could inquire from an adjacent policeman the whereabouts of the place they sought.

They had not long to seek—within ten minutes of crossing the bridge they had arrived in a quiet, lane-like by-road, badly lighted, and sparsely built upon; and they stopped some thirty yards from a house which, surrounded by trees and shrubs, lay well back from the road.

There were no lights visible in this house, and they approached it very quietly, with Molossus at heel. They entered the gate, passed along a short drive and found themselves at the front door. Here Merlin paused, sniffing.

"What is it, laddie?" whispered Fitz-Percy.

"Petrol. Somebody has poured or spilled some petrol near here within the last quarter of an hour or so. The smell doesn't hang about long out in the open. They may have gone, after all. Probably the fair Dora, or her companions, if any, poured some petrol into their tank,"—he pointed to the tracks of motor-wheels, plain in the moonlight,—"and upset some as they poured it. If so, they haven't been gone long, but it looks as if we have just missed—"

He broke off abruptly as a huge black chow dog came dashing round the corner of the house, snarling rabidly.

Merlin released Molossus, and the black dog saw, too late, what it had thoughtlessly charged into. It never had a chance. There was a hideous snarling flurry, one keen yelp choked off halfway, and then the pale-eyed *dogue* brought the chow back to Merlin, very much as a retriever brings a rabbit back to a keeper.

There was no sign from the house.

The Downton trio were in the jewelry department, the fair Dora absorbed in selecting the best articles in stock.

THEY reconnoitered completely round the place, without discovering a light in any window or hearing a sound of any occupant. So they broke in through a window at the back, and scouted swiftly through the house behind a big electric torch. A smell of cigar-smoke still hung in the atmosphere, but it seemed the birds were flown or not at home.

"They're gone," said Merlin, while in one of the front sitting-rooms.

"Ar-rrgh!" remarked somebody or something from a big wardrobe-like cabinet in a corner.

Molossus wheeled to it, sniffing and snarling softly about it. The deadhead turned the key and swung back the door.

Something with a canvas bag over its head and so swathed in box-cord that it looked like a mummy, fell helplessly forward into the arms of the explorer.

But it was not a mummy—it was merely Mr. MacBatt, bound, gagged and bagged, with two red eyes that would shortly be black and a lump upon his bulging brow the size and shape of a large gherkin.

They unpacked him—and considerably to their relief found that he was conscious. At any rate, he spoke.

"Brandy," he said curtly.

Gently they broke it to him that there was none.

"Whisky, then," he said, groping for the flask Merlin offered him. He drew heavily upon it—very heavily indeed. But it did him good. It cleared his head. He stared for a moment, then hastily ran through his pockets.

"They've got my keys, sir," he said. "What's the time?"

"Nearly eleven o'clock," Merlin replied.

"Then I've been in the box there twenty minutes and they've been gone nearly a quarter of an hour. Have you got the car, sir?"

Merlin nodded. The badly jarred bighead exclaimed: "Then we'd better follow them, sir. They mean to break into the Stores and fair strip the place!"

They understood then, and a second later were making a rush for the car.

AS has been explained heretofore, the millionaire practically owned, among other things, a huge departmental store near Oxford Circus. Since he occasionally needed things from this highly convenient piece of property, and was in the habit of sending MacBatt to get them, day or night, the bulbous-browed valet was supplied with a master-key for use at night. Anything Merlin needed from the Stores, therefore, no matter at what hour of the night, was always obtainable by the simple process of sending MacBatt to take it, leaving a signed *chit* either with the watchman or in place of the articles taken, to be discovered and charged to Merlin by the assistants in the morning.

Now, it appeared that Miss Dora Downton, who presumably knew of this arrangement, and her friends—two leather-hided, rubber-souled gentlemen, being her brother and her real *fiancé,* explained MacBatt—were about to visit the store, enter by means of the valet's key, sandbag the watchman, and practically devastate the jewelry department at their leisure.

The successful ravishing of Miss Blackberry Brown's jewels, it seemed, had merely been a preliminary canter, so to speak, to the real effort.

"I see," said Merlin as he switched on his engine. "We ought to arrive just at the most useful moment."

He started the car and MacBatt lay back to reflect upon his present situation and con over the story which, later on, he purposed to present to his employer.

MacBatt seriously considered that he had been shamefully treated.

He had followed Miss Downton on to Putney with some vague idea that she was so very much in love with him that she had stolen Blackberry Brown's jewels with the intention of investing the proceeds in some way (unknown to and unguessed at by the cadaverous big-head) which might benefit him as well as herself.

This intention would not be at all honest, of course. But, then, neither was Mr. MacBatt, and, in any case, he proposed to explain to Merlin that the reason he had followed Miss Downton was because he hoped to show her the error of her ways, get the jewels back and restore them to Merlin's little friend, Blackberry Brown. It was a good reason and looked sound to MacBatt—he did not see how Mr. O'Moore was going to deny it.

Immensely to his amazement, however, his dream had been finished with extraordinary swiftness—practically, indeed, at the moment he had entered the drawing-room of the Putney house, to which he had been admitted by a deep-jawed, tight-lipped young man who was a stranger to him.

"Ah—you're the MacBatt man?" that individual had said. "We're expecting you. Dora wants to see you; step right in—yes, she's in there." He had indicated the drawing-room. "Step right in!"

And the unsuspecting MacBatt had stepped "right in"—right into a slam across his bulging brow with a sandbag that felled him like a poleaxed mule.

HE did not entirely lose consciousness. Indeed he retained just enough sense to feign unconsciousness, and so was dimly aware of fluttering fingers that searched his pockets for his keys, and presently found them, and of voices discussing the raid upon the store which was to follow the successful theft of the keys. Then the valet had felt himself bound, gagged, bagged and put away where Merlin and the deadhead had found him.

Yes, on the whole, reflected MacBatt, he

was satisfied. As the thing would appear to Merlin and Blackberry, he had endeavored to recover the jewels and nearly lost his life in his heroic attempt. That was good enough. If Blackberry—and possibly Merlin also—did not do something pretty tolerable in the reward line, MacBatt would be somewhat seriously disappointed in them. And as for the delightful Dora and her brace of man-eaters—well, he had not yet finished with them. The big-head tenderly fingered the lump on his brow and with a dour ferocity began to gloat over the coming attack upon the looters at the store. . . . .

But—and it was perhaps as well for the Downton trio—Mr. MacBatt was not invited to contribute his personal views towards the strategy which Merlin and the deadhead purposed using to ensnare the looters, and consequently the whole thing went through with such simplicity and complete success that there was practically no need whatever for physical force.

Running slowly through a thoroughfare of clubs and restaurants, Merlin picked up two hefty naval officers, friends of his on leave, who were "looking round" the livelier parts of London for whatever might be visible; a little farther on, near the Astoritz, he took aboard an inspector of police and a hugeous Irish constable, also friends of his. Then he turned the heavily laden car storeward.

They left the constable in charge of the small but good three-seater motor of the looters which they found in a street on to which the back entrance of the store gave, and then, guided by the big-headed MacBatt, they entered the building quietly.

As expected, the Downton trio were in the jewelry department, and the fair Dora was so absorbed in selecting the best articles in stock, and her brace of bravos were so busy packing away what she selected, that they were not aware of the softly moving little cohort of bloodhounds tracking them until they were practically surrounded. One nearly got away. He dashed wildly for an exit behind one of the counters, but Molossus brought him back a second or so later, loudly demanding that a doctor should be sent for at once to cauterize what Molo had done to his leg. Dora and her *fiancé* surrendered without argument. They were much too shrewd, it seemed, to import any firearms into the matter. They had revolvers, but very intelligently had left them in their motor—a piece of foresight which had an effect upon the sentences subsequently doled out to them by the judge before whom they were invited to explain matters.

The watchman was found temporarily stunned, but otherwise in good working order, in the leather-goods department—from which the thieves had taken the suit-cases in which they were packing the jewels.

LATE that night, after a little supper in Merlin's suite at the Astoritz, Mr. MacBatt was invited to tell the company present —Merlin, Blackberry Brown, and, of course, the Fitz-Percy—all he knew about the affair.

MacBatt did so readily; he had had plenty of time to prepare his narrative. Whether they believed his story or not, it is difficult to say. But there was a convincing ring about his grim concluding statement:

"I did my best to get Miss Brown's jewels back for her. I thought that girl Downton was in love with me—not knowing she was an expert jewel-thief—and I thought I could persuade her to give them up. I didn't expect her to get her two blackguards to lay in wait for me. If I had, I should have taken a few tools along with me that would have put this lump"—he gingerly touched his brow—"and a few more like it, where they belonged—not on *my* head!"

Apparently they believed him.

At any rate Blackberry was good for a tenner—deftly passed as she left the suite; Merlin remarked that he would have a chat with him next day—it produced another tenner; and the jaunty, chronically broke old Fitz-Percy bestowed the inestimable privilege of a frank and hearty hand-shake, an approving pat on the shoulder, and a sonorous, "Well done, MacBatt!" upon him; even the sharp-set MacBatt expected no more from that genial old tale-teller.

ON the whole, however, MacBatt was satisfied. The downfall of Dora had cost him a good wedding present, but it had brought him two useful little tenners, and a considerable access of reputation.

"Which I could do very well with," as he subsequently remarked to his friend Henri of the Mediæval Hall, over a quiet whisky and soda. "But I lost my girl!" he concluded ruefully.

Henri grinned. "That was the best of al. the luck—*hein?*" he said.

TARZAN, Lord of the Jungle

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

The Story So Far:

UPON the broad back of Tantor the elephant dozed that strange being Tarzan—English boy who by curious chance had been brought up by the giant apes of Africa, had renounced civilization and become lord of the jungle.

Deadly peril threatened Tarzan: for journeying toward the Abyssinian hinterland came the Arab sheik Ibn Jad, seeking to loot a rumored treasure city; and hunters from this Arab camp spied Tantor lolling in the forest shade.

An Arab hunter fired at Tantor—and missed; but the startled elephant plunged off headlong through the forest; and Tarzan, knocked senseless to the ground by an overhanging limb, was made captive by the Arabs, and was about to be murdered by the Sheik's brother Tollog, when Tantor, returning, snatched the tent from over the unequal combat, hurled Tollog into the jungle, and made off with Tarzan.

And now a new menace threatened the peace of Tarzan's domain. Two American hunters, Blake and Stimbol, had arrived with their safari of negro porters. Because of Stimbol's brutality to the blacks, the two had quarreled, and had decided next day to divide the safari and go their separate ways, Blake with his camera and Stimbol with his wanton rifle.

Tarzan, however, ordered Stimbol back to the coast, but granted Blake permission to continue making camera studies of the wilderness folk. The two Americans next day set forth on their several

Tarzan was furious at the thieving Bedouins. . . . . Suddenly an arrow pierced the heart of a treasure-bearer, and a hollow voice sounded from the jungle: "For every jewel a drop of blood!"

In this most engaging of all romances, modern, medieval and primitive men are daringly brought into conflict in a splendidly dramatic climax.

ways, but Adventure was by no means done with them. For Stimbol, deserted by his blacks, fell into the hands of the Arab raider Ibn Jad. And to Blake came an even more extraordinary experience when, wandering lost and alone in a remote mountainous region, he was halted by two negroes clad in a curious medieval costume, and taken through a tunnel and to a strange castle. A portcullis was lifted—and he found himself in the presence of mail-clad knights speaking the English of the Crusades.

For seven hundred years, he learned, the descendants of four wandering shipwrecked companies of English crusaders had maintained themselves in this hidden valley, believing themselves ringed about by the Saracens. They had kept up their ancient manners, customers and speech. And they received Blake as a fellow-countryman, though his speech and allusions were indeed strange to them. They even instructed him in the use of their medieval arms so well that Blake, upon the advice of his special friend the noble young Sir Richard Montmorency, accepted a challenge from Sir Malud, a knight who was jealous of the favor shown Blake by the Princess Guinalda.

Meanwhile Tarzan had rescued from the attack of a lion one Zeyd, a young man of Ibn Jad's party, who had been driven out of it because of the enmity of the powerful Fahd, his rival for Ateja, the Sheik's daughter. Afterward Tarzan made his way to Ibn Jad's camp. And the Sheik compelled Stimbol to attempt Tarzan's murder as the ape-man lay asleep in one of the tents. But Tarzan learned of the plot—and circumvented it in grim fashion: he captured his old enemy Tollog and left him bound and gagged in his own place; and it was Tollog that was stabbed by Stimbol, and buried as Tarzan by the Arabs—while Tarzan himself, trailing his friend Blake, came to the guarded entrance to the Valley of the Sepulcher.

During this time Blake, casting aside his buckler and depending on the point rather than the edge of his sword, won his duel with Sir Malud—and won the hearts of the onlookers by his generosity toward the vanquished. So he was chosen as one of the champions in the Great Tourney, when the knights of the City of Nímmr met the champions of the City of the Sepulcher—for these castaway Englishmen were divided into two none-too-friendly camps.

By a scant margin the knights of Nímmr won the Great Tourney, but the affair ended in deadly earnest, for King Bohun of the City of the Sepulcher, infatuated by Guinalda, captured her by a trick and carried her off, with Blake and the other knights of Nímmr in furious pursuit. . . . .

Perhaps Bohun would not have ventured so far had he known that in his absence a raiding party of Ibn Jad's Arabs had gained entrance to his castle and pillaged it! Nor did he know of the strange superman Tarzan, who, trailing Blake, had entered the Valley of the Sepulcher, made friends with the knights of Nimmr and now

"I suppose here is where I get mine," said Blake. "Get thine! What meanest thou?" demanded the older man.

joined them in the running fight which followed.

Blake himself it was who rescued Guinalda; this outrage, he felt, justified the use of his modern revolver, and the weapon proved deadly indeed against medieval armor. With the recaptured Princess across his saddle-bow, he gained the shelter of the forest,—the ill-famed Wood of the Leopards,—and they dismounted to rest. There it was that they were set upon by Ibn Jad's returning raiders, and Guinalda was carried off by the Arabs, while Blake was left bound to become the prey of the leopards.

Tarzan, however, following Blake after bearing a gallant share in the battle, found him thus bound and released him. The two at once set out on the trail of the Arabs; but when the dividing tracks showed that the raiders had split into two parties (the Arab Fahd had stolen Guinalda from the others), the two pursuers in their quandary thought it best to part company also, one following each party. But still Blake's ill luck attended him; he was overtaken and cast chained into a dungeon by Bohun's knights while Tarzan alone followed the trail of Guinalda and her captors. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AS Tarzan followed the spoor of Ibn Jad, a hundred stalwart Waziri moved northward from the water-hole of the smooth round rocks, upon the old trail of the Beduins.

With them was Zeyd, who had begged so hard to accompany them when they passed the village where he had been waiting, that at last the sub-chief consented.

When Tarzan overtook the 'Aarab, they had already turned south around the eastern end of the Mountains of the Sepulcher. He saw the bags they carried, and the evident concern with which Ibn Jad watched and guarded them, and he shrewdly guessed

"Go away," snarled Toyat. "This is Toyat's she!" "It is Go-yad's!" replied the other, advancing—a picture of bestial rage.

that the wily old thief had indeed found the treasure he had sought; but he saw no evidence of the presence of the Princess; and Stimbol, too, was missing.

Tarzan was furious. He was furious at the thieving Beduins for daring to invade his country, and he was angry at himself because he felt that in some way he had been tricked.

Tarzan had his own methods of inflicting punishment upon his enemies; and he had, as well, his own grim and grisly sense of humor. When men were doing wrong, it pleased him to take advantage of whatever might cause them the greatest suffering, and in this he was utterly ruthless with his enemies.

He was confident that the 'Aarab thought him dead, and it did not suit his whim to reveal their error to them at this time; but it did accord with his fancy to let them commence to feel the weight of his displeasure and taste the first fruits of their villainy.

MOVING silently through the trees, Tarzan paralleled the course of the 'Aarab. They were often plainly visible to him, but none saw Tarzan, nor dreamed that savage eyes were watching their every move.

Five men carried the treasure, though its weight was not so great but that one powerful man might have borne it for a short distance. Tarzan watched these men most often, these and the Sheik Ibn Jad.

The trail was wide, and the Sheik walked beside one of those who bore the treasure. It was very quiet in the jungle. Even the 'Aarab, usually garrulous among themselves, were quiet, for they were very tired, the day was hot, and they were unused to the burdens they were forced to carry since Batando had robbed them of their slaves. . . . .

Of a sudden, without warning and with only the swish of its flight through the air to announce it, an arrow passed through the neck of the Beduin who walked beside Ibn Jad.

With a scream the man lunged forward upon his face; and the 'Aarab, warned by their Sheik, cocked their muskets and prepared to receive an attack; but look where they would, they saw no sign of an enemy. They waited, listening, but there was no sound other than the droning of insects and the occasional raucous cry of a bird; but when they moved on again, leaving their fellow dead upon the trail, a hollow voice called to them from a distance.

"For every jewel a drop of blood!" it wailed dismally, for its author knew well the intensely superstitious nature of the desert-dwellers, and how best to affright them. . . . .

It was a shaken column that continued on its way; nor was there any mention of making camp until almost sunset, so anxious were they all to leave behind this gloomy wood and the horrid afrit that inhabited it; but the forest persisted, and at length it became necessary to make camp.

Here the camp-fires and food relieved the tension upon their overwrought nerves, and their spirits had revived to such an extent that there were again singing and laughter in the *menzil* of Ibn Jad.

The old Sheik himself sat in his *mukaad* surrounded by the five bags of treasure, one of which he had opened, and beneath the light of a lantern was fondling the contents. About him were his cronies, sipping their coffee.

Something fell heavily upon the ground before the *beyt* and rolled into the *mukaad* among them. It was the severed head of a man! Glaring up at them were the dead eyes of their fellow, whose corpse they had left lying in the trail earlier in the day.

Horror-struck, spellbound, they sat staring at the gruesome thing when, from out of the dark forest, came the hollow voice again:

"For every jewel a drop of blood!"

IBN JAD shook as a man with ague. The men of the camp gathered close together in front of the Sheik's *beyt*. Each grasped a musket in one hand and searched for his *hijab* with the other, for each carried several of these amulets; and that in demand this night was the one written against the *jân*, for certainly none but a jinni could have done this thing.

Hirfa stood half within the *mukaad* staring at the dead face, while Ateja crouched upon a sleeping-mat in the quarters of the women. Ateja did not see the back curtain rise, nor the figure that crept within. It was dark in the quarters of the harem, for little light filtered in from the lanterns in the *mukaad*.

Ateja felt a hand clapped across her mouth at the same instant that another grasped her by the shoulder. A voice whispered in her ear: "Make no sound! I shall not hurt thee. I am a friend to Zeyd. Tell me the truth, and no harm will befall you or him. Where is the woman Ibn Jad brought from the valley?"

He who held her placed his ear close to her lips and removed his hand from them. Ateja trembled like a leaf. She had never seen a jinni; she could not see the creature that leaned close above her; but she knew that it was one of those fearsome creatures of the night.

"Answer!" whispered the voice in her ear. "If thou wouldst save Zeyd, speak and speak the truth!"

"Fahd took the woman from our *menzil* last night," she gasped. "I do not know where they went."

As it came, in silence the presence left the side of the terrified girl. When Hirfa sought her a moment later, she found Ateja in a swoon.

CHAPTER XXII

Captive of the Ape

BLAKE squatted upon the stone floor in the utter darkness of his dungeon. After his jailers had left, he had spoken to his fellow prisoners, but only one had replied, and his gibbering tones assured the American that the poor wretch had been reduced to stark insanity by the horrors of imprisonment in this foul hole.

The young man, accustomed to freedom, light, activity, already felt the hideousness of his position and wondered how long it would be before he too gibbered incoherently at the end of a rusting chain; how long before he too was but mildewed bones upon a clammy floor.

In utter darkness and in utter silence there is no time, for there is no means by which one may compute the passage of time. How long Blake crouched in the stifling air of his dank dungeon he could not know. He slept once; but whether he had dozed for an instant or slept the clock around, he could not even hazard a guess. And of what moment was it? A second, a day, a year meant nothing here. There were only two things that could mean anything to Jim Blake now—freedom or death. He knew that it would not be long before he would welcome the latter.

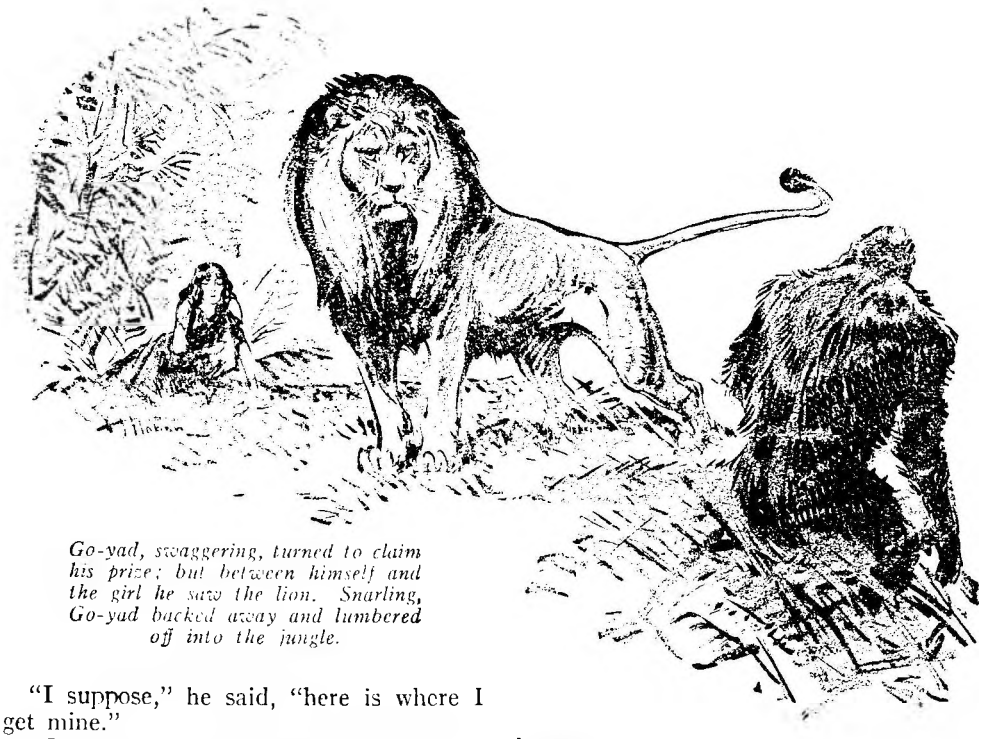
A sound disturbed the silence of the buried vault. Footsteps were approaching. Blake listened as they came nearer. Presently he discerned a flickering light that grew in intensity until a pine torch illuminated the interior of his prison. At first it blinded his eyes so that he could not see who came bearing the light; but whoever it was crossed and stopped before him.

Blake looked up, his eyes more accustomed to the unwonted brilliance, and saw two knights standing before him.

"It is he," said one.

"Dost thou not know us, Sir Black Knight?" demanded the other.

Blake looked at him closely. A slow smile lighted his face, as he saw a great bandage wrapped about the neck of the younger of the two.



Go-yad, swaggering, turned to claim his prize; but between himself and the girl he saw the lion. Snarling, Go-yad backed away and lumbered off into the jungle.

"I suppose," he said, "here is where I get mine."

"Get thine! What meanest thou?" demanded the older man.

"Well, you two certainly haven't come to pin any medals on me, Sir Wildred," said Blake with a wry smile.

"Thou speakest in riddles," said Wildred. "We have come to free thee, that the young King may not bring disgrace upon the Knights of the Sepulcher by carrying out his wicked will with thee. Sir Guy and I heard that he would burn thee at the stake, and we said to one another that while blood flowed in our bodies, we would not let so valorous a knight be thus shamelessly wronged by any tyrant."

As he spoke, Wildred stooped and with a great rasp commenced filing upon the iron rivets that held the hinged anklet in place.

"You are going to help me to escape!" exclaimed Blake. "But suppose you are discovered—will not the King punish you?"

"We shall not be discovered," said Wildred, "though I would take that chance for so noble a sir knight as thou. Sir Guy is upon the outer barbican this night, and 'twill be no trick to get thee that far. He can pass thee through, and thou canst make thy way down the mountain side and cross to Nimmr. We cannot get thee through the city gates, for these are held by two of Bohun's basest creatures; but perchance upon the morrow Sir Guy or I may find the way to ride out upon the plain with a led horse, and that we shall if so it hap that it be possible."

"Tell us of a thing that hath filled us with questioning," said Sir Guy.

"I don't follow you," said Blake.

"Thou didst, and mighty prettily too, take the Princess Guinalda from under the very nose of Bohun," continued Guy; "and yet later she was seen in the clutches of the Saracens. How came this to pass?"

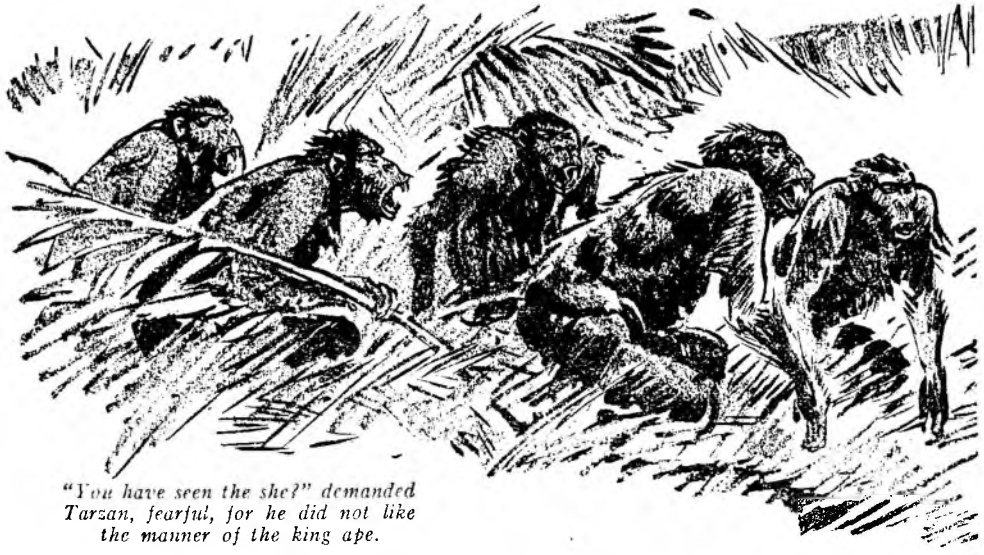
"She was seen?" anxiously demanded Blake. "Where?"

"Beyond the outer barbican she was, and the Saracens carried her away through the pass that leadeth no man knoweth where," said Wildred.

Blake told them of all that had transpired since he had taken Guinalda from Bohun, and by the time he had finished, the rivets had been cut and he stood again a free man.

Wildred smuggled him through secret passages to his own quarters, and there gave him food and new clothing and a suit of armor, for now that they knew he was riding out over the pass into the strange country, they had decided that he could only be permitted to do so properly armored, armed and mounted.

It was midnight when Wildred smuggled Blake through the castle gate and rode with him toward the outer barbican. Here Sir Guy met them, and a few minutes later Blake bade these chivalrous enemies good-



"You have seen the she?" demanded Tarzan, fearful, for he did not like the manner of the king ape.

by, and mounted on a powerful charger, his own colors flying from his lance-tip, rode beneath the portcullis and out upon the starlit road that led to the summit of the Mountains of the Sepulcher.

TOYAT, the king ape, picked a succulent beetle from the decaying bark of a fallen tree. About him were the great savage people of his tribe. It was afternoon, and the apes loafed in the shade of great trees beside a little natural clearing in the jungle. They were content and at peace with all the world.

Coming toward them were three people, but the wind blew from the apes toward the people, and so neither Toyat nor any of his fellows caught the scent-spoor of the Tarmangani. The jungle trail was soft with damp mold, for it had rained the night before, and the feet of the three gave forth no sound that the apes heard as yet. Then too, the three were moving cautiously, for they had not eaten for two days and they were hunting for food.

There was a gray old man, emaciated by fever, tottering along with the aid of a broken tree-branch; there was a wicked-eyed Beduin carrying a long musket; and the third was a girl whose strange garments of splendid stuffs were torn and soiled. Her face was streaked with dirt and was drawn and thin; yet still it was a face of almost heavenly beauty. She walked with an effort, and though she sometimes stumbled from weariness, never did she lose a certain regalness of carriage, or lower the haughty elevation of her well-molded chin.

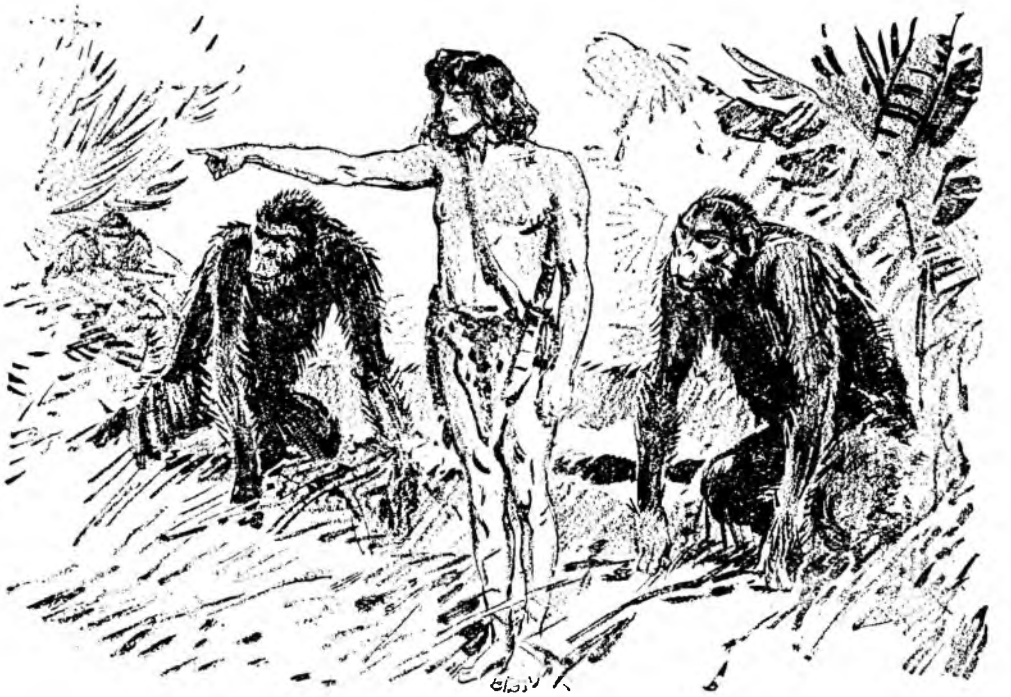
The Beduin was in the lead. It was he who first sighted a young ape playing at the edge of the clearing, farthest from the great bulls of the tribe of Toyat. Here was food! The Beduin raised his ancient weapon and took aim. He pressed the trigger, and the ensuing roar mingled with the scream of pain and terror that burst from the wounded *balu*.

Instantly the great bulls leaped to action. Would they flee the feared and hated thunder-stick of the Tarmangani, or would they avenge the hurting of the *balu?* Who might know? Today they might do the one; tomorrow, under identical circumstances, the other. But today they chose vengeance.

LED by Toyat, growling hideously, the bulls lumbered forward to investigate. It was this sight that met the horrified gaze of the three as they followed up Fahd's shot to learn if at last they were to eat, or if they must plod on hopelessly, weakened by the hunger gnawing at their vitals.

Fahd and Stimbol turned and bolted back down the trail, the Arab, in his cowardly haste, pushing Guinalda to one side and hurling her to the ground. The leading bull, seeing the girl, leaped upon her and was about to sink his teeth into her neck when Toyat seized him and dragged him from her, for Toyat had recognized her for what she was, and the king ape had once seen another Tarmangani she, and had decided that he would like to have one as a wife.

The other ape, a huge bull, seeing that Toyat wanted the prey, and angered by the bullying manner of the king, immediately



decided to contest Toyat's right to what he had first claimed. Baring his fangs, he advanced menacingly toward Toyat, who had dragged the girl back into the clearing.

Toyat snarled back at him. "Go away," said Toyat. "This is Toyat's she."

"It is Go-yad's," replied the other, advancing.

Toyat backed away. "I kill!" he screamed.

Go-yad came on—and suddenly Toyat seized Guinalda in his hairy arms and fled into the jungle. Behind him, bellowing and screaming, pursued Go-yad.

The Princess Guinalda, wide-eyed with horror, fought to free herself from the hideous hairy creature that was bearing her off. She had never seen nor even heard of such a thing as a great ape, and she thought them now some hideous low inhabitants of that outer world she had always been taught consisted of encircling armies of Saracens, and beyond, at a great distance, a wonderful country known as England. What else was there she had not even tried to guess, but evidently it was a horrid place peopled by hideous creatures, including dragons.

Toyat had run no great distance when he realized that he could not escape while burdened with the she, and as he had no mind to give her up, he turned suddenly and faced the roaring Go-yad. Go-yad did not stop. He came on frothing at the mouth, bristling, snarling—a picture of bestial savagery, power and frenzied rage.

Toyat, relinquishing his hold upon the girl, advanced to meet the charge of his rebellious subject, while Guinalda, weakened by unaccustomed exertion and lack of nourishment, appalled by the hideous circumstances of her plight, sank panting to the ground.

Toyat and Go-yad, immersed in the prospect of battle, were oblivious to all else. Could Guinalda have taken advantage of this temporary forgetfulness of her, she might have escaped; but she was too stunned, too exhausted to take advantage of her opportunity. Spellbound, fascinated by the horror of it, she watched these terrifying, primordial man-beasts preparing to do battle for possession of her.

NOR was Guinalda the sole witness of these savage preliminaries—from the concealment of a bush behind which he lay another watched the scene with steady, interested eyes. Absorbed by their own passion, neither Toyat nor Go-yad noted the occasional movement of the outer leaves of the bush behind which this other watcher lay, a movement imparted by the body of the watcher with each breath and with each slightest change of position.

Perhaps the watcher discovered no sporting interest in the impending duel, for just as the two apes were about to engage,

he arose and stepped into the open—a great black-maned lion whose yellow coat gleamed golden in the sunlight.

Toyat saw him first, and with a growl of rage turned and fled, leaving his adversary and their prize to whatever fate Providence might hold in store for them.

Go-yad, thinking his rival had abandoned the field through fear of him, beat loudly upon his breast and roared forth the victory cry of the bull ape; then, swaggering as became a victor and a champion, he turned to claim the prize.

BETWEEN himself and the girl he saw the lion standing, gazing with serious mien straight into his eyes. Go-yad halted. Who would not have? The lion was within springing distance, but he was not crouched. Go-yad backed away, snarling, and when the lion made no move to follow, the great ape suddenly turned and lumbered off into the jungle, casting many a backward glance in the direction of the great cat until intervening foliage shut him from his view.

Then the lion turned toward the girl. Poor little princess! Hopeless, resigned, she lay upon the ground staring at this new engine of torture and destruction. The king of beasts surveyed her for a moment and then walked slowly toward her. Guinalda clasped her hands and prayed—not for life, for hope of that she had long since resigned, but for death, speedy and painless.

The tawny beast came close. Guinalda closed her eyes to shut out the fearsome sight. She felt hot breath upon her cheek; its fetid odor assailed her nostrils. The lion sniffed about her. Why did he not end it? Tortured nerves could endure no more, and Guinalda swooned: it was a merciful surcease of her suffering.

CHAPTER XXIII

Jad-Bal-Ja

NERVE-SHAKEN, the remnants of Ibn Jad's company turned toward the west and hastened by forced marches to escape the hideous forest of the jinni. Abd el-Aziz and those who had accompanied him from the Wood of the Leopards toward Nimmr had not rejoined them; nor ever would they, for upon the plain below the treasure city of the Beduins' dreaming, the knights of Gobred had discovered them, and despite the thundering havoc of the ancient matchlocks, the iron knights of Nimmr had couched their spears against the Saracens and once again the victorious *cri de guerre* of the Crusaders had rung out after seven centuries of silence to announce a new engagement in the hoary war for the possession of the Holy Land—the war that is without end.

From the north a mailed knight rode down through the forests of Galla land. A blue and silver pennon fluttered from his lance. The housings of his great charger were rich with gold and silver from the treasure-vaults of Wildred of the Sepulcher. Wide-eyed Galla warriors viewed this solitary anachronism from afar, and fled.

Tarzan of the Apes, ranging westward, came upon the spoor of Fahd and Stimbol and Guinalda, and followed it steadily toward the south.

VETERANS of a hundred battles, the famed Waziri marched northward—a hundred ebon giants—and with them came Zeyd, the lover of Ateja. One day they came upon a fresh spoor crossing their line of march diagonally toward the southwest. It was the spoor of Arab sandals—those of two men and a woman; and when the Waziri pointed them out to Zeyd, the young Beduin swore that he recognized those of the woman as belonging to Ateja, for who knew better the shape and size of her little foot, or the style of the sandals she fabricated? He begged the Waziri to turn aside for a time and aid him in finding his sweetheart, and while the sub-chief was debating the question in his mind, the sound of something hurrying through the jungle attracted the attention of every ear.

While they listened, a man staggered into view. It was Fahd. Zeyd recognized him instantly, and as immediately became doubly positive that the footprints of the woman had been made by Ateja.

Zeyd approached Fahd menacingly. "Where is Ateja?" he demanded.

"How should I know? I have not seen her for days," replied Fahd, truthfully enough.

"Thou liest!" cried Zeyd, and pointed at the ground. "Here lie her own footprints beside thine!"

A cunning expression came into the eyes of Fahd. Here he saw an opportunity to cause suffering to the man he hated. He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Wellah*, if you know, you know," he said.

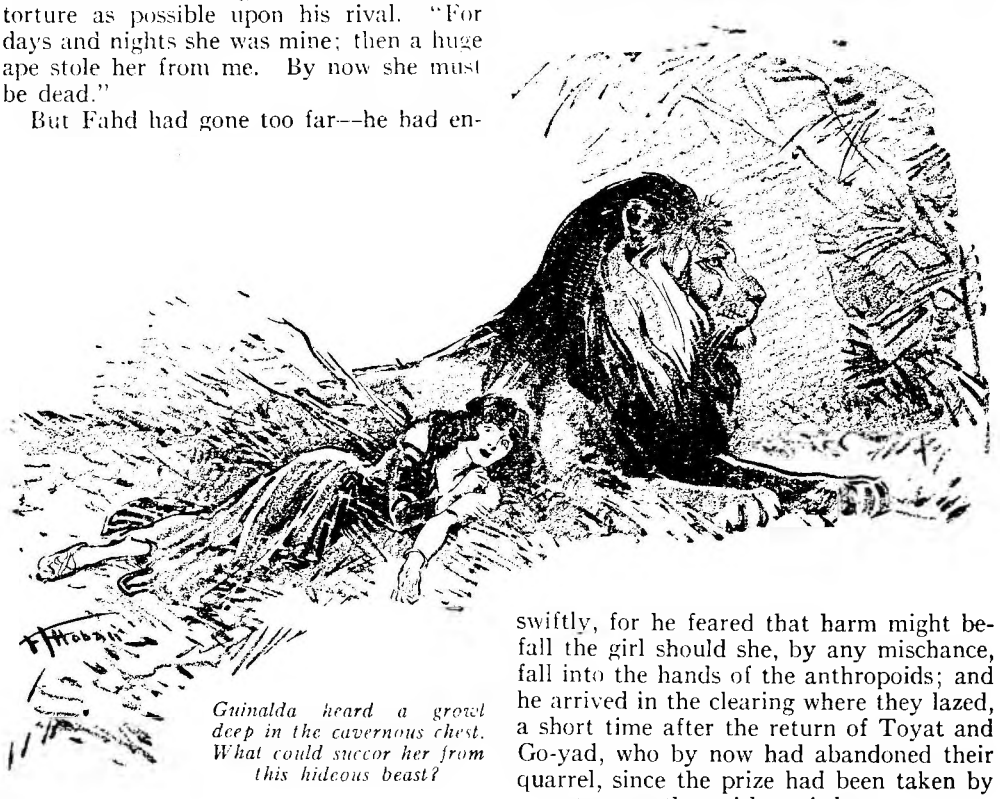
"Where is she?" demanded Zeyd.

"She is dead. I would have spared you," answered Fahd.

"Dead?" The suffering in that single word would have melted a heart of stone—but not Fahd's.

"I stole her from her father's *beyt*," continued Fahd, wishing to inflict as much torture as possible upon his rival. "For days and nights she was mine; then a huge ape stole her from me. By now she must be dead."

But Fahd had gone too far—he had encompassed his own undoing. With a scream of rage, Zeyd leaped upon him with drawn *khûsa*, and before the Waziri could interfere or Fahd defend himself, the keen blade had drunk thrice in the heart of the lying young Beduin.



Guinalda heard a growl deep in the cavernous chest. What could succor her from this hideous beast?

WITH bent head and dull eyes Zeyd marched on northward with the Waziri, and a mile behind them, a wasted old man, burning with fever, stumbled in the trail and fell. Twice he tried to regain his feet, only to sink weakly back to earth. A filthy, ragged bundle of old bones, he lay—sometimes raving in delirium, sometimes so still that he seemed dead.

Down from the north came Tarzan of the Apes upon the spoor of Guinalda and the two who had accompanied her. Knowing well the windings of the trail, he took shortcuts, swinging through the branches of the trees, and so it happened that he missed the Waziri at the point where their trail had encountered that of Fahd, where Zeyd had slain his rival, and presently his nostrils picked up the scent of the Mangani in the distance.

Toward the great apes he made his way swiftly, for he feared that harm might befall the girl should she, by any mischance, fall into the hands of the anthropoids; and he arrived in the clearing where they lazed, a short time after the return of Toyat and Go-yad, who by now had abandoned their quarrel, since the prize had been taken by one stronger than either of them.

The preliminaries of meeting over, and the apes having recognized and acknowledged Tarzan, he demanded if any had seen the Tarmangani she who had recently passed through the jungle.

M'walat pointed at Toyat, and Tarzan turned toward the king.

"You have seen the she?" demanded Tarzan, fearful, for he did not like the manner of the king ape.

Toyat jerked a thumb toward the south. "Numa," he said, and went on hunting for food. But Tarzan knew what the ape meant as surely as though he had spoken a hundred words of explanation.

"Where?" asked Tarzan.

Toyat pointed straight to where he had abandoned Guinalda to the lion; and the ape-man, moving straight through the jungle along the line indicated by the king

ape, went sadly to investigate, although he already guessed what he would find. At least he could drive Numa from his kill and give decent burial to the unfortunate girl.

SLOWLY consciousness returned to Guinalda. She did not open her eyes, but lay very quiet, wondering if this was death. She felt no pain.

Presently a sickly sweet and pungent odor assailed her nostrils, and something moved very close to her, so close that she felt it against her body, pressing gently; and where it pressed, she felt heat as from another body.

Fearfully she opened her eyes, and the horror of her predicament again swept over her, for she saw that the lion had lain down almost against her. His back was toward her; his noble head was lifted; his black mane almost brushed her face. He was looking off, intently, toward the north.

Guinalda lay very quiet. Presently she felt, rather than heard, a low rumbling growl that seemed to have its origin deep in the cavernous chest of the carnivore.

Something was coming! Even Guinalda sensed that; but it could not be succor, for what in all the world could succor her from this hideous beast?

There was a rustling among the branches of the trees a hundred feet away, and suddenly the giant figure of a demigod dropped to the ground. The lion rose and faced the man. The two stood thus, eying one another for a brief moment. Then the man spoke.

"Jad-bal-ja!" he exclaimed; and then: "Come to heel!"

The great golden lion whined and strode across the open space, stopping before the man. Guinalda saw the beast look up into the face of the demigod and saw the latter stroke the tawny head affectionately; but meanwhile the eyes of the man, or god, or whatever he was, were upon Guinalda, and she saw the sudden relief that came to them as Tarzan realized that the girl was unharmed.

Leaving the lion, the ape-man crossed to where the Princess lay, and knelt beside her.

"You are the Princess Guinalda?" he asked.

The girl nodded, wondering how he knew her. As yet she was too stunned to command her own voice.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Do not be afraid," he assured her in a gentle voice. "I am your friend. You are safe now."

There was something in the way he said it that filled Guinalda with such a sense of safety as all the mailed knights of her father's realm had scarce imparted.

"I am not afraid—any more," she said simply.

"Where are your companions?" he asked.

She told him all that had happened.

"You are well rid of them," said the ape-man, "and we shall not attempt to find them. The jungle will account for them in its own way and in its own good time."

"Who art thou?" asked the girl.

"I am Tarzan."

"How didst thou know my name?" she queried.

"I am a friend of one whom you know as Sir James," he explained. "He and I were searching for you."

"Thou art his friend?" she cried. "Oh, sweet sir, then thou art mine as well!"

THE ape-man smiled. "Always!" he replied.

"Why did the lion not kill thee, Sir Tarzan?" she demanded, thinking him a simple knight, for in her land there were only these beside the members of her princely house and the pseudo king of the City of the Sepulcher, for in the original company that had been wrecked upon the coast of Africa at the time of the Third Crusade, there were only knights, except one illegitimate son of Henry II., who had been the original Prince Gobred. Never having been in contact with an English king since they parted from Richard at Cyprus, no Gobred had assumed the right to issue patents of nobility to his followers, solely the prerogative of the king.

"Why did the lion not kill me?" repeated Tarzan. "Because he is Jad-bal-ja, the Golden Lion, whom I raised from cubhood. All his life he has known me only as friend and master. He would not harm me, and it was because of his life-long association with human beings that he did not harm you; though I was fearful, when I saw him beside you, that he had—for a lion is always a lion!"

"Thou dwellest near by?" asked the girl.

"Far away," said Tarzan; "but there must be some of my people near by, else Jad-bal-ja would not be here. I sent for my warriors, and doubtless he has accompanied them."

FINDING that the girl was hungry Tarzan bade the Golden Lion remain and guard her while he went in search of food for her.

"Do not fear him," he told her, "and remember that you could not have a protector more competent than he to discourage the approach of enemies."

Sheeta rose swiftly to meet horse and man; and as he leaped he struck full on the metal tip of the great lance.

"And well may I believe it," admitted Guinalda.

Tarzan returned with food; and then, as the day was not done, he started back toward Nímmr with the rescued girl, carrying her, as she was now too weak to walk; and beside them strode the great black-maned lion of gold.

During that journey Tarzan learned much of Nímmr and also discovered that Blake's love for his princess was apparently fully reciprocated by the girl, for she seemed never so content as when talking about her Sir James and asking questions concerning his far country and his past life —of which, unfortunately, Tarzan could tell her nothing.

Upon the second day the three came to the great cross, and here Tarzan hailed the warders and bade them come and take their princess.

She urged the ape-man to accompany her to the castle and receive the thanks of her father and mother, but he told her that he must leave at once to search for Blake, and at that she ceased her urging.

"An' thou findest him," she said, "tell him that the gates of Nímmr are always open to him, and that the Princess Guinalda awaits his return."

Down from the Cross went Tarzan and Jad-bal-ja, and before she turned back to enter the tunnel that led to her father's castle, the Princess Guinalda stood watching them until a turn in the trail hid them from her view.

"May Our Lord Jesus bless thee, sweet sir knight," she murmured, "and watch o'er thee and fetch thee back once more with my beloved!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Where Trails Met

DOWN through the forest rode Blake searching for some clew to the whereabouts of the Arabs, ranging this way and that, following trails and abandoning them.

Late one day he came suddenly to a large clearing where once a native village had stood. The jungle had not yet reclaimed it, and as he entered it, he saw a leopard crouching upon the far side, and before the leopard lay the body of a human being. At first Blake thought the poor

creature dead, but presently he saw it attempt to rise and crawl away.

The great cat growled and advanced toward it. Blake shouted and spurred forward, but Sheeta paid no attention to him, evidently having no mind to give up its prey; but as Blake came nearer, the cat turned to face him with an angry growl.

The American wondered if his horse would dare the close proximity of the beast of prey, but he need not have feared; nor would he, had he been more fully acquainted with the customs of the Valley of the Sepulcher, where one of the greatest sports of the knights of the two enemy cities is hunting the giant cats with lance alone, when they venture from the sanctuary of the Wood of the Leopards.

THE charger that Blake bestrode had faced many a savage cat, larger too, by far, than this one; and so he fell into his charging stride with no show of fear or nervousness, and the two thundered down upon Sheeta while the creature that was to have been its prey looked on with wide, astounded eyes.

Within the length of his spring Sheeta rose swiftly to meet the horse and man. He leaped, and as he leaped, he struck full on the metal tip of the great lance; the wooden shaft passed through him so far that it was with difficulty that the man forced the carcass from it. When he had, he turned and rode to the side of the creature lying helpless on the ground.

"My God!" he cried as his eyes rested on the face below him. "Stimbol!"

"Blake!"

The younger man dismounted.

"I'm dying, Blake," whispered Stimbol. "Before I go, I want to tell you that I'm sorry. I acted like a cad. I guess I've got what was coming to me."

"Never mind that, Stimbol," said Blake. "You're not dead yet. The first thing is to get you where there are food and water." He stooped and lifted the emaciated form and placed the man in his saddle. "I passed a small native village a few miles back. They all ran when they saw me, but we'll try there for food."

"What are you doing here?" asked Stimbol. "And in the name of King Arthur, where did you get the outfit?"

"I'll tell you about it when we get to the village," said Blake. "It's a long story. I'm looking for a girl that was stolen by the Arabs a few days ago."

"God!" ejaculated Stimbol.

"You know something about her?" demanded Blake.

"I was with the man that stole her," said Stimbol, "—or at least who stole her from the other Arabs."

"Where is she?"

Stimbol shook his head slowly.

"She's dead, Blake!"

"Dead?"

"A bunch of those big anthropoid apes got her. The poor child must have been killed immediately."

Blake was silent for a long time, walking with bowed head as, weighed down by heavy armor, he led the horse along the trail.

"Did the Arabs harm her?" he asked presently.

"No," said Stimbol. "The Sheik stole her either for ransom or to sell her in the north, but Fahd stole her for himself. He took me along because I had promised him a lot of money if he'd save me, and I kept him from harming the girl by telling him that he'd never get a cent from me if he did. I felt sorry for the poor child, and I made up my mind that I was going to save her if I could."

WHEN Blake and Stimbol approached the village, the blacks again fled, leaving the white men in full possession of the place, and it did not take Blake long to find food for them both.

Making Stimbol as comfortable as possible, Blake found fodder for his horse and presently returned to the old man. He was engaged in narrating his experiences, when he was suddenly aware of the approach of many people. He could hear voices and the pad of naked feet. Evidently the villagers were returning.

Blake prepared to meet them with friendly overtures, but the first glimpse he had of the approaching party gave him a distinct shock, for these were not the frightened villagers he had seen scurrying into the jungle a short time before.

With white plumes waving above their heads, a company of stalwart warriors came swinging down the trail. Great oval shields were upon their backs, long warspears in their hands.

"Well," said Blake, "I guess we're in for it. The villagers must have sent for their big brothers."

The warriors entered the village, and when they saw Blake, they halted in evi-

dent surprise. One of their number approached him, and to Blake's surprise addressed him in fairly good English.

"We are the Waziri of Tarzan," he said. "We search for our chief and master. Have you seen him, Bwana?"

The Waziri! Blake could have hugged them. He had been at his wits' end to know what he was to do with Stimbol.

Along the trail two figures were approaching: one a man bent beneath a great load, the other a girl; the figure of a lion lurking in the shadows behind them.

Alone he never could have brought the man to civilization, but now he knew that his worries were over.

Had it not been for the grief of Blake and Zeyd, it had been a merry party that made free with the cassava and beer of the villagers that night, for the Waziri were not worrying about their chief.

"Tarzan cannot die," said the sub-chief to Blake, when the latter asked if the other felt any fear as to the safety of his master; and the simple conviction of the quiet words almost succeeded in persuading Blake of their truth.

ALONG the trail plodded the weary 'Aarab of the Beny Sâlem fendy, el-Guâd. Tired men staggered beneath the weight of half-loads. The women carried even more. Ibn Jad watched the treasure with greedy eyes. An arrow came from nowhere and pierced the heart of a treasure-bearer close before Ibn Jad. A hollow voice sounded from the jungle: *"For every jewel a drop of blood!"*

Terrified, the Beduins hastened on. Who would be next? They wanted to cast aside the treasure; but Ibn Jad, greedy, would not let them. Behind them they caught a glimpse of a great lion. He terrified them because he did not either come nearer or go away—he just stalked silently along behind. There were no stragglers!

An hour passed; the lion paced just within sight of the tail end of the column. Never had the head of one of Ibn Jad's columns been so much in demand. Everyone wished to go in the lead.

A scream burst from another treasure-carrier. An arrow had passed through his lungs.

"For every jewel a drop of blood!"

The men threw down the treasure. "We will not carry the accursed thing more!" they cried, and again the voice spoke.

"Take up the treasure, Ibn Jad!" it said. *"Take up the treasure! It is thou who murdered to acquire it. Pick it up, thief and murderer, and carry it thyself!"*

Together the 'Aarab made the treasure into one load and lifted it to Ibn Jad's back. The old Sheik staggered beneath the weight.

"I cannot carry it!" he cried aloud. "I am old and I am not strong."

"*Thou canst carry it, or—die!*" boomed the hollow voice, while the lion stood in the trail behind them, his steady eyes glaring fixedly at them.

Ibn Jad staggered on beneath the great load. He could not now travel as fast as the others, and so he was left behind with only the lion as company; but only for a short time. Ateja saw his predicament and came back to his side, bearing a musket in her hands.

"Fear not," she said. "I am not the son thou didst crave, but yet I shall protect thee even as a son!"

IT was almost dusk when the leaders of the Beduin company stumbled upon a village. They were in it and surrounded by a hundred warriors before they realized that they were in the midst of the one tribe of all others they most feared and dreaded —the Waziri of Tarzan.

The sub-chief disarmed them at once.

"Where is Ibn Jad?" demanded Zeyd.

"He cometh!" said one.

They looked back along the trail, and presently Zeyd saw two figures approaching. One was a man bent beneath a great load and the other was that of a young girl. What he did not see was the figure of a great lion lurking in the shadows behind them.

Zeyd held his breath, because for an instant his heart had stopped beating.

"*Ateja!*" he cried, then ran forward to meet her and clasp her in his arms.

Ibn Jad staggered into the village. He took one look at the stern visages of the dread Waziri and sank weakly to the ground, the treasure almost burying him, as it fell upon his head and shoulders.

Hirfa voiced a sudden scream as she pointed back along the trail, and as every eye turned in that direction, a great golden lion stepped into the circle of the firelight in the village, and at its side strode Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle.

AS Tarzan entered the village, Blake came forward and grasped his hand.

"We were too late!" said the American sadly.

"What do you mean?" asked the ape-man.

"The Princess Guinalda is dead!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Tarzan. "I left her this morning at the entrance to the City of Nimmr."

A dozen times Tarzan was forced to assure Blake that he was not playing a cruel joke upon him. A dozen times Tarzan had to repeat Guinalda's message: "An' thou findest him, tell him that the gates of Nimmr are always open to him, and that the Princess Guinalda awaits his return!"

Later in the evening Stimbol, through Blake, begged Tarzan to come to the hut in which he lay.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the old man fervently. "I thought that I had killed you. It has preyed on my mind—but now that I know that it was not you I believe I can recover."

"You will be taken care of properly, Stimbol," said the ape-man, "and as soon as you are well enough, you will be taken to the coast." Then he walked away. He would do his duty by the man who had disobeyed him and tried to kill him, but he would not feign a friendship which he did not feel.

THE following morning they prepared to leave the village.

The old Sheik Ibn Jad and his Arabs, with the exception of Zeyd and Ateja, who had asked to come and serve Tarzan in his home, were being sent to the nearest Galla village under escort of a dozen Waziri. Here they would be turned over to the Galla and doubtless sold into slavery.

Stimbol was borne in a litter by four stout Waziri as the party prepared to take up its march toward the south and the country of Tarzan. Four others carried the treasure of the City of the Sepulcher.

Blake, dressed again in his iron mail, bestrode his great charger as the column started out of the village and down the trail into the south. Tarzan and the Golden Lion stood beside him. Blake reached down and extended his hand to the ape-man.

"Good-by, sir!" he said.

"Good-by?" demanded Tarzan. "Aren't you coming home with us?"

Blake shook his head.

"No," he said, "I am going back into the Middle Ages with the woman I love!"

Tarzan and Jad-bal-ja stood in the trail watching as Sir James rode out toward the City of Nimmr, the blue and silver of his pennon fluttering bravely from the iron tip of his great lance.

THE END.

"SPEARS IN THE SUN"

Photograph by Field Museum of Natural History

A photograph of Mr. Baum taken on the trail in Abyssinia

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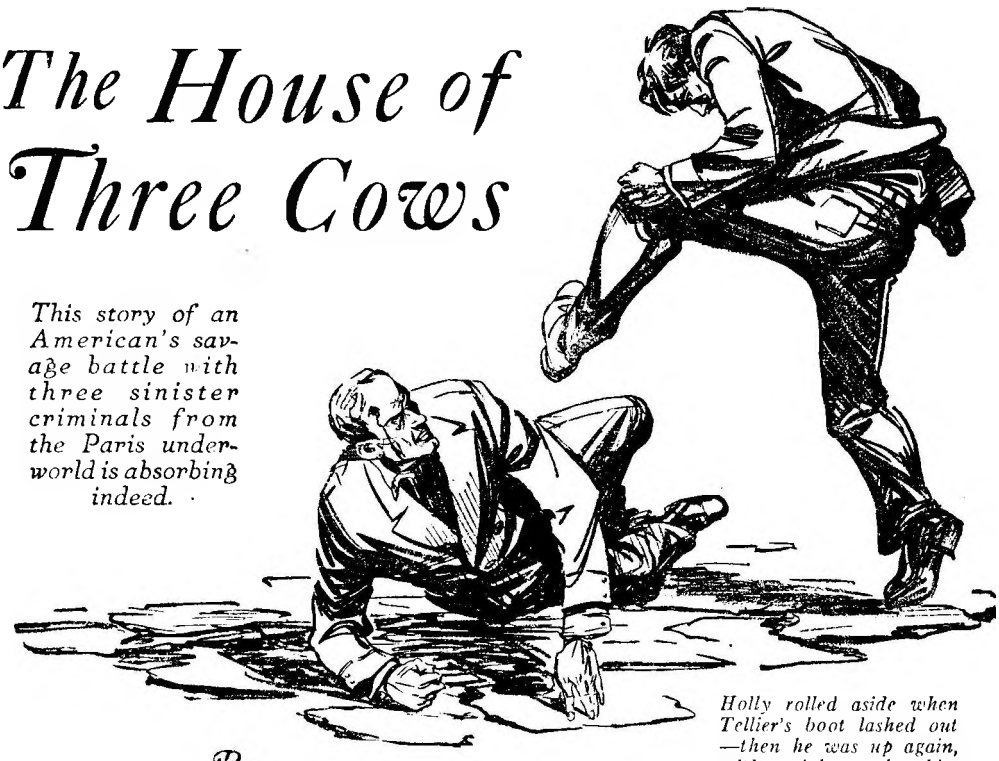
This story of an American's savage battle with three sinister criminals from the Paris underworld is absorbing indeed.



Holly rolled aside when Tellier's boot lashed out —then he was up again, with a right to the chin

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

BOTH Hollock and I were up and dressed early, long before our train pulled into Brussels. Breakfast was served aboard, and we made the most of it.

Behind us lay Paris, and the convention of the American Legion therein; yet because of this convention, we were now marching on Brussels and elsewhere in Belgium. Holly, an ace of the Lafayette Escadrille, a bomber in Morocco, an aviation commandant in the French army, had recruited me and now saw in sight the end of his ten years' fight with Tellier; he was quite cool about it, unhurried as usual.

"You let Alice know were coming?" I asked.

Holly shrugged. "Wired her. Had to do it, worse luck! She'll meet the train, I suppose."

We both had the same thought—it was no game for Alice Vincent.

We had not dreamed Tellier could actually be in Belgium, when we let her go to Brussels in search of him, but our effort to sidetrack her out of danger had only pushed her into it, for Tellier knew her by sight. And he had a rat-hole in Bruges.

A former officer in the French army, now allied with the Paris underworld, Tellier had conceived the idea of recruiting his finances by plucking delegates to the Legion convention. He had laid his plans with care, picking certain Legionaries with more money than sense, and employing every means from blackmail to plain robbery. Unluckily for him, the French government was highly interested in protecting its visitors from just such efforts, and Holly, being an American, was one of the men employed to keep a lookout. Through Alice Vincent, whom I intended to marry if I lived long enough, Holly got an inkling of Tellier's intentions, and we went after him—Alice insisting on having a share in the game. She was that sort. That was one reason I meant to marry her.

We went after Tellier hot and heavy, smashed his attacks, bombed his G. H. Q., drove him out of France into hiding—and now we knew where he was. Ten years earlier, during the war, Hollock and Tellier had started fighting, and between them was the ancient hatred and the new battle. Such was the situation, in a nutshell.

"IF Tellier gets a glimpse of us, he'll skip," said Holly thoughtfully. "We mustn't reach Bruges until late this afternoon. He got out of France by automobile, and is probably ready to jump into Holland at a moment's notice—"

"Put the Belgian police on him," I said. "You have authorization?"

He nodded. "Of course. But the first job is to find him. We're not dealing with a fool, Buddy Barnes! And when we do find him, then—"

"Then—what?" I prompted, as he paused. His gray eyes probed me for a moment.

"Well, it'll be a man's job to put the bracelets on him, that's all!" he returned. "And I want to take him back to Paris alive, Buddy. I had a hint from Headquarters that they're keen on making an example of him. A Grand Cross of the Legion would increase my prestige, and the rosette in your buttonhole would—"

I grunted. "Shucks! I'd sooner have a long life without a decoration than a grand military funeral, so stick that in your hat! If I tangle with friend Tellier, I shoot first and shoot for dead center."

"Then I'll see to it," Holly chuckled, "that you don't see him first."

It did not occur to either of us that seeing him last might count the heaviest.

We drew into the *gare* at last, and alighted. Having only a bag each, we were quickly out and down the platform—and there was Alice to meet us. I pass over details with unwonted delicacy; suffice it to say the meeting was all that could be desired.

"Huh!" said Holly. "When you folks have finished that billing and cooing, let's get over to the Gare du Nord and leave our bags. I have one or two officials to visit, too. Any luck, Alice?"

"Plenty, since you and Buddy are here!" she answered, laughing. "On my own hook, not a particle. But you've found out something? Is Tellier here?"

"In Bruges," said Holly, and we climbed into a taxi.

"And now, tell me all about it!" demanded Alice, settling back.

WE told her enough, as we rolled along to the other station, to cause a flurry in her quick gray eyes.

"You should leave this to the police, Holly," she said. "They've been very nice to me here—and it's too dangerous—"

"Tut!" And Holly grinned at her. "No danger at all. Just walk in and grab him."

"Besides," I added morosely, "you want to wait six months before you marry me, and so what's the odds? I'm going to learn to fly an airplane next week."

"All right," she struck in gayly. "I'll go along when you learn. When do we leave for Bruges?"

"This afternoon."

We skirted the huge square that lies before the Gare du Nord, and left the taxi. A large open car had halted just before us, but we paid no attention to it until a hand fell on Hollock's shoulder and a voice rang beside us in English:

"Isn't this Commandant Hollock? Ah! I thought so! —Nonsense, man, shake hands!"

Hollock had turned. His face went red suddenly, and he drew into a stiff salute. The tall man who had stopped him bore a vaguely familiar look, but I could not place him. They shook hands heartily.

"You know," said the stranger, "I've never forgotten that great fight of yours against those four Huns who were bombing my headquarters! I've never bestowed a decoration with more real appreciation than in your case, I can assure you. Ah—you have friends? Present them, please."

"This is Miss Vincent, Your Majesty," said Holly, rather flustered. "And my friend Buddy—I mean Mr. James Barnes."

THE KING shook hands with Alice, and his eyes twinkled.

"You see, I'm a good hand-shaker!" he exclaimed. "Your first trip to Belgium, is it?"

"Y-yes, Your Majesty," stammered Alice, a bit swept off her feet. "And to me, it's the most interesting country in the whole world!"

"Yes? May I inquire the reason?" asked the King.

"Because it's the last country in the world to know what a real king is like."

Well, that pleased him, naturally, and we had a great little talk. The King was a good fellow, and when he heard we were going to Bruges for a day or two, he took Holly's arm.

"Look here, I'm under an obligation to you that a decoration more or less can't repay," he exclaimed. "I'm off to the country for a few days, and sha'n't need this car. Suppose you take it as long as you're in Belgium—it's rather well known

—and I'll place the chauffeur at your orders. It may facilitate your sight-seeing a bit, what? Come along. You don't want to take that stuffy train in this glorious weather—"

So there we were, willy-nilly—one can't refuse a king, even if he acts like a private citizen. Holly, of course, did not mention our errand, and in another five minutes we found ourselves stuck with a big car that would make us the center of all eyes wherever we went in Belgium.

It did not occur to any of us that this simple and graceful act on the part of a great-hearted man might have complications, other than to draw attention to us.

OUR chauffeur, as might be expected, was a war veteran—an honest, stolid, intelligent Fleming who regarded the royal auto as something sacred. When Holly finished his police business—somewhat accentuated by our arrival in the king's car—we set out at once for Bruges, meaning to lunch *en route* at a village tavern the chauffeur knew.

I never did learn the town's name, for other things intervened. We reached it about one-thirty, disembarked at an ancient inn, and settled down to enjoy an admirable meal, the chauffeur lunching by himself.

"What's your program?" I demanded of Holly, when hunger was eased off a bit.

"Simple," he responded. "Go to the Hotel de Ville in Bruges, show my authority, and see if we can locate our man. It shouldn't be difficult. Spot him before dinner, and grab him after dinner. Chuck him into the car in the morning, run him back to Brussels, catch the Paris express—and the job's done."

"Very simple," I said dryly. Alice broke into a laugh.

"You really expect it'll be like that, Holly?" she asked banteringly.

"Theoretically, yes." And his eyes twinkled. "Practically, anything may turn up. For heaven's sake, remember we're dealing with a rascal of the utmost ingenuity, resource, ability! We'll have to play our game by what turns up—and the great thing is to get our man, no matter what happens. And get him alive."

I grunted at that, not liking it particularly, and let the matter drop.

Luncheon over and the afternoon half consumed, we filled our pockets with the excellent Havanas which Belgium affords smokers for one franc per each, and after paying the bill sauntered out to the car. The chauffeur was just emptying a spare tin of gas into the tank, and Holly was chatting with Alice, when I looked up to see a big red touring car flash past. It was gone in a jiffy, leaving me with an impression of the goggled driver staring hard at us—then an exclamation broke from me.

"Tellier, by the poker! Did you see that car, Holly—gone now! Tellier was in it, saw us! He was alone—I saw those odd triangular eyebrows of his above the goggles—no mistake about it—"

Hollock's eyes swept about, then he whistled softly. It was plain enough to each of us that pursuit was useless—by the time we could be off, Tellier would be five miles away. And too, pursuit would only show him we were after him.

"Good eye, Buddy," said Holly calmly. Alice stared from one to the other of us.

"But would he recognize us—and would he know this car?" she queried.

Holly only smiled at this. "Wouldn't he, just! But he'll not be sure we're after him. He'll skip out of Bruges, yes; he'll not be quick about it, though. Hm! This means barriers are up, he'll be warned—oh, hang the luck! Pile in and let's be off. No delays now—find him and grab him at once, before he slips us! The hunt's on."

In three minutes we were running the speedometer up to forty kilometers an hour and more.

THUS did our unhurried and leisurely pilgrimage become a swift race against time, for we knew our antagonist, knew him all too well. An evil chance had betrayed us—or perhaps our own failure to provide against such chance. We had known Tellier expected his lady-love to arrive from Paris that morning. We had kept her in Paris—but we should have kept ourselves out of sight. What more likely than that Tellier would meet her at Brussels? No wonder Hollock said things under his breath, as the road flew past and *gendarmes* saluted the royal car in each village.

So we headed north, until the towers of Bruges came into sight and we crept into the town by narrow, tortuous streets. Once the commercial and money center of all Europe, Bruges now well deserved her title of "Dead Bruges," for she lay dead upon her canals and river, the ghost of old supremacy, the shell of what she had been in times past.

At last we emerged upon the huge market-square, bordered on two sides by cafes and hotels and shops, on the other two by the ancient Stadhaus and the Hotel de Ville, and headed for the last-named with the bells ringing four o'clock overhead. That Tellier would be watching for us was improbable. He had, beyond doubt, made straight for his rat-hole, and would be making ready for a quick night-flight into Holland.

When we drew up before the Hotel de Ville, there was an instant flurry—*gendarmes* and officials hastening out to receive royalty, and standing somewhat dazed to see two Americans descend from the well-known car. That car was of tremendous use to us, however, for we not only got an interview with a bearded gentleman at once, but we found him most anxious to oblige in every way possible. I forgave the King then and there for unwittingly getting us into this fix.

WHEN he had examined our papers and collated them with telegrams he had already received from the Paris prefecture and the Quai d'Orsay and other places, our official spread out his hands, gazed solemnly at us, and said we could do whatever we wished, have whatever we wanted, and go wherever we desired. His intimation was that with a troop of cavalry and a machine-gun or so, we might possibly corral Tellier.

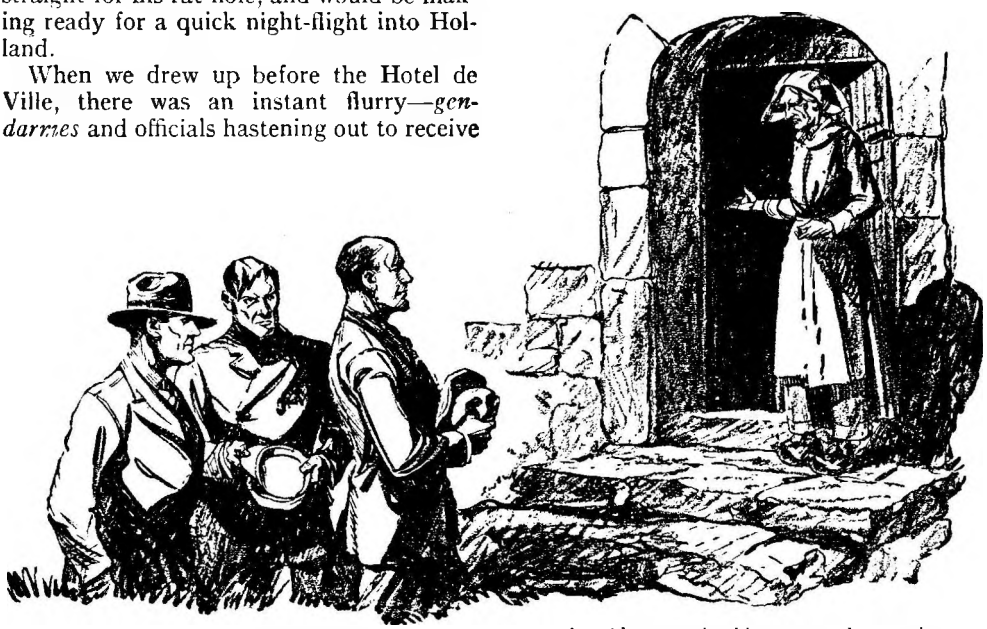
"Do you know where he is?" demanded Holly, who had laid out a photograph of our man.

"I will know in five minutes, m'sieur," said our official.

"Then," said Holly, "with your permission, we'll go after him in ten minutes."

"How many men shall you need?"

"A police inspector, to make report to you afterward. We shall put Tellier in our car when we get him, and reach the border as quickly as possible—before midnight, perhaps."



A wide-capped old woman let us in, saying the Baron would see us at once.

"Oh, *la-la-la-la!*" said the bearded gentleman all at once. "You are joking?"

"If I were joking," said Holly, "would I be using His Majesty's car?"

That was a facer—unanswerable. The situation was relieved by the entry of a ferret-faced man who went to the desk, spoke in Flemish with the official, handed over some papers, then looked at the photograph of Tellier and shook his head. Our official glanced over the papers, and laid them down with a gesture of finality.

"The man you seek, messieurs," he said, "is not in Bruges."

"But—" began Holly, when I interrupted:

"Pardon—perhaps men are common here, but red Hispano cars are not common. Is there such a car known here?"

"But certainly!" said the official. "It belongs to Baron van Osterman—a nobleman of Holland who is spending a little time here. He has leased the House of Three Cows, on the river beyond the fish

market. He is certainly not the man you seek. He looks nothing like this photograph and is well known. I know him myself."

"Has he heavy black triangular eyebrows?" I asked, remembering the goggle-masked face I had seen in the red car.

"But yes—I have such brows myself, m'sieur."

That was true. Holly arose briskly.

"We regret to have disturbed you, m'sieur. We shall not need the inspector after all, then. If I chance to find our man here, I have your permission to take him?"

The official laughed. "One or a dozen, m'sieur; I am entirely at your service."

WE went back to the car, outside. I knew by Holly's manner that he had something in mind; it was impossible that we should have come on a false scent to Bruges.

"They say our friend isn't here," he said abruptly to Alice, with a worried frown. "I'm going to take the car and make some further inquiries. Do you want to look around the lace shops, and meet us later at that hotel opposite?"

"Yes, I'd love to," she returned, and climbed out. "Buddy, you're going with me?"

"I'd love to," I said; then caught a glance from Holly. "Unfortunately, I've got to go around to police Headquarters and do some inquiring on my own—it's up this side-street. I'll meet you and Holly later."

I swung off without giving her time for any questions, and headed up the narrow street lined with tourist shops that debouched from the post-office corner. Police Headquarters did lie this way, but Alice did not know it.

When I came to the next corner, I waited. Sure enough, in three minutes along came the car, with Holly as the sole passenger in it. He swung open the tonneau door for me.

"Good work, Buddy—she's out of it. Hop in."

"Where to?" I demanded, as we started off.

"The House of Three Cows, of course."

"You don't think this Dutch baron is our man?"

He chuckled. "We're not dealing with a fool, are we? The only thing we can do is to go straight for him."

"And if he proves to be Tellier—"

"Grab him." Holly leaned over and spoke at some length to the chauffeur. The stolid Fleming nodded.

"I have been told to obey you, m'sieur," he said. "That is enough."

"Good!" Holly settled back and reached for a cigarette. "Three of us—that should be enough, likewise!"

THE House of Three Cows was not a walled house with gardens, after the French style, but was an ancient stone building rambling along the street-side, the river behind it. Over the doorway was a half-effaced carving of three animals, which might have been cows at a venture. At one side was a newly built garage of stone.

The car halted, and our chauffeur went to the house-door. In thus risking a frontal attack in broad daylight, we were risking everything. Should the Baron prove to be Tellier, everything depended on getting to him before he could slip away, whether or not he saw us coming. Official stupidity had put us between the devil and the deep sea.

A wide-capped old woman let us in, saying the Baron would see us at once. All three of us entered, and she led us through the spick-and-span house to a tiny garden behind. A wall cut us off from the river, along which half the house was built; the place was tiny, with two fruit trees, a flower bed, a table and several chairs. We sat down and I, for one, felt that we need not have been so anxious about Alice's safety. We were evidently on the wrong trail.

I was certain of it as the Baron made his appearance. No man could have been more unlike the burly, athletic Tellier, with his heavy black mustache and vigorous air. Our host was more than burly—he had a great paunch, was dressed in black despite the summer weather, and his clean-shaven face was not the one we knew. Its lines were different, and besides, it showed the effects of good living, being ruddier than a cherry and starred by a large red nose. He had the heavy triangular brows which so marked Tellier, and heavy-lidded gray eyes, but there the resemblance ended, it seemed to me. With his face masked by goggles, I might well have mistaken him for our man, but not as he now was.

When he spoke, in English marked by the clipped Dutch accent, his voice was husky and not the voice of Tellier at all.

"Awake, eh?" said the Baron. "Enjoy yourself, Mr. Barnes—but don't move!"

I felt sorry for Holly, who made no bones about explaining our blunder very frankly, while the Baron held his paunch and roared with laughter.

"That is good!" he exclaimed heartily. "You will have a glass of good beer with me—it is sent to me from Munchen, and is the good old beer. And then you will tell me about this man—a good joke! Ernestine! Glasses, a jug of the Munchener, cigars! And to think you have His Majesty's car, eh? I saw you gentlemen this afternoon as I drove from Brussels."

Holly offered to send the chauffeur out, but the Baron demurred. Nothing was too good for the King's servant, and besides, the chauffeur understood no English. So we all settled down, lighted cigars brought by the old woman, and awaited the beer, accepting the delay with the best grace possible.

The old woman brought four steins and a huge foaming jug of dark beer. She filled the steins, left the jug, and departed. We clicked steins and sipped—the chauffeur put his down at one long, deliberate draught. The Baron chuckled at this and filled the stein again for him. Then he shoved back his chair.

"Come with me," he said, and winked. "I have something to show you. We will come back and finish our beer."

He told the chauffeur to wait, and led us off across the garden, swinging his great paunch as he rolled along. Holly gave me a queer look, which I could not fathom. We halted at a door in the house wall, and the Baron shoved it open, then stepped back.

"Enter, gentlemen!"

We obeyed, passing down two steps into obscurity.

Holly touched my arm.

"Grab him when I give the word, Buddy!" he murmured.

For a moment I thought he was crazy—but only for a moment. Something struck me violently in the back, flinging me against Holly. Something in the darkness cracked me over the head, and made such a good job of it that I promptly went to sleep. . . . .

When I woke up, it was in another room. I had been dumped into a chair by a window, and Holly lay face down on the floor at my feet. Looking out the window as my eyes opened, I found the garden below me and saw our chauffeur there still at the table, head in his arms, dead to the world. Oddly enough, this jerked me to full realization—the beer had been drugged! Then a chuckle to one side made me turn my head with some difficulty—it hurt.

"Awake, eh?" said the Baron—or was it the Baron? "Enjoy yourself, Mr. Barnes! But don't move."

I saw now what Holly must have perceived earlier, that the Baron and Tellier were one and the same. Impossible as it

seemed, the evidence was there before me. Another man stood to one side, holding a pistol—a scrawny, thin-faced Frenchman, scowling at us.

It was Tellier who drew my gaze, however. He was just getting out of his black suit—only a short time could have elapsed since we were so neatly trapped. He unstrapped a huge artificial paunch that overlay his shirt, and proceeded to unmake himself. From his nostrils and mouth he took cotton packs which had absolutely changed the lines of his face, then he washed off all the makeup, removed some collodion which had slightly altered the shape of his eyes, and flung a sneering laugh at me.

"Worth the trouble, wasn't it? Still, I must congratulate your friend—probably he looked at my hands, not at my face. One can't change the hands. Too bad I can't stay to settle with him personally—after ten years, I'm more heavily in debt to him now than ever! But needs must when the devil drives, and he'll rot just as well if Emile attends to him. Now the other clothes, Emile!"

In his free hand the scrawny Frenchman extended a suit of clothes, and Tellier got into them. He opened a pocketbook, examined passport and official papers, and then turned to the faithful Emile, changing other things from old pockets to new as he spoke.

"You understand? The big stove is already half-filled. Put these things into it, see the papers well lighted, before you come. I've sent Ernestine home for the night—she'll not be in your way. Don't try to put these two into the river until it's dark, for some one might see. Then join me with the Hispano—I'll wait at the place we arranged."

"Understood," said Emile.

TELLIER came over to us, and stirred Hollock with his foot, a smile on his lips. I saw Emile change position so as to keep me covered, but he need not have bothered. My hands were not bound, but I was momentarily too feeble to rise, much less show fight.

"So! After ten years, it ends here!" Tellier grinned at me suddenly. "And you, Mr. Barnes, go the same road! Well, you've put me in the way of getting over the frontier unquestioned; I thank you. How you got the King's auto, I don't know—but it'll not carry you away from here, that's certain. Give Hollock my compliments when you see him in hell."

With this, Tellier jerked open a door, slammed it, and was gone.

The sense of his words was slow to reach me until, after a moment or two, I heard the purring thrum of an engine. Then it broke on me. He had taken our car—the chauffeur was drugged—and in a few hours would be over the frontier. What Tellier could do with his own audacity and ability, backed by the King's car, beggared the imagination.

And we were responsible for that car.

MORE, we were in for a most unpleasant time; Emile, not waiting for darkness, went across the room and tugged at a ring set in the floor—not neglecting to watch me narrowly. A trapdoor came up and back, and the simplicity of operations in ancient Bruges became obvious. Once through that trap, there was a clear drop into the river below.

"A good road for police rascals!" said Emile with a nasty grin at me.

True enough. Head throbbing, strength gone, I was an easy victim. Holly promised no trouble; he must have been knocked on the head too, for I could see blood at the side of his forehead. None the less, Emile was taking no chances with either of us—he did not mean to drop anyone who could utter a yell or two. He leaned forward and dragged Holly's body a bit away from me, toward the trap.

"Wait till dark? Not I!" he muttered, straightening up and looking around. "I know you police spies—this one goes here and now, and you after him! Ah, there's the thing—"

A fireplace was in one wall, and beside it a big stand of brass and iron implements. He caught up a heavy poker and swung about, in his face a look of bestial cruelty. He took a step at Holly's figure, swung up the poker—and I tottered out of my chair and at him, feebly enough.

"You want yours first, eh?" he said, and laughed. "Very well—take it!"

The weapon swung in his hand, and then Holly's arm shot out, caught him about the ankle, brought him down. Next instant Holly was on top of him—Holly, bleeding from a cut above the eyes, but alive, hitting savagely. Emile relaxed, and Holly glanced up at me with his old grin.

"Quick, now—curtain-cords or anything! Tie him hard and fast—"

At the smell of the burning paper, Emile wriggled. "Wait!" he cried; "wait—I'll tell you!"

Curtain-cords were swiftly cut off, and the victim lashed. I was stupefied by the abrupt change in affairs—I had not dreamed Holly was shamming. He rose, caught up Emile's pistol, and pocketed it.

"Buddy, we've got just one chance in the world," he said, his gray eyes cool and yet burning behind their coolness. "Thank heaven, I woke up in time to hear what was said! You understand? This murderous devil knows where he's to meet Tellier. We don't. We can take the car downstairs and go—if we know where to go."

I sank back into my chair. "I got a nasty crack, Holly. So did you, by the look of—"

"Bah! A glancing blow—cut the skin, nothing worse. Yes, they whanged you properly, old man. Well, what d'you say? Squeamish about it?"

"Not a damned bit," I said. "Take off his shoes. I've got matches."

IT was getting dark outside. Holly dragged Emile to the open trap and laid him face down, head and shoulders sagging in the opening. Then he took off the man's shoes, and with one of them panned the soles of his feet until a wriggle and squirm showed Emile was awake again. The rascal twisted his head about and looked at us, terror stamped in his thin face.

"Let him yell—no one will hear him," said Holly indifferently. "Get that newspaper over there, light it, and burn his feet properly. If he wont tell after that, we'll chuck him through and then be on our way. No use sparing a rat like this. He knows where to meet Tellier, but we'll have the whole country looking for that car in no time."

Emile heard all this with ashen terror. He could not maintain his position, and his head fell forward, so that the river below was plain enough to see. Holly held him firmly in place.

I found the torn newspaper, lighted a match, and ignited it. How far we would have gone, it's hard to say; neither of us felt any pity for the wretch who had been about to smash our skulls and dump us overboard a few moments ago. At the smell of the burning paper, he wriggled.

"Wait!" he cried. "Wait, I'll tell you—"

"Go on and burn him," said Holly. "He'll only lie until he's well singed."

Emile felt the newspaper flaming close to his feet, and uttered a yell.

"Stop it!" he shrieked, though he was not burned. "It's outside Vandoorn—this side the town, at the stone bridge—that's the truth—"

It was the truth, too; we could tell this by his agonized voice. Holly looked at me and nodded. I tossed the flaming

paper through the trapdoor and pulled Emile back.

"Feeling better?" asked Holly curtly.

"Some," I said. "Why?"

"Then get down and we'll run out the Hispano. I'll finish this business or break a leg!"

We did it. . . .

I've handled a Hispano more than once, but seldom one with the finely attuned power of Tellier's car. We got it out, paused not to let Alice or anyone else know where we were, but shot out of Bruges after finding at a wineshop where lay the road to Vandoorn. This town, it appeared, was only ten miles distant.

Darkness had come on rapidly. Regardless of regulations, I opened up the full blast of our headlights, blinding everyone ahead and getting a clear track; we would need to blind Tellier ere we reached him, too. The cold rush of night air, and the necessity of keeping every sense on the alert, keyed me up again in no time. Hollock crouched in the rear, out of sight, for Tellier expected to see his car with just one occupant.

Ahead of us lay the decisive meeting—now beyond any mistake. Ten years before, amid the wholesale war that raged around, Hollock and Tellier had clashed; they had run into each other again and again across the years, as two brazen kettles floating in a river-current meet with recurrent clangor. Now, within the past week, had come the sharpest and most savage clash of all.

IF we caught Tellier, he would not hit and run this time. Instead of the haul of loot his sweetheart should have brought him from Paris, he had found his two enemies on his trail. He had trapped us well; but his own haste, and Emile's overconfidence, had ruined everything so carefully built up.

"You watched him change clothes?" asked Hollock suddenly, shouting at me from behind.

"Yes. Why?"

"Did he have any weapons?"

I thought back to that scene in the upper room.

"No," I called back. "He went through his other clothes, took money and pocketbook, nothing else—"

"Then take this, but don't use it except in a pinch." And Holly pitched his captured pistol over to the seat beside me.

"You're a fool!" I shouted at him, and heard him laugh.

"My game, Buddy!"

I cursed his folly and stepped on the gas a bit more.

A CRY from Holly apprised me that Vandoorn was in sight—I caught a glimmer of lights below, as we swooped over a hill and down, and made the brake-drums scream. We slowed, our lights picked up a line of trees, and then I saw the lights of another car switched on and off quickly. Tellier was there, waiting.

Either a river or canal, for it seemed of goodish size, flowed here. The bridge was an old stone structure, with a parapet a scant three feet high on either side. Just before reaching it, the road widened; there, back to the trees, ready to speed in either direction, was the royal car. My lights picked up the figure of Tellier, beside it. Deliberately, I ran the Hispano up in front of the other car and halted with a jerk—leaving my lights on to illumine roadside and bridge.

"Well? You got here quickly," said Tellier, stepping out into the glare of light. "Are you sure you burned the papers in that stove?"

Holly opened the rear door, jumped out, and came forward.

I caught up the pistol, but like a fool let the chance go when I had Tellier there full in the light, ten feet from me. I knew how much this moment meant to Holly, and simply could not spoil it for him—it's hard to use cold reason at such times. So I just sat there and gawked at the two of them.

When he saw Holly, Tellier took a step backward; when he recognized him, the man's face became frightful—almost the face of a maniac. The lips curled back; the slightly protruding eyes glared. He was caught, and knew it, knew escape was cut off.

"No, the papers didn't get burned," said Holly quietly. "We've got you, Tellier. Will you come along quietly—"

"You devil!" cried out Tellier in a spasm of rage and fury. "Every time—you—"

He was almost inarticulate, and no wonder. Holly laughed and walked up to him.

"Well? It's between us now—the two of us. If you still think—"

Tellier lashed out viciously, Holly evaded the blow, and they were at it hammer and tongs.

I knew to my cost what a fighter the man was; and now that he had everything to win and nothing to lose, he fought like a madman. The two of them mixed it for a moment with all their hatred to the fore—standing breast to breast, slugging. The dust-cloud from under their feet, the sound of blows driven home, the panting breaths, the sharp curses, drove into me like wine, lifted me from my seat, brought me out on the road watching.

They were cooler about it now, sparring, striving to get at each other. Holly drove in smash after smash to Tellier's belt, while the Frenchman struck only for the head. Both got their wish. Holly dropped, but rolled aside when Tellier's boot lashed out, and was up again as Tellier drove in—up and meeting the rush with a terrific right square to the chin. Tellier merely shook his head and covered up. I saw him glance over his shoulder at the other car, and guessed he had a weapon there, so I came out into the light.

"Keep out, Buddy!" panted Hollock, and then went reeling under a right and left.

TELLIER rushed him, smashed through his guard, beat him back and back, hit him at will, it seemed. Hollock was groggy for a moment—then pulled himself together just when all seemed lost. Fiend that the other was, Holly whipped into him with sudden speed and unguessed fury, and his fists had a kick lacking previously. Perhaps the sting of defeat worked wonders at the crucial moment.

Now it was Tellier who went down, sprawling. Holly waited for him to rise, and snapped forward a blow as he came up, but Tellier threw himself backward from it and went down again. Holly laughed suddenly, and I knew he was all right.

"Stand up to it!" he said, and threw himself forward.

Blow after blow snapped into Tellier, fetching grunts from him—he was retreating now, and both of them were on the bridge. I followed, pistol ready, fascinated by the sheer brutality of it. The two men had forgotten everything except each other. The car lights swept the width of the bridge, and held them clear enough. They tangled in a swirl of dust, and then I heard Holly cry out with a new note in his voice:

"Ah—you coward! If you want it that way—take it!"

And he went into the big Frenchman with a knee-punch—Tellier had played foul, obviously. It was hammer and tongs all over the bridge, hitting anywhere, staggering, banging at each other, using fist and foot and knee in a fury too mad to last long. Of a sudden Holly put both hands to his eyes—a gouge had nearly got him—and Tellier smashed him in the unguarded moment, sending him reeling, following it up savagely.

Instead of evading the rush, Holly swept into it, planted a reddened fist on Tellier's mouth, and clinched. I shouted at him frantically to break away, but he only cursed. Tellier had the strength of a bull; yet Holly had all the swiftness and agility that a bull lacks. The two staggered back and forth, doing everything except bite.

Tellier roared abruptly—a deep-throated, hoarse roar of anguish—and tried to break, but could not. He threw out his arms, beat Holly over the back and sides with both fists, went backward with growing momentum as he lost balance. Somehow, Holly had obtained a bulldog grip on him.

Clear across the bridge they reeled, locked together—Tellier trying to keep on his feet, Holly tearing at him and forcing him ever backward. Then they began to fall, still locked in that death-grip. Another wild, fiercely inchoate cry was wrenched from Tellier, and he struck the parapet. I saw the ancient stones shake and give. Holly's weight plunged full atop of him—with a dull crash the whole parapet tottered and collapsed, and the two men rolled over after it, over into the darkness.

I stood there at the gap a long while, but could see nothing in the dark flood below. The ten years' trail had come at last to its ending.

WHEN I walked into the hotel where we had told Alice to meet us, I saw her in the lobby, talking to our bearded official friend and two men in uniform. She was furious and anxious and half in tears, and when she caught sight of me, she came on the run.

"Buddy!" she cried out. "I thought—oh, it's all right, then! But why are you wet?"

"My yearly bath," I said. "Go get a bottle of brandy, some grub in a basket—and get it quick! No time to talk now. I'll handle these gentlemen."

She stared hard at me, then obeyed. There was a girl for you!

"Gentlemen," I said to the three Belgians. "His Majesty's car is lying near the bridge just this side of Vandoorn. His Majesty's chauffeur is in the garden of your friend the Baron van Osterman, drugged. If you'll have the kindness to see that the chauffeur and car are safely returned to His Majesty, we'll very much appreciate it."

I bowed, and left them with that to chew on. They deserved it.

ALICE was getting her basket when I joined her. I took it, and paid for it. Then I led her out in front, where an excited *gendarme* was waiting to tell me I must park my red car farther in the square. I left him talking, and put Alice into the front seat beside me.

"But where's Holly?" she exclaimed, as I started the car. "And this isn't our car at all—"

"It is as far as Paris," I said. "That is, if you're game to spell me at the wheel—I don't know how long I'm good for. As for Holly, he's lying in back there, dead to the world and half drowned. I had to fish him out of a river. Our friend Tellier's there too, handcuffed to the footrail and a little bit deader than Holly, but still good for a term in French Guiana—he'll probably become an immigrant there, for the rest of his life."

She took one look into the tonneau, as we swept under the lights and turned off to the right for the station and the south road, and a little cry escaped her.

"Oh! They—they're both dead, Buddy! Tell me what's happened! Are you hurt?"

"Now, listen!" I said. "You want to know, don't you? Well, there's something I want to know a lot worse, before I tell you! And this is it—are you going to wait all those six months before you'll take a trip around the world with me?"

"Buddy Barnes, I could shake you!" she exclaimed angrily.

"You can, if you'll marry me first," I said. "Will you? Hurry up, too—Holly needs a drop of that brandy, and can't get it until we get things settled. And I got a crack on the head that'll probably leave me harebrained for life—"

"You're absolutely hopeless!" she exclaimed, and then caught my arm. "Of course I will, Buddy—I was only waiting for you to ask me—"

We nearly went into a shop window then and there!

Pitchers Are Born

By EDWARD H. REEVE

The author of this engaging story is a Canadian newspaper man who has himself been a member of champion teams in various sports.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

AT eleven-fifty A. M. on the epochal day (for me) that I first met Joe Rooney, I stood in the washroom of the State Bank of the thriving little city of Hillapolis with a wad of wet newspaper in my hand. Open before me lay a volume, entitled, "The Art of Big League Heaving; two dollars postpaid with twenty-five illustrations," at the page depicting Speedy Lewis, the Sox ace, throwing his curve in three movements. With diagram fixed in mind, I wound up and hurled my makeshift ball at the door where I could visualize a batter, a catcher, preferably my friend George Brewer, and a grandstand full of cheering fans behind. Unfortunately the door opened at that moment; and as Mr. Radcliffe, the bank manager, entered, my missile swept his fedora neatly off his head.

He was a short, sarcastic man with a large voice; a fine singer of bass solos at all local fêtes, garden parties and Kiwanis luncheons. But he was not singing as he picked up my book and remarked: "H'mm, an invaluable volume for the rising ledger-keeper. Do you pitch under a *nom de plume*, Frederick? I cannot recall your name in any box scores."

"No sir," I hastened to explain, after gasping out some apologies, "I merely pitch

I wound up, and hurled my wad of wet newspaper at the door. Unfortunately it opened at that moment, and Mr. Radcliffe, our manager, entered.

for the Walnut Avenue baseball nine, and I am striving to perfect my form, besides mastering several of the curves depicted herein."

"Quite so, Frederick," he answered. "But let me assure you that one more practice like this and you will have thrown yourself completely out of a job, which would be quite nice hurling for an amateur. Take a short warm-up now, and relieve the cashier's cage for noon hour."

I did, with burning ears, reflecting bitterly that this was another setback. For five years, since coming to Hillapolis to live with my uncle and aunt, I had striven at this bank until at nineteen I was, as Rooney afterward said, "a long, sad youth, jogging through life on a three-legged stool." A home course I was studying, known as "Battling Business," was the extension ladder with which I hoped to scale the heights of success, yet Mr. Radcliffe and my relations remained quite unimpressed by my efforts, and their running fire of knocks rattled daily through my existence like a persistent xylophone trio.

THE only advantage I had ever found in my position was that it put me closely in touch with Alice Hooper, who also worked at the bank. She is the human interest theme in the story, and she interested plenty of humans, for she was a beautiful girl. For a time, though, despite my serious nature, I had the preference—until Champ Wallace came back from college.

They called him Champ for being the champion boxer at college, a fact he had proved several times in our parts, being of a quarrelsome disposition. He had also been a champion all-round athlete; and to hear him tell it, the champion hot potato, which was credible, for he was good-looking, a great dancer, and the owner of a roadster as sleek as his hair. He was a star pitcher too.

These admirable attributes, however, became offensive in him, for he had found out how good he was, and could not keep a secret. On account of Alice he soon took an active dislike to me, which was unfortunate, for he was also a champion kidder, especially when a crowd was around. At night in bed I could always think of snappy answers, but never at the right time.

When I took the cashier's wicket this day, there was one customer in the bank—and Champ Wallace. The customer was engrossed in sorting some bills.

Champ, who was waiting for Alice, draped himself before me and began his usual annoying line such as: "You have disappointed us all again, Freddy. Will you never learn to stick to your banking? Look what it did for Willie Hoppe! On asking Alice to the outing tomorrow I find she promised three weeks ago to let you take her. Tut, tut, what means this? Instead

of frisking away the precious moments of this holiday, you could be staggering over three more pages of 'Battling Business.'"

He made me nervous, try as I would to ignore him; but finally the lone customer, who had been waiting for service, suddenly elbowed past Champ and said: "If Alexander Hamilton, here, is quite through with his inspirational address, I'd take it kindly if you could change this bill for me."

Stepping back a pace and swearing softly, Champ gave the intruder a look of chill disdain. "Are you rushing to catch another freight-train," he snapped, "or just trying to drop that twenty before they miss it?"

That was Wallace, always ready for a scene, but the stranger returned his gaze coolly; and as he sized up Champ, I slipped him the Observation and Character Study —Chapter Five, Battling Business. He was a big, husky man of thirty or thereabouts, in a slouch hat and rough dress, rather hard appearance but good-natured looking, walked with a limp, had a tanned and battle-scarred face and large hands.

"Neither or neether, as the case may be," he answered deliberately. "I just blew in on my saxophone and got stuck on a few high notes. Are you advertising something, or are you just wearing that suit for a lark?"

I held my seat for fireworks, but at this moment Alice came out, powdering her nose, and being oblivious, in blonde fashion, to anything except herself, she remarked blithely: "Now, Champ, leave off kidding Freddy and come to lunch."

"O. K., Sunshine," said Champ; and then with a truculent look at the stranger: "I'll see you again, Scar-face."

The stranger laughed rather absent-mindedly as he studied Alice's carriage while she tripped out with Champ, leaving me with that dull ache that had become chronic. But I warned him: "Mister, that is Champ Wallace, reputed to be much the most capable fighter in these parts."

"Champ Wallace!" he exclaimed. "Good grief! You leave me all a-tremble."

But he didn't look at all nervous as he limped out briskly.

NEXT day started in gala fashion for me, as George Brewer, the incomparable Alice and myself went spinning along the sunny countryside. Alas, halfway to the outing, George's car stopped dead, and for twenty minutes we labored in vain to revive it. Then who should drive along but Champ Wallace. He stopped and cried loudly:

"Whatever is the matter? Don't tell me that this car has broken down! And it the machine that won the automotive prize at the Chicago World's Fair. It cannot be!"

We ignored him, but there he parked with that cursed smile on his face offering advice continually, making remarks about the main-spring, the paddle-wheel and the like; then he started on me.

"Don't tire yourself, Freddy. Remember the honor of Walnut Avenue is resting on you, and I shudder should you lose control just when that curve on Page Fourteen is becoming visible to the naked eye."

"Of course, you are the only pitcher in these parts," I sneered.

"Oh, no, no," he cried cheerfully. "After your performance in beating the Wolf Patrol nineteen to eighteen, I take off my hat to you. It must have been an air-tight tussle."

Now, he knew we had not played the Wolf Patrol or any other Boy Scouts, just as he knew George's car had not been in the Chicago World's Fair; but that was his style. Alice giggled at everything he said.

"Gentlemen, I must tear away," he remarked at last. "You will be tickled silly to hear I am pitching for the Y boys today. as their regular heaver is busy pitching hay fever. We should have a tremendous duel, Freddy. Care to come along, Alice? You don't want to miss the races."

Well, after very little hesitation Alice went, of course, and they sped away with Wallace's last remark ringing in my ears: "So long, Freddy! I'll tell them to keep the egg-and-spoon race till you arrive."

We finally got to the outing in time for our ball-game, but matters went from bad to worse. I will not try to alibi for my pitching that afternoon, but everything combined to make me look my poorest.

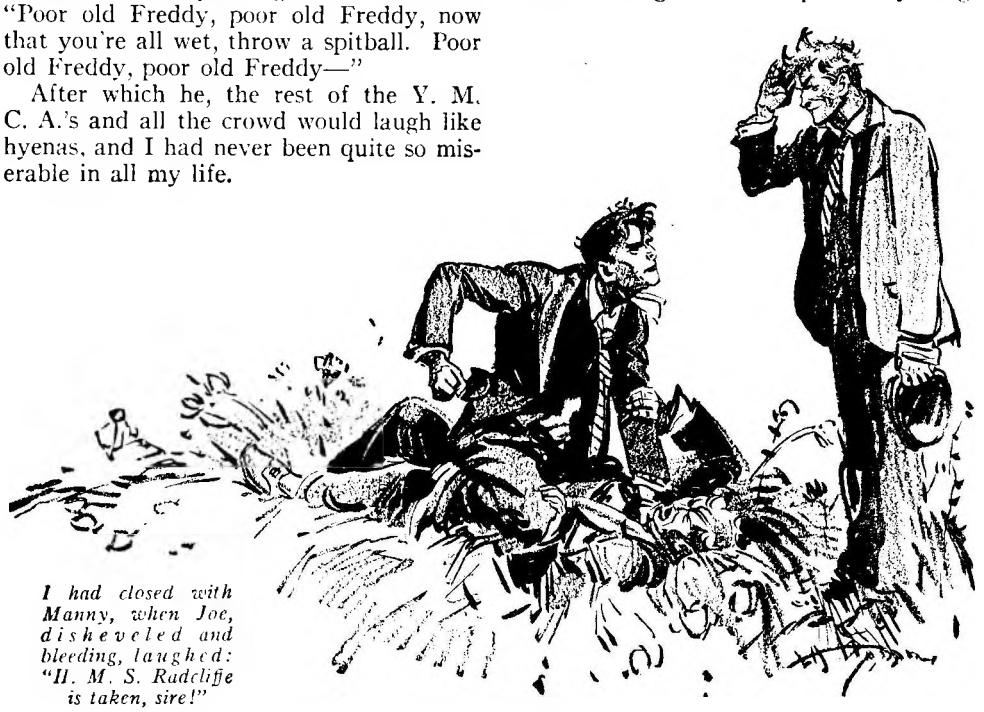
In the first place, Champ Wallace pitching against a team of our caliber was enough to make the game a farce. Then I was very wild, for in relinquishing my own awkward way of pitching for the proper big league style, Illustration Twelve, and in trying to master the curves of Article Two, I found great difficulty in getting the sphere anywhere near its intended destination. When I threw curves, I was wild. When I went back to the straight fast one, Roger McIntosh, our catcher, missed it; and when I threw it straight and slow enough for him to hold, the Y batters hit it fiercely.

Our opponents were no wonders, but Champ's pitching gave them a huge advantage. He mowed us down and stuck out his chest as though winning a world series. George Brewer saved us from total ignominy by hitting a homer, but we were behind in the fifth, fourteen to one, and Champ was bubbling over with wise-cracks.

When I was pitching he would roar: "Poor old Freddy, poor old Freddy, now that you're all wet, throw a spitball. Poor old Freddy, poor old Freddy—"

After which he, the rest of the Y. M. C. A.'s and all the crowd would laugh like hyenas, and I had never been quite so miserable in all my life.

He made a remark and began to roll on the ground, while his brother ran out calling me a ruffian and saying he washed his hands of the team right there, while everyone else in the crowd looked at me and made remarks as if I had murdered some one. All except a big fellow near our bench whom I recognized as the slouch-hatted stranger. He helped carry Roger



I had closed with Manny, when Joe, dishevel ed and bleeding, laughed: "H. M. S. Radcliffe is taken, sire!"

My dismay gave way to indignation when we trooped in for our fifth batting and Herbert McIntosh took it on himself to tell me how poorly I was pitching; and his precious brother, our catcher, chimed in with his piece, and in the Invincibles' next innings I lost my temper completely.

Three runners were on base; Champ was keeping up his "Poor old Freddy!" slogan, and a thousand voices were helping him with the refrain until I forgot style, curves and all else and hurled the ball blindly, full force, across the plate. The batter let it go, and it thudded against Roger's chest-protector. The next one whistled past his ear, and both he and his brother shouted warnings, but now I didn't care. Again I threw. The batter missed and it smacked Roger on the knee. He hopped about while Herbert yelled heatedly at me. Once more I heaved the ball over; again the batter missed, and Roger caught it, on the thumb.

to Herbert's car and, after shoving Herbert in, he cried:

"Drive to the doctor's quick before hardening of the arteries sets in." Herbert shot off in a cloud of dust and indignation.

"And now who will catch?" said Willie Weaver, our shortstop.

"Me," said George Brewer, "and my brother Peezer can play field."

"But," said Willie, "we have no manager, either—Herb's quit!"

"Applications for that position are now being received," interposed the large stranger, looming up suddenly. With everyone bent on making us laughing-stocks, here was unlooked-for aid.

"Will you manage us?" asked Willie.

"Yes, yes, yes and a tiger!" he answered. "The name is Joseph Rooney, men—you've heard of my little Aunt Annie. George, can you hold Freddy when he uncorks?"

"Yes, we practice together."

"Excellent," said Rooney. "Don yonder armor, then, which I lifted from young Missem. And you, Frederick, have been trying to pitch some wrinkles."

"Yes, sir," I replied, "and I must admit I have not yet gained full control of them."

"I'm glad to see you're honest," he cried. "Now, hearken, throw no more doodads today. Make Mr. Spalding whistle 'The Star Spangled Banner' with every pitch. Right. Then up guards and at 'em."

The rest of the game was short. Though the full-throated gibing continued, I listened only to Rooney's steadying voice and managed to get through the next two innings without being scored on, at which point supper was announced and we Walnuts drew off to a far table. We took our new friend to eat with us, which he did prodigiously, pausing only to answer Willie Weaver's flow of questions, which led to the doubtful information that he was making a tour of America on a pogo stick but had crashed doing a tail-spin, that we could break the news to the Hillapolis Chamber of Commerce that he would tarry a week in our hamlet and that he would be delighted to coach us the odd evening.

"We practice at Brown's field tomorrow night," said Willie. "Do you know where that is?"

"I do," he replied. "I helped Brown chase the buffaloes off that smiling sward. I'll be there, and by special request I'd like the battery to generate around an hour ahead of the rest. *Adios,* for now, and thanks for the chow."

NEXT night George and I reported to Brown's Field, hardly expecting to see Rooney; but there he was with a couple of baseballs and bats.

"Right on the dot, Eastern standard time," he cried. "We wont ask you to punch the clock: just doff the wrappers and to work. Lights, action, camera!"

That was the way he talked. Following instructions we began to warm up while he watched. Feeling embarrassed, I did my best to follow the diagrams from "The Art of Big League Heaving," but after throwing several, Rooney interrupted, saying:

"Frederick, as a friend I implore you to zoom that pellet as nature intended you should! Pitch as you did yesterday when you got fightin' mad. Hurl with the carefree abandon of the mazurka, not with the stilted step of the minuet."

I did as he said, and of course threw the ball much faster and freer than under the new style I was trying to perfect; but this was not the idea as I saw it, so I expostulated: "Look here, sir, while I can do better this way now, what of three years hence? The book on the subject says my style is all wrong. Ultra-rapid films of big-league pitchers at the local movie house have borne this out. I've concluded I'm making mistakes, and I'm trying to right myself."

At that he delivered the first of the many sermons he was to give us.

"Bozo," he began, "before going further, let this percolate: Style is nice, but every man has his own. When I was a boy, my Uncle Ambrose took me to see a man called Wagner play shortstop, which he went about after the fashion of a Holstein in a muddy meadow. Yet, when have you observed an all-star lineup without his name? In sport, my boy, let nature take its course.

"True," he continued, "you have a wind-up like a Dutch clock; but the fact that you bring your old left flipper around from your larboard pocket while the first baseman is ducking your right foot, and the ball appears suddenly out of the nowhere, will be a help, not a hindrance, in your pitching chores. Greek statuary has nothing to equal the pose you strike just prior to the departure of the horsehide from your mitten; but unless I am mistaken, you are the possessor of a natural crossfire that is unique. In time I will show you how to cut down on your cranking so the runners wont steal your catcher's mask; but meanwhile, laddie, whip the ball with that tanglefoot motion and the speed which comes therefrom, and the law of ballistics will do the rest. Fret no more, just toil away."

Another time I would have argued, but that was a stage in my life when I understood how people sometimes ended it all. My industry at the bank netted me nothing but criticism. My feelings for Alice were unreturned. My athletic endeavors were derided, and I suffered the scorn of he-men like Champ Wallace. I decided, therefore, to drift with the tide, and Rooney's advice chimed with my mood.

So George and I worked on with our new acquaintance dropping us bits of advice until the others arrived and the practice was soon in full swing. How clearly I recall the scene, Brown's old field with the rough diamond, and the long grass growing around the fences, and a crowd of young fellows tearing about as if possessed!

Finally at dusk Joe said: "Boys, thus

endeth the first lesson, which is one of your lighter efforts if I am to do a McGraw on your behalf. Now, do we continue or do we call it off?"

We looked at him and at each other, then everyone chorused: "We want to go on."

"Good stuff!" he cried. "And thanks. I must hie me hence now to see a man about a terrier, but be on hand tomorrow. Adieu, young friends, adieu!"

With that he drove off in his battered car, and no one spoke until George cried: "Did you see him handle that bat and ball? I bet he was a wow of a player before he got that gimpy leg. Boys, we got a manager!"

"He asked me how fast I could run," remarked Pete Pember, "and when I told him I won the high-school sprints, he said he thought so from my build and the color of my hair, and I had better browse in center field. I told him I played third because my older brother did, and he said his father used to be a champion figure skater, but that didn't cut any ice with him."

"When he moved me over to third," Jack Morris said, "he told me I had the kind of legs found chiefly on Gulbransons and third basemen, while my good whip would help 'where the red-hot liners warble and the bunts come twisting down.' "

"He told me," put in Ham Hickey, "that he liked the way I glaumed onto throws at first base, but I would have to shift gears faster, and I got to play ten sets of handball every day for speed. Oy!"

"He just told me," chirped Peezer Brewer, "that I was too young to be out in the wilds of right field where something might sneak up outa the long grass, and I could play second where my own brother could throw to me."

He had missed no one, and had put all hands on edge for the next night; and before the week was out you would have thought Joe Rooney had been with us all his life.

When he broke the news that he had decided to park among us for the summer, we gave three cheers. And from then on we had concentrated baseball. Each evening he clattered up in his old bus, which he called the Charley Ross because it had been missing so long, and the excitement started.

My most constant employment was throwing baseballs everlastingly at a mattress he had tied up on the fence and marked out in squares to test my accuracy.

Our clubhouse was a shed Joe had talked Mr. Brown into letting us have, and therein he and George installed a shower bath and hung a sign upon the door, "The Walnut Athletic Club." And the sponge fights, and kidding he would start there, and the close harmony in the shower, were enough to lift anyone from the doldrums.

Unfortunately others did not know Joe as we did and suspicion soon was pointing to him in our chatty metropolis, for, although he always had a roll, no one ever caught him working.

BUT we were for him, bootlegger or no, for he was coach, trainer, adviser, and entertainer to us. He fixed George's car so it would run almost consistently; he coached Ham Hickey, much to our surprise, in French and history for a few hours every day for two weeks, so that Ham passed his high-school exams, which was also a surprise; he cured Bill Bender's dog from the mange and taught Jack Morris, a good swimmer, how to do the eight-beat crawl so that Jack won the races at the regatta. He found out that Squint Mackie's right name was Robert, and before long we were all following Joe's example of calling him Bob instead of Squint, which must have been quite a relief to him.

We never tired of sitting in the park after dark listening to Joe talk of athletes and sporting events, but he seldom would talk about himself, and even Willie could only glean that he had been given a free course in Hexathlons and Advanced Spheroids in a couple of colleges before the war, and he had been hit by a piece of shrapnel in the foot one day at Ypres. But Willie found out the colleges he had gone to, and by digging up the records discovered Joe's name and picture in a football guide as end on an All-American team; and from then on, if folks had said he was a gunman, we would have still stuck by him.

One night when he had been with us seven weeks he said to George and me: "Wanted, a good young battery for pleasant outdoor work, ideal surroundings, quick chance for advancement. Men, my old froth-blowing friend, Gunner Baxter of River Bend, where I was going on Sunday for some fishing, sends word the campers have arranged a friendly ball-game, and he wants me to bring along a pitcher and a catcher for his side."

"What kind of ball-players will they be?" asked George dubiously.

"Why, I guess they're not ball-players at all. Just a bunch of the boys. River Bend is two hundred and fifty miles from here. Leaving Saturday evening for a breeze along the broad highway through some of the finest signboard territory in the land, we could arrive in time to wangle the odd trout and join in the baseballic frolic."

So three P. M. Sunday found us donning strange ball uniforms in River Bend, and what a surprise we received when we stepped on the field, for the place was ringed with cars and four thousand people must have been on hand. This was strange for a friendly game, and I said so to Joe.

"That's easy," he explained. "There has been so much ribbin' done about this game that every River Bender and his brother is out to see the fun. It should be a scream. Then this park is a great place for tin canners and sandwich scrambles, and they are around to see what's the excitement."

Thus reassured, I took the box for Joe's friend's team without any qualms, and when my first batter struck out, I felt right at home. Still, Joe was wrong if he expected the game to be a joke, for we had a well-played match, with some of the fellows remarkably proficient. This was not so noticeable at the bat for they appeared weak hitters, but in the field both sides were skillful, while the shouting of the fans was the loudest I had ever heard. When George hit a homer in the third, the uproar was terrific; but knowing it was all in fun, it merely gave me a pleasurable thrill and I hurled as steadily as though pitching into my mattress, and the opposition scored but two runs off my delivery. As Joe, pinch-hitting in the eighth, hit another homer with one on, we won three-two, which put Joe and the Gunner in great spirits. After supper at Gunner's summer hotel, we returned home with Joe singing us a song with three hundred verses, the name being, he said: "Sweet Chiming Bells of Dayton, O., You Register With Me." He also gave us ten dollars each before we fell to sleep, explaining the Gunner had taken it out of the collection for our expenses, and so the trip was an all round success.

It was followed by others. The next Sunday it was River Bend, where we won 3-1, and then came a journey to Pine Top, a long distance in the other direction, where another acquaintance of Joe's was staging a match between two summer resorts, and our side won 2-0. Six times in all we went on these excursions, and with Rooney helping out with his terrific pinch-hitting, we took six games without losing one.

SO the summer drifted along with Rooney keeping the boys at their baseball until we won the Church League cup easily, an event which caused no furore whatever being merely celebrated by our eight supporters and the team with a feed at Joe's expense, and then we were all startled out of the even tenor of our ways when Joe announced he had entered our Walnut nine in the Hillapolis Fair baseball tournament.

Imagine our consternation! Only the cream of the talent in the State entered the lists for the famous Hillapolis Shield, and the Mohawks had been pressed to the limit the previous year to come out as winners. Great crowds always attended, and large sums of money changed hands on the results; and the mere thought of us Walnuts stepping into the affair left us shaking. But Joe would not withdraw, for he said he did it for our experience and to see if we had any nerve, and after that, what could we say, though everyone took our entry as a joke.

That night, however, something more disastrous shook my career. We were working late in the bank, but early in the evening Mr. Radcliffe was called out of town, leaving Alice and me alone.

"As Miss Hooper lives some distance from here, Frederick," he said, "I will leave my car and you can drive her home."

That suited me wonderfully, and I went at my work with such zest that shortly after nine I announced to Alice that we were finished. She answered: "That's great; and listen, Freddy, there is a hot dance down at the Red Cat tonight. Say we take it in?"

"But Mr. Radcliffe—"

"Three hearty pazzazzas for Mr. Radcliffe! Don't you want to take me?" she said, running her fingers through my hair.

Well, naturally, that settled it, and I felt like a million dollars as I pulled up in the grounds of that famous roadhouse and ushered my beautiful girl friend to a table by the dance-floor. Two hours later, though, much of my enthusiasm had waned, for the first people we met had been Champ Wallace and a crowd of his girl and boy friends; and after a couple of short dances, the moments I had Alice to myself were few and far between. Some fifteen minutes before, in fact, she had disappeared into

the moonlight with Champ; so, brooding over the matter, I betook myself to Mr. Radcliffe's car.

It was parked on the outskirts; and finding it, I also found Champ and Alice with three of his cronies and three other girls, the eight of them being parked in or on the car. I smelled liquor at once, and when I arrived they were drinking a toast to Hoozit or some such person. Seeing an intruder, they hastily hid something, but recognizing me, they laughed relievedly and Champ said:

"Well, well, if it isn't Frederick the Walnut, the demon of the dance-floor! How did you escape from all the girls who were clamoring for a whirl with you?"

"We would offer you a drink, Freddy," said Manny Manners, pouring out another round, "but it might start you on a bender, and we know you are a hellhound when in your cups."

I said angrily: "I want none of your liquor, but I am in charge of this car, and you've no right to use it as a saloon."

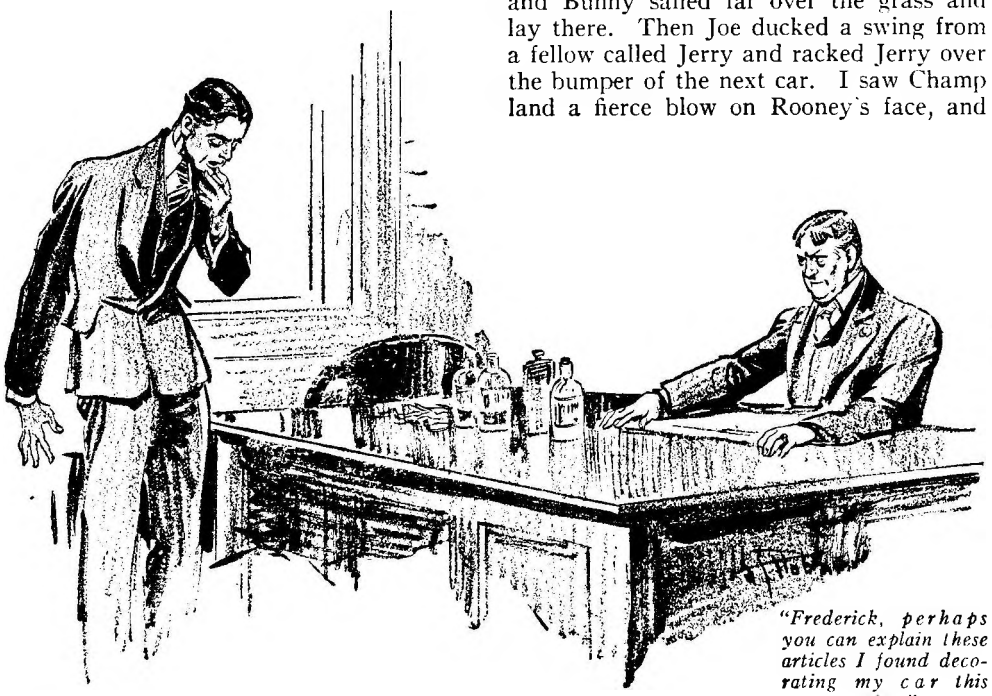
"Now, Freddy, don't be tiresome," said Alice.

That made me madder, and I cried: "Alice, I'm surprised to see you acting this way after me bringing you here."

It was an unfortunate remark. Alice drew herself up in queenly fashion and turned coldly away; and Champ, grabbing me belligerently, snarled: "Take the air, flat tire, before I smear you!"

The next instant he was whirled back, and with a thrill of joy I found Joe Rooney at my side. There was no time for talk. In an instant the four fellows were into us. Joe smashed Bunny Dyson on the nose and Bunny sailed far over the grass and lay there. Then Joe ducked a swing from a fellow called Jerry and racked Jerry over the bumper of the next car. I saw Champ land a fierce blow on Rooney's face, and simultaneously I closed with Manny Manners. The engagement must have lasted a couple of minutes. We fell into a flowerbed, and I was pounding his head on some ornamental stonework when Joe pulled me off. His hair was disheveled and his nose bleeding, but he laughed:

"H. M. S. *Radcliffe* is taken, sire. Hop in and drive the prize away, and I'll follow in my sloop."



"Frederick, perhaps you can explain these articles I found decorating my car this morning."

I ROSE and surveyed the scene. The struggle had been so swift and silent that no one apparently had heard the disturbance above the distant thumping of the orchestra. I saw two girls helping Bunny to rise. Another held Jerry's head while Alice stood distractedly by the car.

"Alice," I said, "let's go home."

"Don't speak to me, you brute!" she cried. "What have you done with Champ?"

So I sadly stepped on the gas and did

not stop driving till I had the car parked safely in Mr. Radcliffe's garage; then I drove home with my redoubtable friend.

"Joe, what did happen to Champ?" I asked.

"He died game, boys, I'm here to tell," said Joe as he felt his nose, "but he was frigid when he fell. Your erstwhile girl friend, who appears to have turned Flaming Mamie, will find him in the flower-bed next to your opponent."

That news alleviated somewhat the pain I was feeling from Alice's behavior, and I smiled on my way to work next morning when several people told me that Champ Wallace and some of his friends had been shaken up rather badly the night before in a car accident.

My smiling ceased, though, when Mr. Radcliffe sent for me first thing.

"Did you take my car home last night, Frederick?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you take Miss Hooper home?"

"No, sir—she went home with some friends instead."

"I am glad of that. Then perhaps you can explain these articles I found decorating my car this morning, and just what kind of a party you saw fit to hold with my property."

So saying, he produced a pocket flask, a bottle three-quarters full of gin, and a couple of girls' compacts. "Some more of your gin is on my upholstery," he remarked.

INSTANTLY the position I was in flashed on me. Why had I not thought to look over the car? All those things had been dropped when the fight started. But how could I explain? Would he believe me? And then I realized I could say nothing without placing Alice under a cloud.

Well, to make it short, five minutes later my connections with the bank had been severed, and in thirty minutes more I was walking out of my uncle's dwelling for the last time. Minus job and home I sought out Rooney for advice.

"Come out of it," he counseled. "What good was that job? Your salary wouldn't keep an oyster in soup, and your uncle had cobwebs in every pocket, so you're lucky to be shaking two anchors at once. Lucky!"

"I guess I'll leave town," I said.

"Good idea," he agreed, "but not till after this Fair Tournament. Stay here at the Tavern with me, bozo, and we'll come out yet with a cheery lawf."

THE next ten days all I did was practice baseball with the rest of the Walnuts doing about the same. I got so I could hit the designated marks on my mattress eleven times out of twelve, which Joe said was pretty good balance even for a bank-clerk; but how I and my team-mates wished the ordeal over!

Joe and I heard no more about that fight at the Red Cat, and though I never happened to meet or see Alice, I often wondered if she knew why I had been fired.

Ten crack teams and ourselves were the entries in the Tourney, and we had temporary relief with the draw when we took a bye. The others swung into action on the opening Saturday of the Fair.

The Mohawks won eight to nothing, with Champ Wallace pitching till they had a good lead and then retiring to save himself for the next game on Tuesday. That night the five winning teams and ourselves were drawn, and to our horror and their joy we drew the Mohawks for opponents.

Despite our prayers for rain, Tuesday dawned warm and bright, and at four P. M. I found myself, as in a nightmare, walking out on the field with the Walnuts, many of whom were as nervous as myself, judging by their bungling attempts at fielding practice. Fifteen thousand people were there. They had seen two fine games and were staying for the comedy and we were greeted by mirthful treble cries such as: "Yoo-hoo, here come the camp-fire girls! Back to the orphanage!" and others.

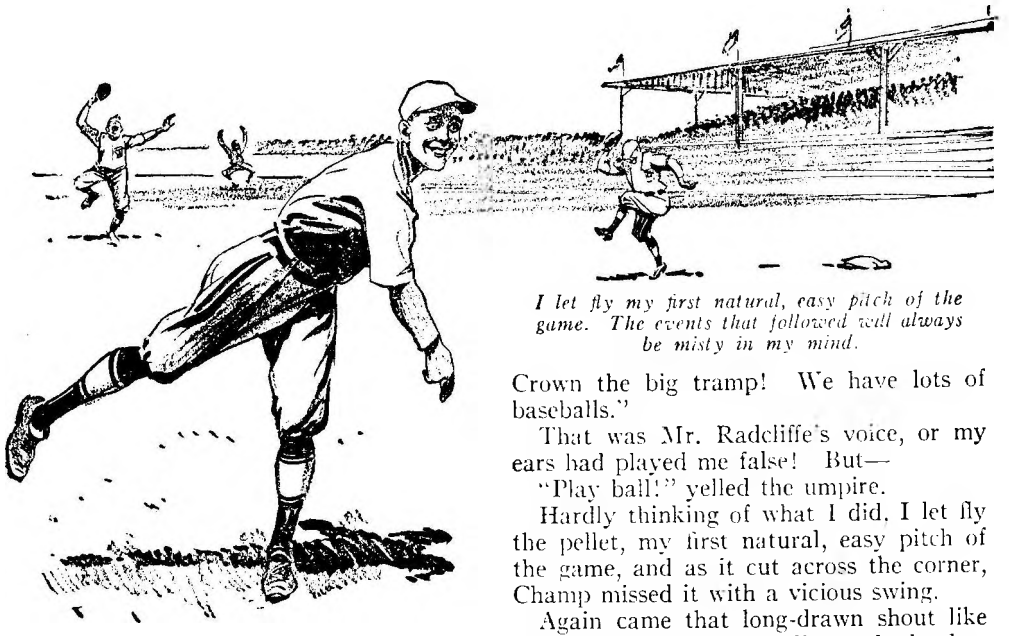
Some one had strange confidence in us though, for Willie Weaver said to George and me: "There is a guy called Gunner taking all kinds of freak bets on this game. He has an awful roll and it's all going on us, different ways."

"Good old Gunner!" cried George.

"He's throwing his money away," I said

"Oh, I don't know," remarked my friend, and in him, his brother Peezer and Joe Rooney, who put himself in right field, we had three players free from the general nervousness.

As for myself when I faced the first batter my stomach felt like an elevator, and the first three throws went over the screen. Slowing down, I grooved one which was slashed at Willie so fast it almost knocked his leg off. The next man bowled me over with his drive, and the crowd, rocking with laughter suggested that we dig a trench. Their third hitter drove a long single scor-



I let fly my first natural, easy pitch of the game. The events that followed will always be misty in my mind.

ing a run. In spite of Rooney's encouragement, I couldn't control the ball except by lobbing it. The fourth man walked, and the next shot a hit to right. The runner on third scored, but the one from second was out at the plate when Rooney hurled the ball in like a bullet. Another single and another walk filled the bases, and I wished the ground would open up and swallow me.

The Mohawks were dancing around, shouting jeers, and the fans were acting as though watching a Harold Lloyd picture. "Come on, Casabianca," shouted one, "stick to the deck." And I felt not unlike that unfortunate youth as Champ walked to the plate and his admirers shouted wildly for him to clear the sacks.

"Make a big effort, you long-legged clown," he sneered; "throw one this far—"

THE rest was lost, and even the rattle of encouragement from the side was drowned when, suddenly, startlingly, on the air, high over all other sounds there rose a booming, far-carrying, somehow very familiar voice which roared:

"Strike the big bum out, Freddy—strike him out! He may be a champ back at college, but he's only a chump around here."

Both Champ and I jumped. Where had I heard that deep ringing voice before? It was not the Gunner. It was not one of my clubmates. As I paused, it rose again: "Hit him on the bean with it, Freddy! Crown the big tramp! We have lots of baseballs."

That was Mr. Radcliffe's voice, or my ears had played me false! But—

"Play ball!" yelled the umpire.

Hardly thinking of what I did, I let fly the pellet, my first natural, easy pitch of the game, and as it cut across the corner, Champ missed it with a vicious swing.

Again came that long-drawn shout like that of a Kansas hog-caller, only louder: "Oh, you big bum, Wallace, you immense cheese! You may be a whale with the women, but you're only a fish-cake to us."

I stared at the stands. Could that voice belong to anyone else but Mr. Radcliffe? As if in answer, my eyes came to rest on a figure in one of the box seats, a figure standing up on a chair with every motion denoting high excitement, and that figure was Mr. Radcliffe or my eyes deceived me, though the dignified cutaway coat was flying open, the more dignified black fedora was bashed in on his head and through a megaphone made from a newspaper he was demanding in stentorian tones that I "put the ball across and watch that big lug swing himself round-shouldered."

The events that followed for some time after that, I am afraid, will always be misty in my mind. Astonishment had bereft me, it seemed, of all other emotions. I recall following the umpire's curt instruction to "snap out of it," by throwing at the places George Brewer held his decker, and being faintly surprised at the loud thuds made by the ball as it smacked into his mitt, and then I was on my way to our bench.

I had struck Champ Wallace out! And on the last pitch George had snapped a throw down to Peezer at second, where the kid had caught a Mohawk runner four feet off the bag, ending their innings. But I remember feeling no elation, relief or any other reaction. James Jones Radcliffe or a man with James Jones Radcliffe's voice,

coat, hat and mustache, had elected himself as a one-man rooters' club for our team; and everything else, for the nonce, paled before that!

OUR first batters Weaver and Morris struck out, and the crowd made remarks about our signaling corps, but George took some of the smile off Champ's face by doubling. Then Rooney was up, and when they saw his limp the wisecrackers outdid themselves. "A wheel-chair for General Grant!" they yelled. High above their gibes, however, rose that big bass voice again:

"Put it out of the park, Joe: this guy Wallace can't throw anything but conversation. You know how to hit him, Joe; you've done it before."

For an instant Champ glared truculently at the stand and then whipped the ball straight at Rooney's head; but Joe stepped back and slashed the pellet to the fence for another two-bagger, scoring George. Ham struck out to end the innings.

I was still in a daze as I took the mound. The Mohawks had scored two runs in the first, should have had more and would probably get them right away, but I was not thinking of that. If that was Mr. Radcliffe, I was pondering, what did he know about Joe and Champ fighting? I must have been pitching mechanically. If so, the practice that Rooney had driven me to all summer stood me in good stead for this form of work. For though my support made two errors, we managed to retire the side without a score, and another batter struck out, much to the surprise of the multitude. Their wonder and mine further increased in the third, when two Mohawks fanned and the other popped; and when, in the fourth, I held them to one hit and no runs, almost everyone appeared to be absolutely dumfounded.

What was the matter, I asked myself. Were these champions really finding my offerings hard to hit, or were they merely kidding us along or waiting for bets? Each frame I expected the storm to break loose. So did the fans, and apparently so did the Mohawks.

Of course we were not scoring, either. Joe got another hit in the fourth, but that was all. In the fifth, the opposition drove out two blows and I thought my time had come, but a great stop by Ham Hickey and a good catch by Pete Pember, along with another strike-out, put me over the hole; but even then we could not realize that we had a chance. We were almost afraid to encourage each other, but as Willie said, Joe was doing enough of that for an entire league. And even Joe was outclassed by the efforts of the "mystery man" in the grandstand.

As an exhibition of long-distance and consistent rooting, his was a masterpiece. He was going through more motions than a college cheer leader; he was conducting a dozen arguments with those around him, he was pouring most voluble and well-thought-up abuse at Champ and his teammates; and above all he was encouraging us with advice, praise, war-whoops! It was astounding to hear him; and in the sixth, when I struck out their side on eleven pitched balls, the entire crowd forgot that they had stayed to laugh and settled away in real earnest to take sides and root excitedly. The Mohawks' great following were roaring for their favorites to start their steam-roller attack, and the rest of the attendance, supporters of the other teams in the tournament, all fell in behind our rooter, and the din was terrific.

IN our half of the sixth, George and Rooney hit once more in succession to tie the score, and from then on it was nip and tuck. By then I was quite cool as I pitched. I had given up puzzling over Mr. Radcliffe, and worked away as though laboring at practice on my mattress target. Joe would signal for each pitch to George, who relayed it to me, and I would put the ball just where he asked for it. Yet as inning after inning went by and I found myself still holding these formidable clouters in check, I would pound my shin with a bat to make sure it was not all some strange dream.

Thus went the battle, my mates giving me almost errorless support to turn back the Mohawks each frame, while Champ, pitching savagely, silently and exceedingly well, cut through the Walnut batting order —until the twelfth, when the break came in the deadlock.

Willie Weaver, leading off for us, choked up his bat and scratched a hit; Jack Morris sacrificed him to second. George sent him to third with a fly that was captured far out by the fence, and Joe Rooney advanced grimly to the plate. Champ's play, of course, was to walk Joe and get the next batter. If he had used his judgment, that is what he would have done, and he may

have intended to do so, but the tense silence that had fallen as Rooney and Champ faced each other in this crucial spot was shattered to bits once more by the loudest Radcliffian effort of the day.

"It wont be long now, Champ," came the cry. "You're all flattened out like a hardwood floor, and here is where we slap on the old Walnut finish!" Then rising in a powerful lilt to an old tune it continued:

"That smart Walnut finish
That hard Walnut finish
That old Walnut finish
For young Champ the chump!"

One long dirty look Champ directed toward the singer as a shout of laughter rocked the stands; and gripping the ball furiously, he put everything he had into his pitch to put it past Joe. Swift and straight it flew; Joe's big shoulders seemed to spread, and the bat whistled through the air.

A moment later Willie had scampered across the plate with the winning run, Joe had crossed first-base, and was galloping for the clubhouse with the rest of us at his heels, and the crowd going crazy!

About ten minutes after that, with pandemonium still reigning in our dressing-room, Joe pulled George and me away from a flock of congratulators and dragged us into a little side room.

"Joe," I shouted over the hubbub, "how did you know we had a chance to beat them?"

"Because, old blushing violet," he yelled, "you two guys have beaten six teams as good as them this summer. In those Sunday games you were smoking out some of the best collections of ringers this side of the Mississippi, and I couldn't tell you how good you were for fear you'd get the toolie woolies, which was a mistake. Do you think I'd spent the summer here if I hadn't heard you make the ball screech at the outing that day, if I hadn't seen in George and you two gems of purest ray serene, two—"

His further remarks were drowned out by the triumphant swell of harmony from the showers, and then through the doorway came Mr. Radcliffe. Yes, it was he, for certain, though Mr. Radcliffe as I had never seen him before—his collar gone, his hat scarcely more than a rim, and his entire manner wild and exceedingly merry.

"Frederick," he cried tragically, "come back—all is forgiven—Miss Hooper has told all." With that he pulled out a letter with a flourish and handing it to me, went into a jig. Breathlessly I tore open the envelope, and read in Alice's well-known hand, a message that was short but sweet.

SHE had been at home sick the day I was discharged, and had, in fact, been off from work for ten days. Upon returning to the office, however, she had learned that I had left, and when Mr. Radcliffe told her why, she almost had a relapse. It was nothing to what he had, however, when she told him right away the real facts of the case. He had promised to come to the ball-game in the afternoon to square things up with me. She wound up her missive by asking me to forgive her and wishing us luck for she was cheering for me.

"Yeehoops!" shouted Joe as he read it over my shoulder. "Love sends a little carload of orchids. But this was written this morning! What kept you?"

That question brought forth a seven-minute discourse from Mr. Radcliffe as to how he had brought along the bottle of gin that had been left in his car that night to confront Champ Wallace with the evidence of his guilt. But first he had to make sure it was really gin, and that had kept him late, and arriving in time to hear the cheers for Champ as he strutted up to bat, he had resolved to teach him a lesson.

"So I drank all his gin, and it serves him right," concluded Mr. Radcliffe. "And meanwhile I told him just what I thought of him. You heard me?"

"Heard you?" laughed Joe. "People three counties over turned off their radios to listen. But just to show that there is no hard feeling, though you spoiled a no-hit game by not coming around before, I will now supervise the opening of two new accounts which will one day be the prize exhibits of your bank."

Rooney drew George and me aside and handed us each to our amazement, a roll of bills containing eight hundred dollars. Silencing our ejaculations, he said: "The first Sunday I bet ten dollars of your expense money, and each game since I put up some until today we got auto-to-apple odds, and shot the works. You have made three times that much for me, and your diet of walnuts has kept me on the wagon for five months. Frederick, you may borrow my chariot tonight, for it's time you stepped around to warble that touching ditty of 'Alice, Where Art Thou?'"

CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Has given us one of the best of all his stories in this exciting chronicle of a daring flight to Kabul to rescue the Emir.

After the Colonel had knocked in a peculiar way, a swarthy face appeared at a wicket.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

Illustrated by Joseph Sabo

SIR ABDOOL MOHAMMED KHAN is today a typical Englishman of the London clubs—swarthy in complexion, but not more so than any Londoner who has spent many years in the tropics. Yet he is not only pure-blooded Pathan, born in Kabul, but of princely rank. His father was a harem-brother of the great Abderrahman—making him a cousin of the Emir who succeeded to the *musnud* in 1901 and a second cousin of the prince now reigning.

None the less Sir Abdool is one of the famous Free Lances in Diplomacy who have secretly done so much and so often risked their lives in combatting international intrigue. And the debt owed him by the British Foreign Office almost equals that acknowledged to Earl Trevor and Earl Lammerford. . . . .

Leaving his new house adjoining the famous mansion of the Trevors, in Park Lane, one evening, Sir Abdool decided that he'd walk to his club for the exercise, but when halfway there abandoned the club idea in favor of dining at one of the greater hotels where he often noticed people or little incidents of particular interest to him. So it happened that as he strolled through the lounge of the Cecil, one of two handsome women seated on a divan smiled and spoke.

"Are you also dining alone, Sir Abdool—or is the lady a trifle late, as usual?"

"Ah! Lady Moncden! Mrs. Darnley! This is very pleasant. It occurred to me on the way over that my club lacked variety—I had the inclination to look at new faces. Of course—one always turns up acquaintances in a place of this sort if he is bored with his own company."

"And—er—are you not overmuch in love with yourself this evening? Might we offer the antidote and suggest dining with us? We're stopping in the house and have our own table—a very decent one overlooking the Embankment."

A few minutes later, as they made a leisurely way through the first courses, Sir Abdool was studying the faces of those at neighboring tables—and had it not been for his years of experience in a game which sometimes made a startled expression upon one's face a death-warrant, would have found it difficult not to stare incredulously at a man who sat with two others at a table not far from them. But to the ladies with him there wasn't the slightest evidence that he had even noticed the man.

This man was swarthy, with deep-set black eyes, a jet black mustache and a round face. In evening clothes, of course—but wearing them as if more accustomed to a longer coat which buttoned down the

front like a single-breasted frock coat or an oriental *caftan*. His oily black hair was very thick—apparently of not more than a few weeks' growth, as if his skull were usually shaved to wear a turban or tarboosh. The men with him were unquestionably Russians—presumably Ukrainians.

LADY MONCDEN found that her guest had no objection to discussing people about the room—in low tones which couldn't be overheard—but the men at the other table didn't seem to attract his attention. Time after time his glance wandered over and beyond them—until finally her patience was exhausted and she asked if they were not Orientals.

"Two of them are Ukrainians, I fancy—in fact, I'd make any reasonable wager upon it. And Ukrainians do not interest me in the least. The third man? Yes—probably—anywhere from Teheran to Rangoon."

"Don't you think he has a rather striking face, reminding one of some one who should be recognized at a glance, yet baffling? Some man holding a high position before the public?"

"There are thousands of men who give one that impression, Lady Moncden. Every personage before the public has his double somewhere—usually more than one of them."

"If that is really so, I don't see how it is possible for those who know the personage ever to be quite certain whether they are seeing the real man or his double!"

"Well—the circumst'nces at the moment would weigh quite heavily as evidence, d'ye see. For example, if we were to see His Majesty sitting over yon at one of the tables, we'd be fairly certain it was a mere resemblance, because he's known to be at Windsor this evening—we'd have to assure ourselves by telephoning down before there could be even argum'nt upon the subject."

"Oh, to be sure—I grant you that! But I've often wondered if it ever occurred to His Majesty how narrow his margin of safe identity really is? Suppose some evil-disposed conspirators should come upon the King in Windsor Park some morning—overpower his equerries, take His Majesty to some isolated place where they shaved his face clean and changed his clothes for some of a color and pattern he never wears, then take him to London and turn him loose in one of the East End streets? How would he convince anybody of his actual identity? How long before he would be arrested as drunk or demented? What chance would there be of his possibly spending years in some madhouse?"

"A very large one—provided he lost his head and tried to convince anybody that he was the King. As a matter of fact, he has too good a head to attempt anything of the sort. His first action, I should imagine, would be to quietly make his way either to Downing Street or to Scotland Yard—Hmph! I was forgetting his fingerprints, which are on record, of course, and would instantly identify him."

"Fingerprints! My word! I was not aware that any of the ruling sovereigns permitted any such violation of their privacy as that!"

"Why not—when it's the only absolute safeguard they possibly could have? I fancy they've not been taken in some cases—like the Mikado, or the Shah of Persia, or the Sultan of Morocco, whose ideas of personal divinity would be against it. But I think the fingerprints of every modern ruler are on record where they can be referred to instantly."

"Well—I've learned something. However, getting back to the gentleman yonder, it seems to me that I've seen either his portraits in the gazettes or the man himself, somewhere. . . . . Oh, I say! It has just come to me! That man very strongly resembles the Emir of Afridistan. Don't you think so?"

"You've seen him, then?"

"Not the man himself—no. White women do not visit Kabul and Kandahar, I believe—unless they're the wives of legation officials, and then only for short visits. But there have been a number of excellent portraits in the gazettes—"

"Which do not give the little identifying mannerisms."

"True—but you must have seen the Emir, frequently, Sir Abdool. Have you not?"

"He happens to be my second cousin; I've known him since he was born."

"Really! I wasn't aware that your rank was quite as high as that. But—consider! Put this man in Pathan official costume, with the turban and lacquered boots! Wouldn't the resemblance be rather startling? Wouldn't he pass for the Emir under ord'n'ry conditions?"

"With those who didn't know the man—possibly."

"But—you think he couldn't carry out

the imposture without detection—if he tried it?"

"I think he would die, sooner or later, in a way that would seem horrible and barbarous to English people."

AFTER they had finished their dinner, Sir Abdool chatted with them a few minutes in the lounge and then left the hotel—getting into one of his own cars for which he had telephoned. After running around the square, this car returned to park by the opposite curb, where he and his Afghan chauffeur—a relative, like all of his household—could watch the *porte cochère* of the Cecil.

Presently, the two Ukrainians and the man who had been under discussion came out—called up their own car—and drove away toward the East End. As all of the chauffeurs in the service of the Free Lances had been trained in this sort of thing until they were adepts and knew the streets of London better than the taxi-drivers, Ahmed had no difficulty in following the other car—in spotting the Stepney house into which the three men went after dismissing their machine, which then went to a garage half a mile away, apparently the place where it was habitually kept. On the way back to the West End, Sir Abdool rode in the front seat and discussed with Ahmed in their own language the mysterious Oriental whom they had been shadowing.

"Thinkst thou, then, O son of my cousin's brother, that this one might pass as the Protector?"

"It is a thing which might be, O Thakore Bahadur. At first, I was as one under a spell—I thought that one the Protector himself. But there was not the scar across the inner end of the eyebrow—the mark of the knife when the mad *mullah* would have changed the succession at one stroke—"

"And is thine eyesight getting as that of the old men, Ahmed—seeing dimly, through a film? There *is* a scar!"

"Aie—but a very small one—below the hair—not straight across it. If one but looked, and looked away—yes, a scar. But not the All-powerful One's scar."

"Look thou, Ahmed—our prince is not an old man, ripe with wisdom. It might happen that he hath in mind things which only the foolish ones do. He rides into the mountains, let us say—who knows where? A Pathan with one or two followers rides down to Peshawar—a wealthy man with many flocks of sheep and goats and camels, at home. From Peshawar down to Karachi—from Karachi to London, in English clothes. . . . . The Emir is somewhere in the mountains—on a tour of inspection. If he were gone three months, who's to raise a question? None from the British legation would be permitted to ride with him. Aie—the thing might be!"

"But thou, O protector of thy cousin's son—thou knowest it is not. This man is not the Powerful One!"

"Nay—that is a thing known to us—but others would not believe it! Seest thou, Ahmed—this one is with Ukrainians, under the influence of Russia. If, now, he were to be somewhere in Kabul—in a month, two months—and the Powerful One upon a mountain journey of inspection—and he came not back to Kabul, but this one came in his place? Eh? It is a thing which might be! Drive to Downing Street—I must cable to Kabul at once!"

SIR ABDOOL was received at the Foreign Office with the usual respect and courtesy, but was told that Sir Austen was somewhere on the Continent—not expected back for several days. As it happened, the permanent, Parliamentary and deputy under-secretaries were out of town that evening, leaving the Foreign Office in charge of the assistant under-secretary, Sir Lovell Burmish—a martinet of the old type who believed in precedent for everything and all the red-tape available—a man who owed his appointment to family influence and was not usually in position to clog seriously the Government machinery. His first impulse after receiving Sir Abdool's card was to refuse an interview.

"Confound the fellow! Native, isn't he? Know all about 'em—was in India five years! Dev'lish cheeky to come here askin' for an interview at this time of night! However, send him in an' I'll deal with him!"

When Sir Abdool was ushered into the room and quietly seated himself by the end of Sir Lovell's desk, that pompous autocrat was inwardly surprised. This man looked more like an Englishman of high standing than a native.

"Sorry to trouble you so late in the evening, Sir Lovell—but it's a matter of really first importance, and it will take but a few minutes of your time. What I wish is to have a cable sent in the F. O. code to Colonel Sir Thornleigh Warrington, in Kabul—at

"And you're not overmuch in love with yourself? Might I offer the antidote and suggest your dining with us?"

once—and the reply sent to me in Park Lane by special messenger when it arrives."

"An'—er—what authority have you, sir, for makin' any such unheard-of request?"

"His Majesty's service, Sir Lovell."

"Er—have you anything to show me in proof of that?"

"Not unless you care to call the Premier on the telephone."

"You know, I presume, that he's staying the night at Windsor?"

"Of course. I'll put the call through, if you wish—Governm'nt service has right of way. I know a few things about the post-office people which you may not."

"Er—it would be quite useless, d'ye see. Colonel Warrington is no longer at Kabul. He was on leave for a few days in Peshawar, an' I shifted him there temporarily, this morning, until I can think of some other berth for him. There have been complaints in regard to his attitude at Kabul. He lacks firmness—lacks the nerve to insist upon certain most advisable measures in handlin' the Emir—"

"Who is acting in his place?" The question was sharp as a whip.

"Major Follansbee-Dyer."

"The man who nearly plunged the whole Malay Peninsula into revolt and bloody war by his asinine threats to the Sultan, in Kedah! Warrington wrote me that he was being sent to Kabul in a subordinate position—said that unless he kept strictly within his orders and didn't try to exceed them, he was likely to stir up trouble at any time. Evidently you do not know, sir, that Afridistan is fairly rotten with Russian propaganda and that nothing but the most delicate handling will avert another Pathan War, backed by Russia—"

"But—but—confound it, sir! You are permittin' yourself to criticize the handling of a Governm'nt departm'nt—you, an arrant outsider—a—a native, begad!"

"Just a moment, Sir Lovell. I assume, of course, that you would prefer remaining in the service. If you really do, you will cable Warrington within the next ten minutes to return to Kabul and take charge. Also you will cable Follansbee-Dyer to get out of Afridistan at once and stay out—reporting at Delhi for whatever they may wish to do with him. Frankly, sir—in your two or three days of authority, here, you've done more to embroil this Governm'nt than any other man in the service. My cable to Warrington would be quite useless until he is back in Kabul—and if I telegraphed to Follansbee-Dyer, it would be like pouring petrol on a fire. The only action you've left for me is to reach Kabul myself in the shortest possible time—I fancy it can be done in a bit over two days. I shall be

talking with the Premier at Windsor within the hour. If you have not acted upon my suggestions before he reaches Downing Street, tomorrow, I fear you'll be in for the most unpleasant experience of your life. That, of course, is your affair entirely!"

IT was a situation which had occurred but three times in twenty years. Had the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs been in Downing Street, as he usually was nine days out of ten, Sir Abdool would have been assured of instant and full coöperation in an emergency which the secretary would have recognized at once. Had the Trevors and Earl Lammerford been in London, they were powerful enough to have forced Sir Lovell's resignation, with the substitution of a more practical official, within an hour or two—but all three were in Washington at the moment. Scotland Yard deals with actual and potential crime, but matters of international politics are away beyond its depth and outside of its sphere.

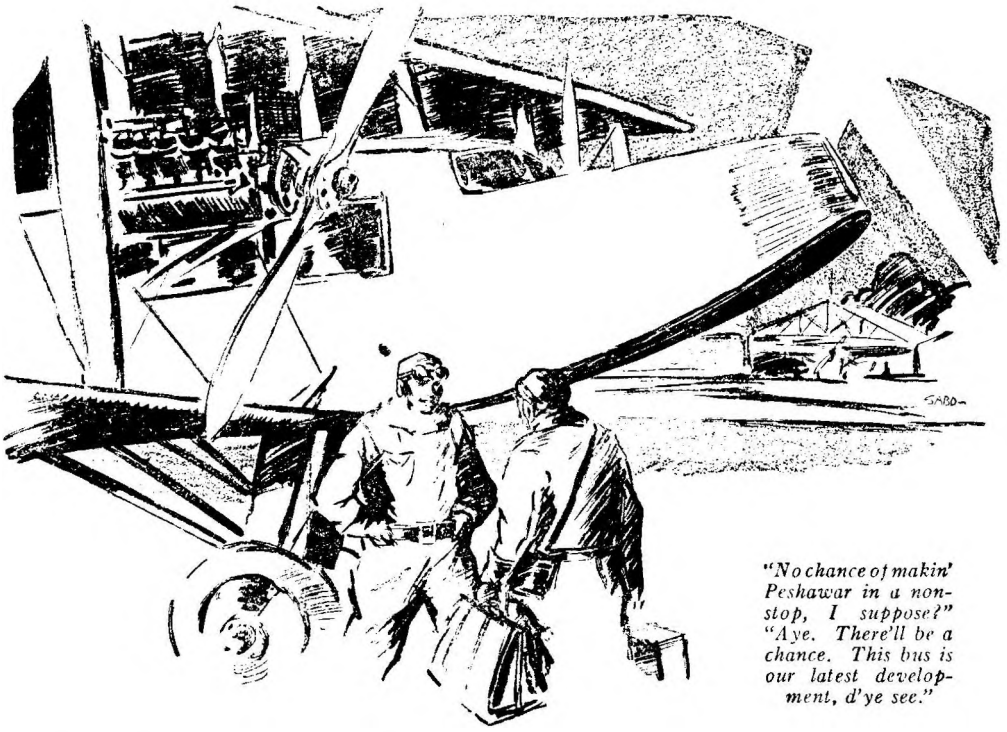
Sir Abdool had blocked out his only available course of action before he left the building—perfecting it as Ahmed drove him back to Park Lane. There, in the privacy of his underground study, he called up the Trevor estate in South Devon and got Harry Archer on the wire. Archer, being the Earl's chief engineer, chief mechanic, expert pilot and electrician, thoroughly understood that any order from the Pathan prince or Earl Lammerford had all the force of one coming from His Lordship or Countess Nan. Instructing Archer to call up the powerful Chincoteague Station owned by the Trevors, in Maryland, he asked him to get Earl Trevor on the radio-telephone at the house of the Senator with whom they were stopping while in Washington. In fifteen minutes His Lordship's voice came clearly through the air, and Sir Abdool rapidly outlined his evening's experiences—after which Earl Trevor routed the Premier out of bed, at Windsor, and talked with him for half an hour, both of the conversations being "scrambled" by means of an appliance the Earl had perfected so that nobody intercepting the message on a receiving-set could make head or tail of it. Then Archer was asked to have in readiness their largest and latest type of long-distance cruising-plane, and to accompany Sir Abdool upon his arrival if he could spare the time.

Driving rapidly from Park Lane to Croydon, the Prince took a small scouting plane from the Trevor hangar, outside of the Government lines on the flying-field, and in something over an hour came down at Trevor Hall in South Devon, where Archer was waiting for him with the big plane, fueled to its utmost capacity. Taking with them for emergencies one of their most skilled mechanics, they headed out over the Channel in a southeasterly direction, while Archer's wife was putting through a radio message to Colonel Warrington asking him to remain in Peshawar until Sir Abdool could join him there. As they flew along at a hundred-and-fifty-mile clip, Archer mentioned through the phones a bit of Croydon gossip he had picked up while chatting with one of their own men there, earlier in the evening.

"Jamieson said that a request had come in this morning to the air service people for the chartering of a large plane for a forty-five-hundred mile flight. There was some doubt as to whether a cruising plane could be gotten ready for such a flight within three or four days—then the Croydon manager happened to think of a boat just finishing overhaul in Amsterdam, and had it sent over at once. It came down at Croydon about seven o'clock—was refueled—and a party of three men left in it at eleven, heading for the eastern Mediterranean. Jamieson had the impression they were Russians—he was standing alongside of the bus when she went up—"

"My word! That's fairly sharp work, Harry! I fancy they'll be the lot I saw in the Cecil at dinner—an' I might not have stopped them in London after all! Oh, there's devil a doubt but that we'll have our work cut out for us somewhere in Afridistan! No chance of makin' Peshawar in a non-stop, I suppose?"

"Oh—aye. There'll be a chance. This bus is our latest developm'nt, d'ye see—it's made of the new featherweight steel throughout, which is much lighter than duralumin an' stronger. We figure the cruising radius with a full supply of fuel not less than five thousand miles. In fact, we've kept her in the air over Trevor Hall for sixty hours at a hundred-mile gait. But—point's this, d'ye see. If our fuel's two-thirds or more out by the time we make Bassrah on the Persian Gulf, we'll have that beastly stretch of southern Persia to cross before we touch India—nothin' but desolate mountains an' valleys—no water or vegetation that you'd locate in a week's hunt—no firm ground for a take-off. A good eight



"No chance of makin' Peshawar in a non-stop, I suppose?" "Aye. There'll be a chance. This bus is our latest development, d'ye see."

hundred miles of sheer hell with little chance of gettin' through alive if we're forced down. We'd have to fly at a hundred miles to economize fuel. On the other hand, we can refuel at Cairo inside of three or four hours—got our own agent there to guarantee the stuff is properly strained—and can keep to a hundred-an'-fifty miles all the way. Should make Peshawar in about forty hours including all delays. If those Russians ahead of us attempt to get through in a non-stop, they'll leave their bones in that Persian desert. Of course the Croydon people aren't fools enough to let their pilot try it, no matter what their passengers say—but I fancy they'll aim to make Bagdad before refueling."

"Faith—you're quite right about stopping at Cairo, Harry. We'll make better time and prob'ly pass that lot on the way. You'll wish to get back home as soon as possible, I suppose? Eh?"

"Depends upon whether you'll need me, out there. If His Lordship had been at home, he'd have told me to stand by till you cleaned up. From what you gave me of the situation before we took off, I fancy you'll be up against the necessity of getting from Peshawar to Kabul or Kandahar inside of two or three hours, at almost any moment. You'll not be wasting time with any camel-train or even trying to motor up through the Khaibar—it'll be a matter of gettin' where you want to be in the shortest possible limit of time. So I fancy I'd best stick it an' place myself at your orders until you're satisfied that the situation down yonder is well in hand."

COLONEL SIR THORNLEIGH WARRINGTON, after twenty-five years' service in the I. S. S., is one of the most able officers in His Majesty's service—speaking several of the Oriental languages fluently—understanding the Oriental point of view and manner of thinking as few white men understand it. He had been granted a well-earned two months' leave from the legation at Kabul and was enjoying himself, not as most men would in the circumstances, with social relaxation, polo and tennis, but in doing the thing he has come to like doing best—disappearing from the sight of white officialdom in the reeking bazaars of Peshawar, where politics of various sorts are discussed, and getting the Oriental slant on current events at first hand.

Sir Abdool's radio message reached him in the morning. A few hours later, came an official message from Downing Street signed by Burmish and ordering him to Rangoon. That evening, another F. O. message from the Parliamentary under-secretary ordered his return to Kabul at once. Spreading the three messages upon the table in his room, he compared them—

chuckled to himself—told his *syce* that he would return about the time Sir Abdool arrived—and was again swallowed from sight in the bazaars.

WHEN Archer and Sir Abdool came down at the Peshawar cantonments just under forty-one hours from South Devon, they were told that Colonel Warrington was occupying temporary quarters not far from the old Residency. Three hours before their arrival, a dignified Pathan rode into the compound on a camel and inquired for the Colonel's *syce*—to whom he whispered a certain word that induced the astute Mahratta to conduct him into a room adjoining the Colonel's sleeping-apartment and leave him there. As soon as the *syce's* retreating footsteps could be heard on the veranda, the Pathan locked the door, drew screens across the windows, slipped out of his turban and caftan, shoved his legs into riding-breeches and boots—then, as rapidly as possible, scrubbed the dye from his face, neck and arms. An hour before the aviators' arrival, he was seated on the veranda in cool whites. As Sir Abdool came up the steps, his cordial welcome indicated long and close acquaintance—Archer being accepted upon the same terms when a word or two indicated his status.

"Been ordered back to Kabul yet, Colonel?"

"Ordered to Rangoon yesterday, by that ass, Burmish—Kabul, this morning, by the Parliamentary under-secretary. What happened? Where's Sir Austen?"

"Having important conferences somewhere on the Continent. Both the under-secretaries and the deputy were out of town on special service the day I left. In order to give them a little more freedom, I suppose, Burmish was placed in temporary charge—presumably, for one day only. When he saw it running to three or four days, he lost his head as might have been expected and began trying out some of his theories on the machinery."

"Fortunately, things are quiet in Kabul just now—Follansbee-Dyer can't do much harm in the few days he'll have. At all events, I told Freddy Carstairs to go over his head an' stop him if he began messin' things up."

"If matters really *are* quiet in Kabul, Sir Thornleigh, it will be a big relief to me—because they're due for rather serious complications, beginning this evening, I fancy."

"You interest me, old chap!"

"When did you see His Highness—last?"

"Ten days ago."

"Talk with him?"

"Aye—for an hour or more."

"You're quite positive it *was* the Emir?"

"Quite. I've known his scars an' mannerisms for years. An' I've by no means forgotten that you're by way of bein' a second cousin."

"Well—those were the questions I wished to cable you in the F. O. Service Code. Would you have repeated them to Burmish—if he had even let you get that far? Would you have sent them to Follansbee-Dyer?"

"Rather *not!* Oh, my word! . . . . You were gagged before you'd opened your mouth! An' your reason for askin' those questions was just the last thing in the world you could have risked lettin' either one of 'em know! Well—I don't know what it was—yet I can see there was nothing else to be done but come out here by air as fast as you could make it. Er—did you have time to do anything about Burmish?"

"Talked with Trevor across the Atlantic—then he got the Premier out of bed at Windsor and gave him my conversation with Burmish, verbatim."

"Good man! You've rendered the Crown a service! Well—what started all this?"

"His Highness, apparently, was dining with two Russians, in mufti, at the Hotel Cecil, three nights ago. And one of the ladies dining with me—knowing that I was Afghan—asked if I didn't see a most startling resemblance to a well-known personage? Said she never had been beyond the Khaibar—never had seen the Emir—but was quite familiar with his appearance from the gazette portraits. Which of course was utter rot! She's in the plot up to her neck—wanted to assure herself by the expression of my face that the resemblance was a startling one."

"Was it really as good as that?"

"Even to some attempt at faking the scar on his eyebrow. They had placed, that morning, a request to charter a cruising-plane from Croydon—which of course I didn't know. With any coöperation in Downing Street, I should have prevented their leaving London, if possible. Lacking it, I could do nothing without breaking the laws. They left four or five hours ahead of us—but Archer thinks we've passed them."

"The devil! This makes some of the bazaar-gossip a beastly serious proposition! You know how I'm likely to spend a part of any leave I get—I've played the game so long out here that I can't drop it for any length of time. . . . . Oh—aye. Been knockin' about the bazaars a bit as a Pathan—you'd surmise that, of course. Well, d'ye see, the Afridis rather like to see His Highness indulge in some of the good old-fashioned amusements, as his ancestors did before him—all the more, because they know, even better than he seems to, the element of personal risk in it. Every Oriental court is seething with intrigue—there's always the uncle or brother or cousin or nephew, with something of a following, who'll attempt a *coup d'état* if there seems a good chance. His Highness is fairly strong—as far as I know, his organization is a good one. But he always has had a sneaking admiration for the late Haroun al Raschid of blessed memory, even though Haroun was no Pathan. The Caliph's adventures about town at night, with Mezrour, appeal to him as an excellent way of picking up stray political hints. We've had the impression in Kabul, once or twice, that His Highness had been prowling about the bazaars of Kabul an' Kandahar in mufti—but never managed to spot him. Yesterday, however—here in Peshawar—they were hinting that a very distinguished personage may take a little flyer in the underworld most any time, in disguise, and at night."

"HOW closely do you keep him under observation?"

"A good deal more closely than he fancies—but, of course, the espionage can't be perfect at all times, in his own country, where his authority is supreme. I happen to know that he has been out with a camel-train and some of his body-guard ever since I left—making a tour of inspection among the hill-villages an' towns. Two days ago, he was in the mountains twenty miles south of the Khaibar. Numbers of the Afridis ride through the Pass every day, back and forth—some in groups of a dozen or more—some in couples. He could have come through to Peshawar from that last stop between morning and night, easily enough. The Khaibar Rifles don't stop an' examine any of 'em unless there's some good reason for suspecting a man. Where would your three from London be likely to come down?"

"Your guess is as good as mine! If part of their gang, out here, have perfected all their arrangements to trap His Highness in Peshawar—kill or mutilate him—there would be no object in the impostor's coming to Peshawar at all. If some of his guard are in their pay, they might come down at that village where he was yesterday—then go back with the camel-train to Kabul. Nobody would suspect that scoundrel in the Emir's clothes unless they examined him closely—which they wouldn't do. An' that would put him on the *musnud* in Kabul in absolute control. The Protector would have one hell of a time to make good any claim against him! He wouldn't even dare go in there without a British army back of him."

"My word, Sir Abdool! This devilish situation begins to look worse an' worse! Stop a bit! . . . . Let's consider what the ultimate proposition really would be if those bounders succeed in pullin' it off? We'll say they actually establish themselves in Kabul—that means that the supposed Emir in control is unquestionably a mere tool of Russia. Russian money an' propaganda have been comin' in almost too fast for us to handle, sometimes. It would mean early repudiation of the Anglo-Afghan treaties an' boundary agreements. If we object, it means Russian munitions, war-material an' mercenaries backin' the impostor to a very serious extent. I fancy we'd fight it out as we did in the two previous wars in this territory, because it would be suicide to permit Russian encroachment as far as the Khaibar—but it's an eventuality to be avoided by every possible means, d'ye see!"

"I've been going over and over all that on the way out here, Colonel! Suppose we figure as closely as we can just how much margin for action we may have? Archer's friend at Croydon had a close look at the plane those bounders are using, an' expressed the opinion that if they tried to make Bagdad before coming down, they'd have to spend at least a day overhauling the bus before it would be safe to go on with it. If they tried to hurry the job—do it carelessly—they may leave their bones in the Persian desert. They were certainly some hours ahead of us as far as Cairo, and nobody there had seen anything of them—which indicates a course farther east, for Bagdad. At all events, Archer fancies we're quite likely to be twenty or thirty hours ahead of 'em—we got no glimpse of

a plane across Persia, though I was searching with my glass a good bit of the time. Now—if His Highness really came so near the Khaibar with the intention of havin' a look-see at Peshawar in disguise, he might have reached here last evening—almost certainly, he would be here tonight. Have you any idea whatever as to places where we'd be likely to find him?"

"Thanks to the snoopin' about I've done, myself, I fancy I'd know at least eight out of ten—possibly all of them. He'd have heard, for example, of the nautch in the house of Luntaz Begum, who is a very beautiful woman belonging to the oldest profession in the world. She would consider him her personal guest an' see that his varied entertainment left nothing to be desired. In her house, he'd be safe—an' she'd make out for him an itinerary according to what he wanted to see, but she couldn't be sure of protecting him in the other places. Chances are, he'd loaf away some hours in the coffee-an'-narghile stalls scattered through the bazaars—expectin' to pick up bits of political gossip. Every one of those dark stalls has a concealed rear entrance, usually behind a thick Persian or Indian carpet. They're none too safe by daylight; at night, by the dim lamps filled with melted sheep's-fat, robbery is a certainty—murder a strong possibility if one has more than two or three rupees upon him."

"Just so. . . . . Well, let's assume we have twenty-four hours' leeway. We don't want Archer or Bunting killed, so they'd best stop here—an' we'll all be the better for a good dinner. Then they'd best stick close to the plane inside the Flyin' Corps lines—to insure it's bein' ready for instant use. You brown-up again—then we'll get into Afridi clothes an' ride down to the city as soon as possible."

TWO hours later, a couple of tall Afghans, whose dress and bearing stamped them as men of substance, strolled down into Peshawar, which is almost entirely Oriental—the British being mostly in the cantonments, two miles away. In one of the narrow streets they came to a house with but a massive oak door flanked by two little slits of windows on the ground floor, above which were many carved teak-wood balconies projecting over the street from the upper ones—the front being faced with glazed tiles, pale blue and pink. After the Colonel had knocked twice in a peculiar way, a swarthy face appeared behind a small barred wicket in the upper part of the door. Then the door was unbarred and opened for them. As Sir Abdool was passing the man, who stood aside against the wall, the latter touched his forehead and then his heart with the palm of his hand.

"Salaam—and welcome to thy Father's son, O Khan."

"And to thee—peace and long life—O Thou whose face hath in it something of long ago. Aie—thou art Afridi, of the Kambar Khel!"

"It is so, O Khan."

He led them to an upper floor where two of the nautch were swaying on naked feet across the tiled floor to the strumming of a *Saraswati Veena*, the most elaborate and complicated guitar of the East. In a front corner of the big room—near a triple window opening upon one of the balconies but screened by a *mushrebiyeh*—a handsome woman of possibly thirty reclined upon a pile of silk cushions upon a raised dais or platform eighteen inches above the floor-level. As they entered the room, she motioned them to sit by her side on the dais and dismissed the nautch. Sir Abdool she appeared to recognize after a moment's study of his face, and gave the impression of knowing the Colonel by sight—but whether she also penetrated his disguise and knew him for one of the British Raj, he couldn't decide. Sir Abdool briefly told her that they believed the Emir to be in Peshawar and that very serious danger threatened him if he actually was there—asking if she could give them information which would enable them to find him.

"The Protector honored my poor house this day—he would be a rug-merchant from Herat to those who seek to know that which concerns them not. From me he had entertainment—and the evening meal—seeing not that I had knowledge of him and his Raj. There was talk of this one and that one to be seen in the matter of carpets—of coffee and tobacco—of such nautch as may be seen back of the bazaars. I spoke of names—those who be honest men and others whose knives be always sharp. An hour, perhaps, since he went to the house of one Ferozi, but five hundred paces from here. After Ferozi, there was talk of the great bazaar—of coffee and a narghile."

"Had he men with him?"

"Only Suleimi Khan, who is his blood-brother—and faithful."

"Then one might come upon those two in the great bazaar. Those others? It is best that their names be spoken again—that we may remember."

WARRINGTON figured that whatever plot had been arranged for getting hold of His Highness would be carried out in the bazaars if he visited them at night, which it was practically certain he would do—inasmuch as any man to whose house he was recommended would be of a type who could be vouched for. Allowing a couple of hours in the house to which he had gone from that of Luntaz Begum, they should be in the bazaar when he and Suleimi arrived, and could then watch them closely. This supposition proved correct—they were examining Persian carpets in a stall directly opposite one where a solitary Pathan was sipping his coffee and puffing at one of the stems from a large narghile in the center of the floor, when the Emir and his friend came sauntering along in the dim light and sat down to join him. The shadow under the trellised beams overhead was so dense that it was simply blackness—light from the little lamps in the stalls threw faces into relief, leaving the figures merely a blur. One could make out moving figures at perhaps fifty feet against the chiaroscuro—beyond that was shadow, picked out with tiny stars of flame from the smoking wicks.

Apparently His Highness was in full possession of his senses—after having dined well with Luntaz Begum, enjoyed the nautch and other diversions provided for him, and a profitable talk with the man he had just left. He was thirsty—felt the need

Suleimi struggled to his feet, but in another second fell with an Afghan knife in his side.

of a little stimulant—hastily swallowed two small cupfuls of the syrupy decoction. Suleimi Khan—more watchful for the Emir's safety—took but a couple of sips, so got but a light dose of the drug. It had been so powerful that the Protector's chin sank upon his chest and the second cup dropped from his nerveless fingers. In another moment, the unknown Pathan and he who kept the stall approached the helpless figure—one taking his shoulders, the other his legs—and started carrying him back of a carpet which hung in the black shadow upon the rear wall, presumably to place him on a charpoy and leave him there until he'd slept off whatever he'd had, and been robbed of everything worth taking. It was an old game to Suleimi. Struggling against the effects of the drug which was paralyzing him, he staggered to his feet and tried

to stop them—but in another second fell upon the floor with an Afghan knife driven deep into his side.

Noiselessly—but so rapidly that they touched the Pathan as he went through the narrow opening in the mud wall behind the carpet—Warrington and Sir Abdool were upon them. In a narrow alley between the high walls of the bazaar and the fronts of squalid buildings on the other side, the Colonel struck the leading Afridi with a long bag full of birdshot, and the man went down like a felled tree. The other, who was carrying the Emir's legs, knew that his life depended upon his carrying out certain orders. Drawing a short knife from his cummerbund, he stooped over the senseless Prince and would have slashed his face so that it never would have been recognizable. But Sir Abdool had been anticipating this—and blew the side of his head off with a service revolver equipped with a silencer. It made no more sound than a cough in a theater. Even as the man was falling, the Khan let out his voice in a peculiar bubbling cry which seemed to carry for a considerable distance and came echoing back down the alley. Inside of ten seconds, there was the slithering sound of many bare feet upon the stones of the alley. As he flashed an electric torch along the wall of the bazaar and the opposite houses, a dozen shadowy figures appeared through narrow slits of doors and hurried toward him. When they came up, he turned the flash upon his own face for a couple of seconds—then down upon the senseless figure of His Highness.

"Thou knowest my Father's son—aie—even though he be with ye but once in the second or third year, and liveth with the Angresi that he may say that which is to be said for ye when the time be ripe. Look then, upon this man of kingly blood drugged by dacoits who would have killed him. One, I have punished. That, who lieth there, my friend hath stunned—but vipers must not live. (A knife, from one of you—before he wakes!) In the bazaar our blood-brother, Suleimi Khan, lieth upon a carpet floor of the coffee stall. Two of ye will place him gently upon a carpet and follow us to the cantonments. Others will raise the Powerful One and come with us. If there be more dacoits to bar our way, raise the cry of the Wise Afridi—of the Black Kamrai. There be enough of us in Peshawar. It is understood? That is well! Raise the Great One, gently—and follow!"

IN an hour both His Highness and Suleimi Khan were in the hands of the post surgeons at the cantonments—and the mysterious Afridis had disappeared in the night as if the darkness had swallowed them. Colonel Warrington—the brown dye dissolved by a preparation he used, with no ill effects—was standing with Sir Abdool by the charpoy upon which His Highness was now breathing more regularly—both in olive-drab uniforms with as many of their decorations as they happened to have with them. Presently, the senior surgeon got upon his feet.

"An hour longer, gentlemen, and nothing could have been done for His Highness—two cups of that drugged coffee was a pretty stiff dose, and the Protector has been smoking too much. I told him that—last time I was in Kabul. As it is—we've got his stomach an' digestive tract pretty well cleaned out. Got at him just before the muscles had become atrophied an' lost their resiliency. I fancy he'll be conscious in another hour—able to think an' talk in possibly two."

"And—travel?"

"W-e-l-l—I wouldn't say that! Not on a camel, at all events! No—nor in a car, either."

"Sir Abdool's plane was what we had in mind."

"H-m—that'll be a bit diff'rent. I fancy he'd do that without serious effects. You evidently consider the matter urgent?"

"Hmph! . . . . Would you care about another Pathan War, Doctor—with Russian backing?"

"Oh, my word! I'll do everything I can to get the chap in shape for you! Why the devil was he fool enough to come here, anyhow—unless publicly—with a full escort!"

"You ask him that, sometime—and point out where he nearly got permanently done-in. How about good old Suleimi?"

"He's in pretty bad shape—the knife went fairly deep. But he's the sort of a constitution which survives a lot in some mysterious way. I fancy we'll pull him through—but it'll be a matter of weeks or months."

JUST before sunrise, Harry Archer and Bunting took the big plane up—His Highness comfortably stretched upon blankets along the floor of the fuselage, while Sir Abdool and the Colonel squatted by him ready to ease any jolt caused by wind-flaws or holes. For an hour before

leaving he had talked with them, coherently —had gradually understood not only what had happened to him in Peshawar, and his rescue in the very nick of time, but the larger plot for deposing him altogether and substituting a double controlled by Russia. It was this which pulled his wits together more and more clearly as they flew over the mountains to Kabul. After an hour, he motioned for a helmet with ear-phones inside, and asked what they thought the chances were for the impostor to reach the capital ahead of them. The Colonel gave his opinion first:

"Sir Abdool an' Archer reached the cantonments late yesterday afternoon, Your Highness. At that time, they were reasonably certain the Russian crowd were a good twenty or thirty hours behind them, with some chance of being forced down in Persia. Archer came in over the Khaibar—could see considerably farther than the hill-village where your camel-train is now camped, waiting for your return, and an equal distance north of the Pass. There was no sign of a plane in either direction—an' when the Russians do turn up, I fancy they'll have to scout over the mountains a bit before they locate that camel-train—which means daylight scouting. This morning is the first chance they'd have. The commander of your bodyguard wont be expectin' you to show up in a plane, but he'll see nothing out of the way about it—courtesy of the British commander in Peshawar —all that. So he'll not be looking suspiciously at that bounder if he comes down dressed in similar clothes to yours. He'll accept orders for a quick march back to Kabul without question. But they'll not make it under two days, even by forced marches an' racing camels—three days is nearer the mark. Well—barring unforeseen accidents forcing us down, we should make Kabul before ten this morning—even though we are flying slow, on your account."

His Highness nodded, with a pleased but grim smile wrinkling the corners of his mouth.

"I think you're right, Colonel! That scoundrel would scarcely attempt to reach Kabul direct because he would have no means of knowing just what might have occurred since he started. If I had happened to return unexpectedly, for example? You see? Awkward for him—not? No—he'll certainly get in touch with some one among those of my camel-train, or one of their confederates in Peshawar, before he goes through with it."

THREE days later Archer and Sir Abdool —scouting at five thousand meters—saw through their glasses the camel-train winding down one of the mountain passes to the plain upon which Kabul stands. Going still higher above a cloud-bank and circling around to the south, they were fairly certain they had not been seen—and in half an hour were making their report to His Highness. As his identity had been kept strictly secret in the cantonments, the only facts really known in Peshawar related to a couple of visiting Afghans who had been drugged one night in the bazaar—one being stabbed to death and the other taken into the bloody alley back of the wall. Their bodies had disappeared, but two dead Afridis had been found in the alley. There was no police search or inquiry. That was all. And the impostor came riding confidently out upon the plain of Kabul at the head of his appropriated camel-train—along the road to the city—as far as the level ground used for army maneuvers just outside the city gates. Here, ten full regiments of the Pathan Army were lined up on parade—as a mark of honor, he supposed—to receive him—and welcome his return. In another moment, however, a shiver ran down his spine—the commander of his bodyguard whirled about on his camel, looking closely into the supposed Prince's face. Then he whipped out his automatic and covered the trembling interloper. For—in the center of the imposing line ahead of them was a brilliantly uniformed staff at the head of which, upon a milk-white Arab, sat the Emir himself—the great diamond, with its egret-plume, scintillating in his tarboosh. Just back of him sat the British High Commissioner, Colonel Warrington, and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, their tunics covered with decorations.

The impostor didn't die that day—nor the next. They kept him a month, expecting it every moment. And when they did set about it, something like four hours passed before the life was torn from him. As a little souvenir of the occasion, tin boxes containing two rolls of film were sent to a certain address in Moscow—it being thought just as well that some general idea should be abroad concerning what happened to a man attempting any such plot if he slipped up anywhere!

The Holocaust

By

E. S. PLADWELL

A spirited and engrossing novelette of Arizona adventure by the gifted author of "His Blaze of Glory" and "The Lost Frontier."

Illustrated by William Molt

A MAKESHIFT stagecoach which looked like a square white canvas box on a light wagon, drawn by four active little ponies, descended into a dry wash, splattered through a quarter-mile of small pebbles, rushed uphill to the brushy top of the northern bluff above the wash, veering suddenly at sight of three crouching men with red bandanna handkerchiefs over their faces, holding pistols.

The black pony and his white mate, in the lead, flinched, causing the two bays at their rear to do likewise, so that the traces slackened. The driver on the lone front seat, in front of the canvas wall, swung a thick bootleg outward to the brake to prevent the vehicle from rolling backward.

The three bandits ran toward the driver, one at the right side and two at the left.

Twin explosions leaped from behind the driver's shoulders, blowing the canvas front wall outward past him. The hurricanes of flame and smoke shoved the bandits backward like leaves blown by the wind, making them roll and tumble grotesquely in the pungent blue haze.

The ponies jumped. Sixteen frightened little hoofs spurned the ground as if the concussion had lifted them upward. Four pairs of little ears slanted backward; then the stage raced like a bouncing comet for a quarter-mile until the tugging driver finally eased the snorting animals to a standstill. By this time his hat was off, his brown hair was flying in every direction, his foot was numb on the brake, and his gloved hands were hot from the reins.

He turned slowly, looking through the ruined front of the stage. A moon-faced young man and an older person with a black beard and good clothes returned his gaze somberly. In their hands were fouled shotguns. Beyond them, almost collapsed in a rear seat, sat a red-faced man, bald along the top of his head, whose brown clothes and sparse sandy hair heightened his aspect of ruddiness. His lips were gibbering and his brown eyes were popping. This was McKay, the town harness-maker, the only passenger on the stage. The other two were acting as guards.

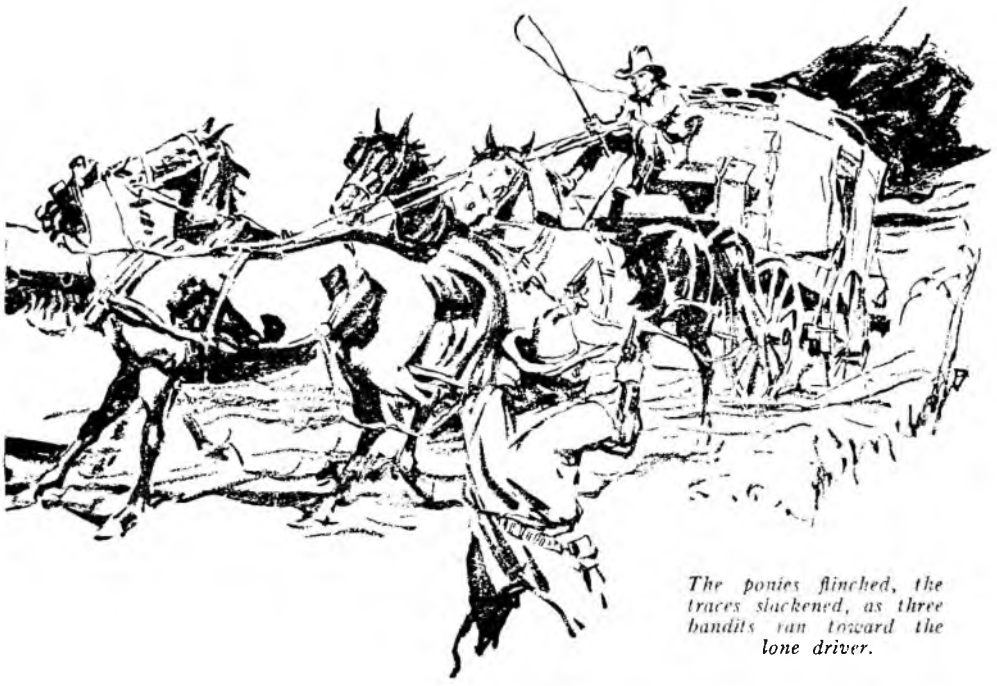
"Well," said the driver in a dull voice, "it's done."

"Yep; it's done," echoed the bearded man with the shotgun.

THE moon-faced young fellow climbed silently down from the stage. So did the bearded man. The driver wound his reins around a front wheel-spoke, soothed his ponies, and then followed the others down the road, where three forms lay in shining red sand alongside liquid red wheel-tracks. His gray eyes took one quick look at the damage which can be wrought by two shotguns at close range with both barrels, and then he gazed the other way.

"It had to be done," insisted the black-bearded man, as if to himself. "The stage has been held up too often. We've got to protect the gold-shipments from our mine. Of course."

John Huntington, the driver, regarded him thoughtfully. This bearded man was



The ponies flinched, the traces slackened, as three bandits ran toward the lone driver.

William Lovett, assistant superintendent of the Gold King mine. It was Lovett who had planned the ambush and helped to carry it through. Lovett had demanded it, threatening that his company would otherwise start its own stage-line. Huntington had acquiesced, but his face showed that he was not overjoyed at the result.

"Well," he admitted, "I hope this is the end of it."

"I hope so," agreed Lovett, looking down at the men on the ground again. "Hello! I know these fellows. They're members of Chris Bascom's gang!" His dark face turned a shade paler.

Huntington frowned. Townsmen mentioned Bascom with awe, cattlemen with exasperation. Bascom's name put a new aspect to this ambush.

"You sure?" demanded Huntington.

"Yes."

"Then Bascom's behind these hold-ups?"

"Maybe," surmised Lovett. "Or maybe it was their own idea."

Huntington looked northward beyond the nearer brushy hills toward a great range of granite mountains, hardly more than a blue outline in the distance. Bascom's gang was believed to lurk somewhere in those far-away fastnesses.

"You've got the right of it," remarked Huntington, slowly. "The stage can't be held up all the time, as it has been. Certainly not. Still, Tommy Muldoon, here, has a wife and baby back in town. We can't afford a long battle. If Tommy and I get into a mess because of this shooting, we may have to ask help from your company."

It was Lovett's turn to frown. He was ill at ease, toying with the hammer of his empty shotgun.

"I don't think you have any right to ask that," he demurred, toward the gun-barrel. "Of course we intend to protect any shipments we may send, but otherwise you've got to stand on your own feet. Any mining company trying to operate in Arizona in this year of our Lord 'eighty-nine, has got troubles enough without guarding a stage-line!"

It irritated Huntington, but he read Lovett's real thoughts. Lovett had been keen for this business until he realized that the powerful Chris Bascom might be implicated.

"Then there's nothing more to say," surrendered Huntington. "Only, if anything happens, we're up in the air."

"I know." Lovett nodded. "It's tough. Still, that's the way the cards lay." He decided that this was cold comfort, so he tried to make amends by being more friendly. "How did you come to start this stage-line, anyhow?"

"I saw the need for one. It's sixty miles from Columbia to Rangoon, on the railroad. Columbia's growing. There's been nothing but freight-teams between the two towns. It was time for a stage-iine."

"Yes; I know; but how did you happen to come in the first place? You've only been here a month."

Huntington began rolling a cigarette, starting for the stage again. The other two fell into step.

"I'm an engineer," explained Huntington. "I helped build some railroad into Colorado, found a good valley, and settled there. Began to have a nice little ranch. Tommy worked for me. Then a cloudburst came along and took everything except four ponies and a light spring wagon. I was busted. Tommy and 'Vangeline and the baby were busted too, but they didn't have any other place to go, so they came along with me. We just drifted along, the four of us, all busted."

"That's tough!" commiserated Lovett.

"You don't know half of it. I was sick, mental. Lost my interest in things. I was too fond of that little ranch, I guess. Maybe I'm a sentimental son-of-a-gun, or maybe I didn't like to start all over again, at thirty. Anyhow, I guess Tommy and 'Vangeline had a hard time with me. A man can fight when he's got anything to fight for, but when there's nothing left—then he's in a bad fix."

"But how about the stage-line?" insisted Lovett.

"Oh, well, we just drifted down here to Columbia. In about ten minutes I saw a need for a stage, so we put a canvas top on the wagon, and started business. It's just going good. All we need is half a chance."

"Well, maybe it'll be all right," soothed Lovett, as they reached the wagon.

Huntington's arm pulled open the side-flap of the canvas top, to allow Lovett to throw his gun aboard. The frightened face of McKay appeared beyond the triangular opening.

"Is—is it all over?" he chattered.

"All over," said Huntington. "We'll have to pull that shovel out of the wagon-bed, though."

"Who were the bandits?" asked McKay.

"Oh, some of Chris Bascom's gang," said Lovett carelessly.

A line of white appeared on McKay's jaws, spreading over his cheeks.

"Bascom's men?" he gasped, almost in terror.

"Yes," replied Huntington, looking at him curiously. "Why?"

"Why—I'm in a bad position, then. You—you trapped those men. I was in the s-stage. Bascom will think I've helped to trap them!"

Huntington stared up at the man, then whistled.

"So you're a friend of Bascom's?"

"No! No! Only when I can't get out of it!"

Huntington's gray eyes became cold. McKay's reddish hand made a helpless gesture. In truth the man was rattled. The roar of the shotguns had shocked his nerves. Huntington's next comment struck him like a whip-lash:

"I knew the Bascom gang was powerful, but I never thought they owned the town's leading citizens!"

"I can't help it!" exploded McKay. "What else can I do? They force me to keep them informed about things, or else I'll lose their trade. They promised to hurt me, smash my store, burn it down—what can I do?"

Huntington regarded him for some time through the open triangle.

"Who else in Columbia belongs to Bascom?" he demanded, point-blank.

"I don't know. One or two saloonmen. The blacksmith, maybe. Say—for God's sake, you're not going to spread this around, are you? No! For God's sake, no!" McKay's frightened hands clasped in supplication.

"All right," said Huntington, gently; and then he closed the flap, turning toward Lovett and Tommy Muldoon. Tommy was frowning. Lovett's eyes were quizzical.

"Funny man for a tough town out here in Arizona!" remarked Lovett.

"A money-maker," explained Huntington, offhand. "He's got a big business; it keeps him scared. Well, that's up to him. How about us? It's beginning to look as if your company could help us a lot!"

LOVETT avoided his gaze, nodding negatively to a clump of sage at his feet.

"No. I'm afraid we'll have to keep out of this. We've got a big business to protect."

"You mean that you're scared too?" demanded Huntington.

"Not exactly; but there's no use of our borrowing trouble, is there?"

Huntington's eyes began to look haggard, but he recognized that Lovett was a loyal employee to his own company.

"All right," said Huntington slowly. "We'll struggle along as best we can, then. What else can we do?"

He looked beyond the team toward the hillocks which stood against the sky-line, a mile away. He saw a quick movement in a clump of brush at the top of a round eminence. His gaze focused upon it. The object proved to be a man who walked toward a horse waiting half-hidden in a little depression of gray-green sage. The fellow mounted the animal and then went over the hill.

Huntington and Lovett glanced at each other. Lovett shook his head.

"What can anybody do in this country?" he asked. "That fellow was probably a spy watching to make sure that the hold-up was done all right. It's a system. They're organized. You see why we're not eager to fight 'em?"

Huntington nodded in somber agreement; but shortly the stage plodded onward over the sandy road, doggedly resuming its interrupted journey. What else could it do?

CHAPTER II

THE swift wrath of Chris Bascom came down on Huntington that night while he lay asleep in his bunk in the little office-bedroom-storeroom at the left of the main doorway of the Columbia Stage Company's barn.

Huntington awoke to find a pistol pressed against his forehead. Heavy hands pinned down his wrists. A crowd of intruders stood alongside him. The little side-door leading to the main barn entrance was open but closed noiselessly until the whole place was pitch-dark.

Huntington was slow to come out of his sleep. Then he tried to jump.

"Take it easy," advised a deep voice. "You'll have plenty of time!"

A yellow light appeared beyond the dark forms nearest Huntington. The light came from a candle near the front window. It reflected on the ceiling and along the walls, where the grotesque black shadows made enormous contortions whenever the men moved. A flash of illumination struck the ivory handle of a six-shooter in a holster on a level with Huntington's eyes, but this gleam ceased as the candle came to the foot of the bed, where it was held aloft.

Huntington winced at the direct glare. He blinked at it until he began to see what was beyond it.

A face stood out starkly in the bright illumination; a hard, embattled visage without any shadow to soften it. The eyes were as gray as Huntington's, but with a cold relentless quality which Huntington could not duplicate. The man's sandy hair was unbarbered, tumbling down below a worthless black felt hat. The lower face was long and squarish, formed like the letter U. The thick-lipped mouth had a faint humorous twist which was almost incongruous in this coarse-skinned visage whose knobby nose, flattened down at the bridge, added to his aspect of toughness. His voice was harsh:

"You're Huntington, eh? Yeh. Well, I've come to give yuh a little medicine. I'm Chris Bascom."

HUNTINGTON started to speak, but decided not to. He saw that this was a premeditated visit. A quick glance around the room proved it. A little front window was covered with clothes so that no light leaked out. Two watchers paced the front of the barn. He could hear their boots. A big fellow with a gray beard held his left wrist, leaning across the cot. A man with a scarred face clutched his right wrist under the covers. Beyond these stood four semi-shadowed figures. Back of them was a towering fellow with a white bandage just above his eyes. The thin face under that great white turban had deep lines of pain around the mouth. Huntington looked at Bascom again.

"You shot them three fellas today, didn't yuh?" Bascom asked.

"We had to. What else could we do?"

"Yeh? Well, one of 'em was a good friend o' mine. I stand by my friends."

Huntington sat up higher despite the men holding his wrists.

"Well, what has that to do with me?" he retorted. "If your friends choose to go into the hold-up business, why shouldn't they take the consequences?"

"You shot 'em without warnin'."

"Well, did anyone warn me when the stage was robbed, about a dozen times before?"

"Never mind arguin'. You shot one o' my best friends. You're through!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just this: You aint goin' to run no stage line, no way, no how, no time! Never. You're done. Them's orders!"

"Orders?" Huntington threw a leg out of bed, but some one's knee shoved it back. It increased his irritation. He shouted: "You've got the nerve to stand there and

give orders to me? You mean to say I haven't got the right to defend myself against road-agents? Say, who do you think you are?"

BASCOM'S lips twisted in a snarl, but he checked his hot reply, beckoning to the tall fellow with the bandage, who came alongside him like a silent animal.

Bascom's left hand pulled up the bandage and gently removed a wad of oily cotton beneath it. The candlelight shone on livid red burns which had seared the man's forehead so deeply that the skin was drawn in tight lines toward the savage welts. They were the marks of a cattle-brand pressed red-hot against the fellow's head.

"Wow!" exclaimed Huntington.

"That's what they're doin' to us these days!" shrilled Bascom. "You see it, eh? That's what some of the Burnham ranch riders done to Bill, here. Caught him and branded him. And now you shoot one of my best friends!"

Huntington began to perceive that the burning brand had started Bascom on a rampage.

"But why blame me?" demanded Huntington. "Did I do that? Are you aiming to take your anger out on me? What for?"

"You shot a friend o' mine!"

"Well, what of it? Am I supposed to be robbed whenever you people feel like it? Is that the idea?"

"Never mind arguin'!" shouted Bascom. "You people, with your damned stage-line, killed a friend o' mine! I aint able to reach the people on the Burnham ranch—not right away; it'll take months. But I can reach you, Mister, and I'm goin' to! I aint goin' to be hard on yuh. No. I'll only put you out o' business. You'd better stay out. I'm tellin' yuh!"

"You're taking a lot on your hands!" defied Huntington.

"That's all from you! Stick something in his mouth, gents. Tie him to the bed. We'll let him think about it a while!"

Huntington made a desperate leap. He tried to arise and thrust himself between two of the men. A powerful fist crashed down on his jaw. It knocked him backward. Several hands yanked his legs out from under. Calloused fingers pawed at his face and forced his mouth open so that a bandanna gag could be thrust in. Thereafter he could only make helpless gurgling noises.

Ropes were tied to his straining arms and legs. The ropes were passed under the cot again and again, so tightly that they threatened his circulation. Even Chris Bascom grinned wryly at the thoroughness of the job. Then, with a nod to his men, he blew out the candle.

The room became black. The little door opened, allowing the crowd to shuffle out while their spurs jingled softly. Then the door closed.

Muffled footsteps soon began to be heard on the board floor at the front of the barn. A hoarse voice spoke. An iron-shod hoof thumped on the barn floor. Then another. Then many, pounding past the door of Huntington's room until they came to the roadway out in front. Somebody chuckled. Two men said something in an undertone while the sound of hoofs became dimmer. Then came silence. Huntington writhed and strained at the ropes. A clock on a near-by shelf ticked relentlessly.

A shot exploded far away. Then the clock ticked on and on.

At last something pattered around the front of the barn, sounding like hesitant footsteps which ceased entirely while the knob of Huntington's door was turned by ghostly hands. The door came open. A specter appeared in the gray-black opening, standing for a long time, dismayed by the throaty gurglings of Huntington's mouth. Then it moved. The door closed.

A bluish flame burst out in front of the specter. It came from a sulphur-match which blazed into yellow light, shining upon a scared young woman of eighteen or so, whose reddish-brown hair hung in disarray over a semi-negligee costume consisting of a nightgown, an overcoat and a pair of vast cowhide boots. Her face was thin; her nose snub; her blue eyes were a trifle too small; yet no ravishing beauty could have been more welcome to Huntington at this moment than Mrs. Evangeline Muldoon.

"Wha-what's happened?" she wailed, over the disappearing match.

Huntington writhed. With widening eyes she regarded this unusual exercise until the match burned her finger, and then she made a little exclamation, hunted for a knife in the darkness, found one, lifted a candle, and hacked through the various segments of rope, so that Huntington was able to come to a sitting posture under the blankets five minutes later, chafing his wrists.

"You shot three fellas today—one of 'em was a friend of mine! You're through!"

"Where's Tommy?" he asked.

"Why, Tommy followed the team to find where they went. He couldn't go very far, though. There's prickly-pear out there. He went out in his night-shirt."

"Night-shirt? What was the rush? Couldn't he take time to do it right?"

"No," defended 'Vangeline. "He was all excited. I woke up first and saw lights bobbin' into the room from our rear window. I got up and looked out toward the barn, but this time there were two lanterns shinin' out from the back windows of the barn, and I knew you wouldn't have two lanterns, so I woke Tommy and asked him why people had lit two lanterns in the barn, and he got up and took a look and he said: 'My God, my God, they've started it!' And I asked him who had started what, and he said, 'It's revenge!' And then the baby began to cry, so he took down the pistol off the shelf and ran out of the door, and I asked him why he didn't dress himself, and he said he didn't have time. So he came to the barn and looked in, but the horses were being taken out to the front, and the men with the lanterns blew 'em out. Tommy must have followed the horses, because he didn't come back, so after a while I got frightened and put on his boots, but I didn't dare start out—"

"And all the horses are gone?" asked Huntington, rising, the blankets around him.

"Yes, every single blessed one of 'em!"

HUNTINGTON went to the little door, and opened it. Above the wide entrance of the barn gleamed brilliant constellations of stars. Northward stood the blue-black ramparts of the mountains, with the lights of the Gold King stamp-mill shining at the base of their nearest and smallest spur. The other buildings of the mining company extended down into town. Huntington could hit the closest one with a stone. Westward of him was the town's main street, dark except for dim lights from four of the more distant saloons and dance-halls, where tinny music tinkled. Almost across the street from the Huntington barn, but slightly westward, stood McKay's harness and saddlery shop, with its door and two broad windows gleaming with reflections from the stars. This edifice and Huntington's stable were the easternmost structures in the town. Beyond this a lonely road led into sage and chaparral.

Something moved in the road, a vague shadow, hardly enough to arrest the eye. Then the movement assumed a whitish glow, while something at its side gleamed dully under the starlight. The object came nearer, and hobbled toward the barn door. Huntington stepped out to meet it. The ghost halted, inspecting him vigilantly.

"Tommy, you go right home and put some clothes on!" commanded Mrs. Muldoon, behind Huntington.

"Oh." The ghost eased down its pistol. "Well," he defended, "look at *him!*"

"That's all right," maintained 'Vangeline. "He was tied down to his bed. You ought to of been, the way you ran out of the house!"

"Couldn't help it," defended Tommy, "Anyhow, I seen which way they went. They went east."

"That don't mean anything," surmised Huntington. "They may circle around the town. They wouldn't go through it. Of course not. Did they see you?"

"Yep. Shot at me. What shall we do now, I wonder?"

"Well," Huntington decided, helplessly, "I guess first we'll put on some clothes."

CHAPTER III

THE Columbia Stage Company held its council of war in Tommy's little one-room adobe shanty built by some bygone Mexican behind the old frame barn of Huntington's. The light from 'Vangeline's well-kept lamp, on a kitchen table, shone on a bare dirt floor, a trunk, a washstand with a damaged bowl, a bed made thickly of blankets and straw on the ground, a cracked mirror on the adobe wall, and a cradle made from a packing-box, where a one-year-old infant slept peacefully in a corner under low-hung shadowy rafters.

'Vangeline perched herself on a cracker-box. Her lord and master occupied a chair at the table, having donned trousers, coat and slippers. Huntington, fully clad but needing a shave, sprawled in the other chair. The lamplight shone directly on his gray eyes and long straight nose. His brown hair was tousled in every direction. His face seemed weary and baffled, but this impression of discouragement was counteracted, curiously enough, by the firm massiveness of his powerful thighs and legs. His body was only of ordinary size, but below the hips he was built like a Hercules. Nor were these underpinnings clumsy. They were solid and symmetrical, with the rough cowhide boot-tops closing in on the bulging calf in a curving line. Something about those underpinnings implied that the owner could come to his feet, no matter what happened.

"The trouble is that Bascom's on a rampage," said Huntington slowly. "He takes it out on us. If we start the stage going again tomorrow, he may be over it. Or he may not."

"How can we start the stage?" demanded Tommy.

"Borrow horses."

"Maybe he'll put us out of business again."

"But what else can we do? We can't leave town. Where would we go? We've only got a hundred dollars, and no horses."

"Yeh," admitted Tommy thoughtfully. "That's right."

"We can't find jobs. Jobs are scarce."

"Yeh. That's right."

"So we'll have to start out again. We've got to try to run our stage on schedule. If we go down, we've got to go down trying. Then people will be for us. Otherwise, not."

"That's right," agreed Tommy. "Still, if anything happens to them borrowed horses, then what?"

"Then we're busted for fair!"

Huntington arose and began pacing up and down on the dirt floor. Suddenly he stopped.

"You take out the stage tomorrow, Tommy. If anything happens, turn back. Don't risk yourself; don't risk anything. I'll watch from the hills. I want to look around for my ponies, anyhow. If you get through, all right. If you don't go through, we've made a try at it. We just can't afford to lie down and quit."

"Why don't you tell the town marshal about it?" 'Vangeline chimed in.

Huntington smiled wearily.

"I will in the morning. I've told him about yesterday's hold-up, already. But what's the use? He only works in town. Anything outside the town is none of his business. He's one of those big noises, anyhow. I'm almost sorry I said anything. He spread it all over the place. Wild Bill! The West is full of Wild Bills. Every town has its Wild Bill this or Wild Bill that. Ours is Wild Bill Jones. He whoops around with two six-shooters, very terrible against drunks; but the less he knows, the less the town knows, and the less Chris Bascom will hear. Forget him. We'll run our own affairs." Huntington looked at 'Vangeline. "Scared?" he asked.

"No, but I don't like Tommy drivin' alone—"

"He'll have company," promised Huntington, "but no guard. We're not going to fight. All we want to do is show a willingness to start on schedule."

"All right, then," agreed 'Vangeline.

NEXT day Huntington started to collect a temporary team for Tommy. It was no easy job. There were plenty of wild cattle-ponies and several big draught-horses which drew the freight-teams, but

carriage-animals were hard to find. Many persons were present to give advice; they clustered around the entrance of the barn all morning; yet in spite of this aggravation he rounded up some sort of a team and started it off with Tommy on the driver's seat and a townsman alongside him.

Even Huntington was forced to smile at his new outfit.

The leaders were two yellow cow-ponies, once broken to harness but not entirely converted, and prone to have sudden brain-storms. The near wheel-horse was a great bony roan with a Roman nose, looming like a camel above the rest of the team. His mate was a long, low white animal, accustomed to trot at an amiable pace in the shafts of the minister's dilapidated buggy.

Huntington did not feel very optimistic when the team stood harnessed in front of the barn.

"Can they hang together?" he wondered. "Or will they come apart?"

"I'll ease 'em along," promised Tommy.

"Remember my instructions!" warned Huntington.

"Yeh. I'll remember."

Tommy released the brake, clucking softly. The team stood immobile; then the leading ponies got the idea, leaped forward, struggled against the dead weight of the wagon and the wheel-horses, started the roan into action, turned down the street, and rocketed past board walks and store-fronts while the scandalized white horse, with its collar almost around its ears, tried to pull back against the whole business.

Wild Bill, the town marshal, witnessed this departure mirthfully.

"Haw-haw-haw!" he guffawed, with hands on hips, above his big six-shooters. "Thass what I'd call a *team!*"

Huntington, winding up a rope to tie to the borrowed saddle of a borrowed cow-pony, nodded in agreement at this mirth.

"It will have to do till I get my own team back," he hinted.

The Marshal regarded him with tolerant superiority. The officer was a big man, and his face was broad, dark, and decorated with an enormous black longhorn mustache which seemed to add gusto to whatever words issued from behind it.

"Oh, shore! Well, you wont have long to wait, friend—not when Wild Bill gits on the case! You just set down and let Bill 'tend to it, and your hosses'll be back in a jiffy. I'm goin' to start right in on this case this afternoon!"

Huntington's gray eyes tried to estimate if there were any real ideas behind the noise.

"We know that Chris Bascom has the horses," he remarked.

"Yeh. Well, I'm a-goin' to send somebody to see Chris this afternoon. Where you goin'?"

"On an errand," said Huntington as he swung into the saddle.

HE rode eastward, along the sandy road which led through sage and chaparral. He watched the ground for signs of the stolen horses, and within a quarter-mile he observed where they had swung northward off the road.

The trail was plain; the hoofs of the horses had trodden out a path which might have been made by a squad of cavalry. It led upward toward the hills and then swung westward after passing behind the knoll where stood the Gold King mine stamp-mill. The tracks ascended gradually toward a high and brushy plateau which gave a close bird's-eye view of the town, with its main street aligned like an L, and also of the farming country near it, and the great desert farther away, melting into the distant haze.

Huntington saw his stage passing a few green irrigated acres, and then striking out across a flat valley bordered by low hills. He stopped and watched. So clear was the air that the white wagon-top and the white horse stood out distinctly. . . . .

Suddenly the stage stopped. Dust clouded out frontward from its hind wheels, which were locked by the brakes.

Through the dust Huntington could see a lead-horse leap upward, then turn around across the traces and kneel. The white horse went down into the dust, which screened the animals from view. A figure had been standing on the wagon-seat, waving its arms upward in a sign of surrender. The arms came down. The figure swayed and then collapsed beyond the seat, sliding downward past the wheels, into the dust.

The other figure on the seat had disappeared. It reappeared behind the wagon and started running toward town.

Three hundred yards to the right of the wagon, little puffs of smoke leaped out from the brush at the top of a knoll. Behind this gray-green brush were horses and men; half-hidden figures which began to move backward as their firing diminished, until they disappeared beyond the hill.

The watching Huntington almost reeled from his horse. His face was white; his eyes were agonized, and his shoulders drooped forward as he stared helplessly at the far-away disaster.

CHAPTER IV

CROWDS of citizens thronged the main street as the stage's two surviving horses hauled the wounded Tommy home.

Wild Bill sat importantly on the driver's seat. The citizen who had run to town with the news was beside him. Their animals were tied behind the vehicle. Huntington rode glumly at the left of the stage, having hastened 'cross-country to the scene of the ambuscade. His face was haggard and his lips were tight. Tommy was badly hurt.

The stage creaked up to the barn, where 'Vangeline stood in the doorway, wringing her hands, cringing away from an elderly stout woman who was making fluttery efforts to comfort her. 'Vangeline cried aloud as she rushed into the stage.

Huntington dismounted stiffly at the other side. As he walked around the team, Wild Bill and his friend came down from the driver's seat.

"He's hurt bad, all right!" bawled Wild Bill, nodding to an approaching golden-bearded man who was part doctor and part veterinary. "It's a shame!" Wild Bill almost collided with Huntington, then drew back and eyed him without great friendliness. "Oh! You! O' course this is none o' my business, friend, but I reckon a real he-man would have took out that stage today *himself* instead of skulkin' around and lettin' that young feller run into danger, considerin' the circumstances and all!"

Red anger, mad mortification, caused Huntington's spasmodic hands to leap to Wild Bill's throat, push him backward into the barn's watering-trough, slam his head under water, and crash it four times against the bottom boards.

It happened in one wild second. The Marshal was overwhelmed before he knew what happened.

The stupefied crowd stood gaping, watching Wild Bill's boots kicking frantically out from the trough. Huntington disengaged his left hand and yanked the six-shooters out of Wild Bill's holsters before the owner could think to use them. The pistols were tossed to the ground.

"Apologize!" yelled Huntington. "Apologize or I'll drown you!"

He brought up the man's wabbling head, shaking it so that a circle of water was thrown out upon the onlookers.

"Take that back! You wind-bag, you gun-toting bluff, take that back!"

The eyes of the Marshal were blinking. His throat made gargling noises, but he sat poised backward, ready to go into the trough again.

"All right," he spluttered, through a mouthful of water. "I take it back. Leggo! Leggo!"

Huntington stepped back as he picked up the man's pistols. He pulled out the cylinders, dumped the cartridges, and handed the weapons butt-first to their dripping and scandalized owner.

"All right," said Huntington, starting toward the men who were carrying Tommy to his house. "Here's your guns. I suppose you'll reload 'em and come charging back, and try to shoot me, or tell me to leave town, or something like that. Well, go ahead. I'm tired. I can't fight you. But if you've got a lick of sense, let me alone for an hour or so while I attend to Tommy."

HUNTINGTON turned his back and strode away, leaving the astounded Marshal wordless for once.

Huntington was not usually caustic, but there was just enough truth in the Marshal's original comment to sting him. He blamed himself. He was the manager of the stage-line. He had sent Tommy out on this errand, and he hated to face 'Vangeline.

Tommy was lying on his bed, breathing hard. The golden-bearded doctor was winding bandages, made from sheets, around him. A silent man alongside him held a basin. Still another had the doctor's meager surgical appliances. Several others stood around watching.

'Vangeline was weeping at the table, with her head in her arms.

Huntington touched her shoulder. She looked up, recoiled slightly. He saw it.

"I know, 'Vangeline. It was a bad guess. Mighty bad. But it's no use to say that now. It's no use to say anything except to the rogues who started this thing. I've got to make them answer for it."

Her head came up, but she said nothing. His voice was husky:

"There's nothing else to do. So I'll leave, for a few days. If I stay, I might have to fight the Marshal. I've got something more

important to fight. So you take care of Tommy. I can't help you much, anyhow. Here's my money, 'Vangeline. It's all I've got except one dollar. Take it."

"You—you're goin' to run away?" she whimpered over her shoulder.

"No. I'm going to scout around. Here. Take it."

She looked up with wet eyes. She took the money like an automaton. Huntington hated to meet her gaze. He turned away and approached the doctor, asking a mute question. The doctor saw it.

"I dunno," he said. "I guess so. Leg, superficial. Arm, bone shattered. Right lung, grazed, with enough of a puncture to be dangerous. We'll know later."

Huntington silently stepped toward the door, ignoring the staring citizens whose attitude he could not quite estimate. He looked back once toward the weeping 'Vangeline and the crowing baby in the corner. Then softly he went outside.

He walked around to the main street where dogs slept and ponies dozed at the hitching-racks as if nothing had ever happened. He gazed around, seeking inspiration, a loan, anything. Unfortunately the minister came along and gave him a lecture concerning ruined white horses, which Huntington promised humbly to pay for when he could. Then the harassed Huntington made another appeal to Lovett at the Gold King mine. Lovett was sympathetic but not optimistic.

"We're sorry for you," admitted Lovett, "but we've got to keep out of this. If you ask me if we're scared, I'll answer that we are." And this was that.

Huntington desperately bethought himself of McKay.

Huntington's eye sighted along the barrel. Chico stared upward, then suddenly decided to seek a niche in the wall.

Recent memories made McKay's face whiten when Huntington strode into the store, with its smell of leather and its two finely embossed saddles resting on posts behind the windows. McKay stood behind a counter backed by rows of leather fittings. At the rear were two employees working on saddle-trees. It was by far the most prosperous store in town.

"I want to borrow a horse and a hundred dollars," blurted Huntington, point-blank.

"What for?"

"I'm going into the hills."

"Oh!" guessed McKay. "To pester around after Chris Bascom?"

"I might as well admit it. Nobody else will go after him!"

"Don't!" entreated McKay, holding up his hands.

"Why not?"

"You don't understand this thing. He's more than a cattle-rustler. He's an *influ-*

ence. Understand? He owns things. He runs people."

"Yes, I know. But what else can I do?"

McKay's reddish forehead wrinkled.

"But he's got everybody frightened," insisted McKay.

"I can see that!"

"But he's a pest," conceded McKay, nodding his head. "Maybe a lot of people would like to see something happen to him. Still, nobody dares to start it. That's why I can't loan you anything. He'd crucify me."

Huntington snorted.

"This cattle-man, Bill Burnham, doesn't seem to be afraid of him!"

"Burnham's ranch is forty miles away. He guards himself. Keeps more men than any ranch ought to. It's busting him. Costs money to keep men. Bascom'll get him. Bascom always does."

Huntington gave up hope in the face of such rabbit-hearted propaganda. He nodded wearily, seeing not a ray of encouragement. Everything was a total loss, then. He would go down fighting, but that wouldn't mean a ripple in the placid cesspool of scoundrelism which tainted this country. He felt like an animal in an abattoir, pole-axed without ceremony by the meat-packers. His only chance was to win his way to the Burnham ranch, and to wage a starveling guerrilla warfare which might lead nowhere. It couldn't help Tommy and 'Vangeline, but there was nothing else he could do. He turned to go.

"Stop!" called McKay.

Huntington whirled upon him. McKay leaned across the counter. His voice was confidential, with a trace of eagerness in it:

"Listen! I've got an idea. I can't lend you any money, see? But I can lend you a horse. Yes. And pay you something. Yes. Listen. I'll give you a job. It hasn't got anything to do with Chris Bascom, see? It's about a girl."

"A girl?" Huntington looked outraged.

"Yes. Helen Langdon. Up in Deep Valley. Her dad ran me out because he says I'm a friend of Chris Bascom. Helen said she didn't want to see me again. That's not fair. Of course not. That's why I need somebody to explain things—somebody with sense and a little education. You'd be just the man, Huntington. If I lost that girl, it'd break my heart. So I want you to go up there and talk for me."

"My God!" gasped Huntington.

"I mean it!" pleaded McKay. "Go up there and talk for me! It's only eighteen miles northwest. I'll lend you a horse—pay you twenty dollars. *Whatever you do otherwise is none of my business, see?*"

HUNTINGTON stared at this tricky, faint-hearted business man who was willing to deal an underhanded blow to the man whom he didn't dare defy openly, and incidentally to the man to whom he gave news and information.

"What devil's nest is this?" wondered Huntington.

"But I mean it!" urged McKay, grabbing his shoulder urgently. "I can tell Bascom I sent you on an errand. I'll be in the clear. See? You can help me! I can help you. You get a horse and twenty dollars. What more do you want? Go up there, give her a song-and-dance that'll make her see I'm innocent. It's all I ask. I've got no other way to reach her. Will you?"

Huntington was sorely tempted. He put his hands in his pockets.

"But I don't feel much like arguing with girls," he demurred. "Not right now." He hated to abandon the search for his ponies, too.

"But I'm desperate!" insisted McKay, eyes shining. "There's nobody else able to talk straight like you can. You know I'm not in with Bascom. You *know* it. It may look like I'm in with him sometimes, but you know the truth. Why, I'd like to see that damned scoundrel kicked out of the country!" McKay checked himself and his face paled around the cheek-bones. "I mean," he corrected, "that he's got me frightened. That's it. You can't blame a man for being frightened, Huntington. You'd be, too, if you had a store like this! But that don't mean that I'm in with him, exactly. No. I'm only in a position where I can't get out just yet. See? It's simple enough to explain. Tell her I'm helpless." McKay looked around cautiously, to see that no person was listening. "Tell her I'd like to fight that damned scoundrel as soon as I can get my hands free!"

Huntington's scornful gray eyes began to show a twinkle of amusement.

"And I can borrow your horse for as long as I want it?" he demanded.

"Yes. Certainly. If you skip off with my horse, I—I can tell Bascom I don't know anything about it, see?"

Huntington grew cold again.

"Then I can be hanged as a horse-thief," he pointed out.

McKay licked his lips, looking beyond his guest.

"Well, I'm desperate," he insisted, at last. "I'll sell him to you for a hundred dollars, on credit. I'll give you a bill of sale. You give me a written option to buy him back when I want him. see?"

"Done!" It was a beautiful sorrel horse.

So the baffled, beaten owner of a ruined stage-line dropped his own affairs for the time and started out—after a night in the brush—to call on a girl!

THE trail led northwest along the flat bases of the granite mountains which stood out in the background. In time the range of mountains began to swing farther northward, cutting off a view of the distant town but affording a vast westward panorama of brownish plains dotted with blobs of green sage which extended for countless miles toward the blue haze which was the western horizon.

The miserable Huntington—suitor by proxy—rode more laggardly as the wagon-rut trail curved around a great blue crag which looked like a jagged toothpick sticking out of a heap of shale rock. It was a promontory-crag, a sort of a headland beyond which the whole enormous mountain-range seemed to swing directly northward. As Huntington turned this landmark, he came upon a new sort of country.

A narrow but deep valley, the color of light chocolate, lay flatly before his eyes, extending far into the flank of the nearest mountain. Most of the land was in use. Down the valley was a wooden house, with a wire fence around its barns, cottonwood trees, haystacks and chicken-houses.

A nearer view disclosed that the main edifice was a rambling one-story structure with a main door in the center of two wings where room had been hitched to room until the whole affair had begun to assume an air of enlarged prosperity. A new coating of white paint improved its looks. There was a small garden in front.

An elderly man with curly gray hair and fierce gray mustaches appeared in the doorway as Huntington rode up and dismounted. The man's visage was leathery, a real frontiersman's face. He greeted Huntington casually, and with the usual hospitality of the West, led him into a neat, sparse living-room with plain board walls. Huntington accepted an unyielding chair.

"I came to see Miss Langdon," he confessed, hat in hand.

"Yeh?" drawled the host, seating himself.

"Yes. I came on an errand."

The old man looked unimpressed.

"What sort of an errand? Important?"

"I guess so," surmised Huntington.

"H'm. Who's it from?"

"Well, I was sent by McKay—"

As if sitting on a spring, the host jumped up, swung the door open, and waved a violent hand toward the desert.

"Git! Hit the trail!"

"But—"

"I told you to git!"

"All right," surrendered Huntington, succumbing for the instant to a cowardly desire to get out of this business. "Now, how do I get to Burnham's ranch?"

"What in tarnation are you goin' to pester Burnham for?"

"I'm not going to pester him. I'm going to join him."

"You're goin' to stab Bill Burnham in the back, eh?"

Huntington lost his temper.

"I'm not going to stab anybody in the back, confound you! I'm fighting Chris Bascom. So is Bill Burnham. I'll repeat that I'm aiming to join Burnham!"

The old man pointed toward the chair again, as he barked:

"Let's look into this kittle o' fish, then."

Huntington decided to accept this truce. He went slowly back to the chair.

"I'm John Huntington," he announced. "I own the Columbia stage-line. Bascom's men robbed it. We shot some of them. Bascom took away my horses. I got another team. He killed two of them, and shot my helper. Do you need any more reasons for me to fight Bascom?"

"Then what are you doin' with McKay's sorrel? What you runnin' his errands for?"

"It was the only way I could get a horse."

"I suppose you don't know he's a friend o' Bascom, eh?"

"He's not," contradicted Huntington. "Bascom's got him frightened. That's the answer."

"Oh!" scoffed the host. "So he gave you his horse to fight Bascom with, eh?"

Huntington hesitated. He suspected that this was too near the truth.

"McKay asked me to come up here and talk for him," blurted Huntington. "He sold me his horse for this errand. As soon as I've done it, I'm free to go where I like, even to fight Chris Bascom."

The host sent a long, shrewd glance at his guest, and then the old man's eyes showed a faint twinkle.

"Seems like you're about willin' to do anything to git a horse!" he observed. "Is that it?"

Huntington nodded. To his surprise, the old man pulled forth a large silver watch.

"Well, young man, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. Considerin' the horse, I'll stand still for two minutes. Let 'er go!"

THE harassed ambassador of love looked startled. Desperately he tried to arrange his plea for McKay while his gray eyes sent a glance toward a girl who had appeared in the inner doorway.

She stood with an amused smile curving the corners of her mouth. Her hair was silky-black; her eyes were deep blue, and her cheeks were smooth olive. The features were not symmetrical enough for great beauty, yet her kindliness of expression atoned for this. That was what surprised Huntington. Here was no whooping two-gun Jane such as one might expect in this country; here was a "home girl" of the sort which would be rare in the land for many years to come.

"This is Nell," introduced the host grimly. "I guess you're supposed to say your piece to her."

Huntington arose and made a feeble bow. He began to suspect that his mission was a joke.

"Well, begin!" coached the host.

Huntington gazed resentfully into the smiling eyes of the girl. Under other circumstances he might have liked that smile, but a quick flash of memory concerning his stolen horses, the mangled team and the bullet-riddled Tommy caused him to want to finish this scene.

"All right." Huntington's voice was terse and the blue eyes ceased to smile. "I've got to explain McKay, then. He's not a fighter. He's got a big store to protect. Bascom's got him terrorized. It's easy enough to condemn him, but if you had a lot of town property, you might be frightened too. Give him the benefit of the doubt. I think McKay hates Bascom. I think a lot of people hate Bascom. But he's got them helpless. He can move around when he likes. He can swoop down on people. That's his game. He's able to carry out any threat at any time." Huntington's eyes flicked toward the host again. "It's the old story of a mobile force against a stationary object. The mobile force wins every time." Huntington leaned forward. "Bascom stays poised in the hills, ready to raid wherever he likes. He's got every advantage. *But he's got a headquarters somewhere!* The only way to fight him is to pen him in, attack him, put him on the defensive! Let *him* be the hunted one; let *us* be the mobile force! Give me thirty men for two weeks and I'll—"

He caught himself. His voice had rung out, but it was only a voice. Thirty men? Why, there were not thirty men in the whole country who were interested enough even to resent Bascom, much less fight him!

There was silence in the warm little room.

"Well," observed the old man, at last, "if that's McKay's message, I guess McKay's changed considerable!"

EVEN Huntington couldn't resist a smile. "No," he admitted. "I got off the track."

"No; you got *on* the track, son. Trouble is, you've got nothing behind you."

"I know it."

"Are you a college man?" interposed the girl. "You speak like one."

"Yes. Partly. Civil engineer. Let me talk about McKay, then—"

"Damn McKay!" snorted the host. "Question is, what are *you* goin' to do?"

"What can I do except keep going? Maybe some day I'll get my thirty men. Otherwise I can only struggle along. The trouble is, Mr. Langdon, people in this part of the country sort of admire a scoundrel, especially if he works on a big scale. Bascom's got a lot of personal friends and only a few enemies. The rest of the people are indifferent. That's the way of the West. Maybe if he hadn't been so unjust to me, I'd have let him alone too; but he went too far. I call it persecution. Now, I haven't got any plans about this thing, but I've got to keep going somehow until the luck breaks. What else can I do?"

"No," said the old man slowly, "you can't do anything else, I guess."

"What's *your* trouble with him?" inquired Huntington.

"Oh, he swooped down on me and cleaned me out. Later he offered to pay me. I took it. After that, he seemed to think he owned me. I put my foot down. He called me a traitor and I dunno what

all. We had a fight and he winged me. That was before Nell came home from school in Louisiana."

Huntington frowned.

"Aren't you afraid—"

"Nope. She makes things safer, strange as it seems. Bascom's too shrewd to annoy wimmen. That's the one thing that would rouse the whole country. Still, I didn't want her to come home, but gals nowadays do pretty darn nigh what they please!"

"Your ranch is wide open," observed Huntington bluntly.

"To attack? Yep. Seems so. But a rifle can sweep the whole valley, and I haven't got anything Bascom wants, anyhow. I've got a couple of hired men posted outside. We sleep behind thick walls."

The guest frowned again. He was still unconvinced, but his host ignored it.

"Now, about your case. I can't help you much, but there are two things I can do. I can lend you any money you need up to two thousand dollars—"

"Two thousand!" Huntington felt like a thirsty man falling into a lake of cool water. This old fellow was open-handed when he liked a man!

"Yep. And I'll give you a note to Bill Burnham. Talk to him like you did to me. He's tough but he's mad. Chris Bascom's raided him till he's ready to froth at the mouth. Better git along. You'll arrive there by dark. If there's anything more I can do, count on me. Need any money?"

"Not till I come back," said Huntington, grasping his hat. "Then I may need quite a lot. You've earned my thanks already!"

"All right. Welcome." The old man produced a tablet of paper, scrawling a note by means of a much-wetted pencil.

Dear Bill: This young fellow has an idea on his chest and I think he is no fool.

Yours truly,
J. P. Langdon.

"Thanks," repeated Huntington, tucking the note in his pocket. Then he looked at the girl. "One thing still bothers me. I feel I haven't earned this horse. I haven't talked much about McKay, have I?"

His attitude had changed since the time he had been willing to run out of this place, only a few minutes before; but neither of them noticed this. The girl nodded complete agreement with him.

"You are right," she conceded, smiling. "Come back, then, and earn your horse!"

CHAPTER V

THERE was nothing soft about Bill Burnham. Huntington observed this instantly when he arrived at the Burnham ranch, just after dark. He found a cold-eyed, bullet-headed host, of the meaty, inelegant type, who domineered by means of a raucous voice and a ruthless disposition. Huntington conceded that Burnham was perfectly able to use a redhot brand—or anything else—on a person he didn't like.

The inside of this establishment reflected the owner. Huntington's eyes beheld a bare living-room with loopholed walls and low ceilings, a haircloth-covered sofa, a pine table, saddles on the floor, a collection of hooks on the walls for bridles and spare clothes, and several chairs occupied with the spurred boots of four lean-jawed, peering men who sat on the table, alongside a lamp. Burnham's ponderous body occupied the end of it. His cold little eyes read Huntington's note of introduction, which was then crumpled in a hamlike hand.

"Huh!" said Burnham. "Well, what's the big idea?"

Huntington saw that it would be foolish to seek sympathy from this barbarian. Audaciously the guest decided the only way to get this man's respect was to bully him.

"The big idea," announced Huntington, point-blank, "is that you and your men have been played for a bunch of suckers for so long that you're used to it!"

"Yeh?" Burnham sat straight up.

"Yep. The plain fact is, you're licked."

"Licked!" Burnham's heavy cowhide boots crashed to the ground. "Licked?" he roared. "Who says we're licked?"

"I do. You're being run to death. You're losing cattle fast. You've got good feed and plenty of water, but after four years more of Bascom, you wont have beef enough to feed your own men!"

Had Huntington stamped on Burnham's toes, the man would not have been more vehement.

"Wadda you mean by that?" he demanded, clenching his dangerous big fists as he leaned toward his guest. "Wadda you mean? Hey?"

Huntington decided to roll a cigarette. He managed to keep his hands steady.

"It's true," he insisted. "Chris Bascom's raided you until he's run you ragged. He told me he was going to polish you off pretty soon." Huntington licked the paper. "It looks like the odds are in his favor."

Burnham was red-faced, open-mouthed, speechless. Folks didn't criticize Bill Burnham very frequently. So he didn't know just what to do. He was forced to fall back on sarcasm:

"I suppose you're the fella who can prevent it?"

"Yep. That's why I'm here. He took your cattle; he took my stage-line. We've got to do something."

There was a strained silence.

"You're brash, aint you?" growled Burnham, at last.

"Well, am I supposed to crawl to you?"

The astounded Burnham, whose mouth was still open, seated himself slowly in the chair while his men looked from their boss to this newcomer, waiting for some signal to guide them. But there was no signal. Their boss' puzzled eyes were glaring at Huntington.

"If you wanted anything, why didn't you ask for it?" Burnham inquired peevishly.

Huntington knew he had gauged this man right.

"I'm not looking for a hand-out," snapped Huntington, still adhering to his brusque tactics. "I've got a hard-luck story, but that's none of your business. You're anxious to protect your ranch. I'm anxious to protect my stage-line. We're both bothered by the same enemy. All right, then. Let's go after him."

Burnham's cold eyes continued to regard him.

"Go on," invited Burnham.

"It's just this: You keep extra men to guard your herds, don't you? Yes. But your system's all wrong. It's defensive. Attack! Forget your herds! Use your men somewhere else!"

"That's suicide!" snarled Burnham.

"Is it?. Not if you keep Bascom on the run. Suppose he does get away with some cattle? If you win, you win everything."

There was silence while the frowning Burnham considered this matter. Huntington knew he had won when the big cattleman turned toward the four men dangling their spurred boots from the table.

"Jim, how about this?" he asked of a leathery, blond young man whose high cheeks made his sunken eyes look as if they had been stung by bees.

Jim studied the back of his gnarled hand before replying.

"Well, it's new, anyhow," he drawled.

Burnham nodded, and then his fishy eyes gazed at Huntington again.

"I don't think you know what you're up against, stranger," said Burnham heavily. "This here gang's got friends everywhere. If you licked a dozen of 'em, there'd be another dozen comin' around behind your back. Still, I dunno. I'm tempted." Burnham's pudgy fingers drummed on the table.

Huntington sat down. He perceived the truth of the statement. His plan was still somewhat imperfect. There were too many people to fight.

"How about the county sheriff helping us?" he asked.

"Busy, scared, too far away."

HUNTINGTON frowned. Absently he watched Burnham back up toward his former perch at the end of the table, but the man did it awkwardly. He attempted to use the rungs of a chair to assist himself. The chair was too far. His feet fumbled for the rungs. The action only shoved the chair further away, so that Burnham was forced to wriggle backward upon the table, almost horizontally, while his feet made useless gyrations.

"I've got it!" said Huntington, jumping up. "Take the support out from under 'em! What would this gang be without Bascom? Scattered! A lot of lost mavericks milling around in circles! A lot of little groups fighting among themselves! Get Bascom, then. Concentrate on Bascom. Chase him, rush him, corner him, whip him, shoot him, do anything you like but keep after him and *never let up!*"

"That's some contract," demurred Burnham, peering at the gaunt, eager, sunburned face of the man in front of him, and then looking at his powerful thick legs. "Still, you've got good ideas. Mebbe you can carry 'em out—I dunno. Trouble is, can I do this alone? How many men do you want?"

"How many can you give?" countered Huntington.

"Five."

"Why not forget your herds for a month?"

"Nope. Five."

Huntington hid his disappointment. He nodded.

"It will do for a start. We'll go into the back country, then. We'll make trouble and cut off stragglers while we try to corner Bascom. It's a gamble, of course, but we may have luck."

He started the next morning. The four

lean-jawed punchers accompanied him, including the ruminative Jim with the bee-stung eyes. The others were known as Ike, Charley and Johnny. A sixth member, a stocky blue-overalled half-breed named Chico, joined them at a chuck-wagon far to the northeast, under the lee of the first range of hills.

They were a hard crowd. They looked even worse than Huntington. Each rider was ragged, unbarbered, slouchy, and tough as the wicked little range-pony he rode. Their faces were mahogany or lobster-red; their hats were wrecks; their shirts and overalls were dusty; but their six-shooters, in worn leather holsters, were beautifully clean. So were the rifles whose barrels stuck up over their backs. Huntington—who had armed himself with a long-range rifle and a pair of Civil War field-glasses—felt quite reassured by them all except the half-breed Chico, who had a peculiar habit of giving side-glances from his sardonic brown eyes.

"I'm not sure about that fellow," said Huntington, as he rode alongside Jim through a broad gulch into the mountains.

"He's all right," grunted Jim. "Born here."

"How long has he worked for Burnham?"

"Eight years."

Huntington stared at the broad back of the half-breed, who was riding a buckskin pony up ahead.

"Well, all right," yielded Huntington. "Still, I like to be completely sure of a man."

"Aw, forget it!"

Huntington had to accept this offhand suggestion, and thus the six horsemen, with their two pack-mules, moved slowly into the mountains for two days, keeping alert for signs to betray the headquarters of the Bascom gang. The footfalls of the eight animals began to echo hollowly on granite corridors as they ascended into a gaunt, savage country where even the half-breed said he was lost. The riders went over a lonely hot valley of yellow sand, then traversed a stony cañon with red rock walls, so silent and dark that even the footfalls of the ponies seemed to be hushed.

'Vangeline jumped. "Look!" she screamed. "The barn! It's burning up!"

Chico, the half-breed, who was riding ahead, held up a hand and halted his horse until the others came up to him.

"I theenk we are going east across the main part of the hills," he advised. "Something may happen. Who knows? Let me go ahead to look."

Huntington glanced at Jim. Jim nodded.

"Sure," said Huntington, with undue heartiness as he tried to mask his distrust of this man. "Go ahead, then."

CHICO pressed his enormous silver spurs into his pony's flanks, and disappeared. The others dismounted, easing the saddles of the ponies. Charley, Johnny and Ike began playing with a greasy deck of cards while they squatted on their haunches

around a reddish granite slab. Jim watered the horses by means of his hat. Huntington assisted him.

"You're sure of this man Chico?" persisted Huntington.

Jim whirled upon him, spilling water.

"Say, what's eatin' yuh? You got it in for Chico, or are you playin' a hunch?"

"I don't know," confessed Huntington. "It's something like a hunch."

"Well," conceded Jim, "if you've got a hunch, we ought to be careful. Still, I can't see it. Chico's one of the boys."

"That's why I'm figuring that I may be wrong," acknowledged Huntington. "Let it go, then. Just keep a sharp eye out, that's all."

IT was mid-afternoon before the scout returned to the flaring hot entrance of the cañon, waving a hand to signal that all was well.

"I know thees place now," he called, while his words made little echoes on the nearer rocks of the cañon. "Thees range goes north and south. Seex miles away is a beeg valley, north and south. It runs through the middle of the mountains. From here we go easy for three miles. Then we go slow. We may find sometheeng!"

Jim sent a quick look toward Huntington as if to say: "See? This man is honest." Huntington nodded amiably enough as he mounted his sleek sorrel, and then the cavalcade left the shade of the cañon and emerged into a hot yellow valley whose brassy sunshine made them blink.

Huntington shortly began to observe that across this flat little valley of silence and yellow sunshine was a sloping blue-gray granite mountain which looked as if it rose toward a sheer precipice beyond the summit. The ascent looked fairly easy. There was brush at the lower slope, and a few pine trees up above.

"Thees way!" suggested Chico, pointing toward the left.

Huntington reined in his horse. He pointed to the granite mountain straight ahead. "Have you been up there?" he asked Chico.

"No. I went thees way, to the left."

"Well, a fellow might be able to look over a lot of country up there."

"There is notheeng to see," demurred Chico with an impatient frown.

"Just the same, I'm going up. Anybody want to go with me?"

There were no takers. The cow-punchers' high-heeled boots were never adapted for mountain-climbing.

"Us fellas will travel ahead slow, so you catch up with us," drawled Jim. "Me, I didn't bring no ladders with me."

"All right," Huntington insisted. "I'll go alone, then."

He galloped across the valley to the base of the blue-gray slabs, where he threw the sorrel's reins over its head and started uphill after a glance which showed him the dusty cavalcade plodding along the valley behind him. He toiled up the sloping hot rocks until a stench and a shuddery view of crawling gray things under a boulder advised him that he was nearing one of the most repulsive things on earth, a den of rattlesnakes, dead and alive. Swiftly he changed his course toward the left, where he walked along the blistering ledges until he came to a little jumping-off place where he could look down from another angle upon the floor of the valley where his men were riding. Jim was in the lead. Chico was back with the pack-animals.

Suddenly Jim wheeled his horse, dodging away from something. The man alongside him dodged the other way. Those behind them bumped into their horses, then caromed aside swiftly.

Dust began to arise down there. A horse leaped up out of it, standing on his hind legs. Some one yelled. The horse went to its knees and the dust screened him.

Huntington's alarmed ears heard the echo of popping noises whose direction he could not ascertain. For an instant he stood irresolute, with heart pounding fast, wondering just what was happening, and why. He looked all around the valley, seeing nothing amiss except the wary attitude of the men in their saddles. His impulse was to join them, but they were too far. Sensibly he stretched himself upon the hot granite slab, unslinging his rifle and field-glasses. He was half-hidden by a tuft of brush between cracks in the rock.

He brought the glasses to his eyes. His anxious gaze swept the silent hill-slopes without result and then concentrated on the men below. He could even see the expressions on their faces. Jim was swearing. The others looked bewildered. Chico, at the rear, edged his animal wisely toward the shelter of a perpendicular red cliff, at the other side of the valley, where he dismounted and spread-eagled himself against the rock wall.

Spurts of dust whipped up from the yel-

low sands under the feet of the other horses, joining the general haze of dust.

One horse lay down and rolled over while his rider leaped away, holding his rifle ready. But there was nothing he could see, apparently. The rider crouched. He held his head low, like a person cringing under rain. Then he straightened up like a ramrod. He held out his rifle as if to present it to some one, then collapsed into the dust.

Huntington cried aloud.

"It's murder! And they don't even give warning!"

He saw Jim contorting on a horse which was stung to pitching-madness by red welts along its neck and flank. He saw another man drop his six-shooter and grasp his head in both hands as he went to his knees. The silent fellow known as Charley sat recklessly on his horse as he looked around, a solitary statue above the others.

Jim rolled off his frantic horse. He came to his feet. He ran toward Chico, who was still making himself small against the red rock. Chico yanked out his six-shooter as Jim approached, but seemed to be waving it toward a cleft in the rock, at his right. Jim started to take the hint.

The impact of a bullet smashed him against the wall, where he crumpled at Chico's feet.

ALL these things Huntington saw in a few short seconds through the twin tunnels of the field-glasses.

The lone rider in the center of the valley seemed to catch sight of his enemies. He yanked up his six-shooter, firing toward a gulch which was around the corner from, and almost under, Huntington. Then Huntington understood why he had heard only faint echoes from the firing of the men in ambush. The jagged wall and the intricate cliffs beneath him had muffled the sound of their shots. Even their powder-smoke was hidden from him.

The lone rider in the valley was partly masked by smoke and dust, but the smoke faded upward as his firing ceased. He seemed to realize that he was too prominent. He jumped off his restless animal while new geysers of sand spurted up from under its legs. The horse made a quick spasmodic leap. It rocketed away from its owner in a writhing gallop while the stirrups bounced high above the empty saddle. The animal raced up the cañon like a tornado, leaving a long dust-wake behind it.

The dismounted rider, standing alone, reloaded his pistol while little spurts of dust kept jumping at him from the ground. He squirmed as if stung by a bee but started firing again.

Huntington saw the quick flashes of four shots before the man went to his knees. When the dust cleared away, he lay as if asleep.

Huntington, dry of throat, drenched with sweat, sobbed with helplessness. He could only hold his rifle, hoping and praying that some target—any target—would offer itself. But there was none. He was only an angry, checkmated spectator.

Even the field-glasses failed to help him. He swung them back toward the yellow valley, groaning at what he saw. Those large-caliber bullets made ghastly red pools in the sand. Even the poor little pack-animals were adding to it. One of them was tottering along, dragging its right rear leg. Huntington bit his lips.

A movement in front of the red granite wall across the valley reminded him that Chico was still there. Chico walked forward as he held up both hands. No spurts of sand leaped up at his feet. Gaining reassurance, he jerked his right hand furtively toward the hill where Huntington lay!

Huntington froze. In that split second of time he reviewed the case of this Chico.

Chico was at the bottom of the business, then. Any doubts of it were swept away by the gesture of that pointing hand. The evidence was complete. Chico had ridden ahead of Huntington's cavalcade. He had met some of Bascom's men. It was possible that Bascom's main headquarters was somewhere near here. At any rate, Chico had told these men the whole scheme of attack. Possibly Chico had frightened them, rattled them, aroused them to ferocious action. And then, their enemies were Bill Burnham's riders. That added a vicious revenge-motive to the episode.

It wasn't Chris Bascom's work, this. Leaders didn't handle things that way, and Huntington admitted that Bascom was a leader. Bascom wouldn't conduct a massacre unless absolutely desperate. And Bascom was far from desperate. His power in the town showed that. The massacre, then, was the act of an isolated outpost composed of the riffraff of the Bascom gang.

In truth, this business was hardly the act of normal men; not even in frontier Arizona. It was plainly done by dull-witted louts easily thrown off balance, and therefore ferocious. And down in the gulch be-

neath Huntington was a whole gang of them. Across the valley, Chico was pointing out his hiding-place!

The hammer of Huntington's rifle came back with a click. His gray eye sighted along the barrel, making careful allowances for the trickiness of downhill marksmanship, where a gunner usually shoots too low. He knew the report would be heard, but something hard in his throat urged him to get this man, no matter if the whole world tumbled apart.

Chico could not have heard that click; yet some glimmering of sense advised him that Huntington might have seen his telltale gesture. His hand came down swiftly. He stared up toward the gray slabs, and then suddenly he decided to seek a niche in the red wall, twenty yards at his right. He started there.

Huntington changed his sight but slightly. He pulled the trigger. Chico, with a convulsive leap, reached the niche and pitched around the corner.

He may still be around the corner. Nobody knows but the wolves and vultures.

CHAPTER VI

FOUR days later a half-delirious Huntington staggered up to the Langdon ranch house and hugged the pump at the rear of the rambling edifice. His body was a mass of dirt and welts. His shirt was a bloody rag. His trousers were torn running-pants which disclosed the mighty muscles of battered legs to the tops of his ruined boots. His hat was gone. So were rifle, field-glasses, canteen, horse—everything.

Helen Langdon observed this ghastly newcomer, and called to her father, who carried him to bed and let him rest. It was evening before he could tell a coherent story. The girl watched the lights play on his haggard face, but said nothing.

"After the ambush," he finished, across the supper-table, "those fellows chased me all over creation. Came dark, I went north. Next day I got into bigger mountains. Brush and thorny stuff. I came to a place where I looked down on a valley shaped like a long diamond, with sheds and corrals in the center. There were only two outlets, one at each end, both deep cañons in solid blue granite. I saw a lot of cattle down there. And haystacks. Did I stumble on Chris Bascom's main roost?"

"Mebbe," admitted Langdon. "It's all news to me."

"It's Bascom's place, then. I even thought I saw my four ponies. It was only a few miles from the scene of the ambush. Chico might have ridden there easily. But why should Chico betray his own crowd?"

"I dunno," puzzled Langdon. "Still, Burnham may have done somethin' to make him sore. Burnham's rough. Half-breeds hold grudges. Anyhow, the thing happened. Go on with your story."

"There's not much more," said Huntington. "I fell off two cliffs, slid down a mountainside, got shot at, and fought some fellow till I hit him with a rock. That's all I remember."

"Huh. And now what?"

"I don't know. It looks like the end of the trail. That trail, anyhow."

"Goin' to quit the country?"

"No. I'll have to find another trail, that's all."

The old man grinned.

"Goin' back to see Bill Burnham?"

"I wouldn't have the nerve. Not now."

"Nope. Better keep away from him for a while," agreed Langdon. "I'll try to ca'm him down. Question is, where are you goin'?"

Huntington—perplexed, heartsick, beaten, ruined—tried to see a clear road ahead, but there was none.

"I'll go to town," he decided, at last. "I'm worried about Tommy. Then I want to make peace with the marshal, and I must report to McKay."

"You might run into some o' the Bascom gang."

"Well, maybe I can meet Bascom, then."

THE old man fumbled with his pipe for a long time, examining its hot corncob bowl with great concentration, but he failed to gain any constructive ideas out of it.

"Well, stay here and rest for a day," he compromised.

Huntington sensibly accepted. It did him so much good that next evening, in borrowed overalls and shirt, sitting on the low front steps, while dusk settled over the plains, he felt almost ready to start adventuring again. Helen was alongside him, in red-and-white checked gingham.

"What shall I report to McKay?" he inquired.

With chin in hands she looked at the gray haze on the faint orange horizon.

"Must you talk of McKay?"

Bascom dragged a six-shooter from his hip. Huntington grasped the wrist. There was no parley — nothing but fight!

"Why, yes. That's the bargain. I haven't done my part of it yet."

"Must you still earn that horse?"

"Certainly."

"But the horse is gone."

"That only makes the thing worse. I've got to bring home some sort of result."

Her deep blue eyes turned slowly toward him, noting the sunburned face with its wistful, baffled gray eyes, and then glancing down toward those massive limbs which seemed to give an impression of strength and stubbornness which no mere passing facial expression could ever achieve. It was as if she were sitting alongside a Hercules; beaten and worried, perhaps, but fundamentally unshakable!

"What sort of result do you desire?" she fenced.

"Oh—er—tell him he's forgiven. Something like that. Maybe you could send him a note, inviting him to visit."

She smiled faintly. "You must be very fond of Mr. McKay!"

"Not a bit of it. But he's entitled to a square deal for his money, isn't he?"

She remained silent for a long time, staring at the darkening sky. Behind her, the living-room lamp shone out through the doorway upon her silky black hair, making it shine with radiance.

"A deal for his money!" she echoed, at last, in a trembling voice. "So I'm the subject of a business agreement between two men, about a horse!"

"No! Why—great Scott—I never meant it that way!" he floundered. "That sounds cruel!"

"Well, isn't it?"

"No! Not on purpose. I'm the man's agent. I can't get out of it. I've got to do the best I can for him. That's all there's to it."

He did not see her quiet smile.

"Very well, then," she said, rising. "Tell your friend that I reject his proposition. I don't care if I never see him again."

"But that's not quite fair!" Huntington also came to his feet. He heard old Langdon slam down a book in the living-room as he snorted:

"Aw, let the idjut come if he wants to!"

The girl turned toward her father. "I want to break up this combination," she informed him, with startling frankness. Then, to the astonished guest: "No, Mr. Huntington. My mind is made up. Tell your employer that I do not care to see him again. I have nothing further to say."

SO next morning the mortified and somewhat puzzled Huntington, on a borrowed horse and with five hundred borrowed dollars in his pocket, started cautiously toward town with his bad news. After he had slipped into the McKay shop via a rear door, Huntington was alarmed at the man.

"Don't take it so damned hard!" exploded Huntington. "There's plenty of other girls!"

"Plenty?" groaned McKay, wringing his hands. "My God, don't say that! She's one in a million!" He grabbed Huntington's arm, shaking it fiercely. "What did you say to her? Tell me what you said!"

"Why, I don't exactly remember. It was sort of mixed up."

"Mixed up!" yelped the anguished suitor. "Didn't you tell her how I cared for her? Didn't you plead, argue, put some *passion* into it? My God, didn't you sweep her off her feet?"

"Nope," confessed Huntington.

"My God, did you act *wooden?* Is *that* the sort of man you are?"

"Well, her dad promised he wouldn't shoot you, anyhow," consoled Huntington quickly. "That's something, isn't it?"

"Oh. Yes. That's right. I'll see her. Yes. That's right. A little hope. Yes. But if you've done me any harm, I'll hold you to account. Understand? I'm desperate. Understand? Desperate!"

It was too much for Huntington. The state of this quivering, blinking, red-faced tradesman suggested that his nerves were so jangled by Chris Bascom and this love-affair that they were like taut strings ready to break. Huntington retreated toward the door.

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "I did the best I could, but let me out of this. Here's your hundred." He tossed the gold on the counter. "After this, you'll have to speak for yourself. I'm licked!"

"Yeh, I will," promised the dazed lover, mopping his brow. "I've got to! My God, I've got to!"

Huntington made a hasty and ungraceful retreat, feeling sorry at his own hopeless inefficiency. McKay had helped him with a pony, and he had not helped McKay one bit, which was manifestly unfair. Yet he was forced to forget the episode as soon as he walked outside, for the street was lively with citizens. Watching lest he be observed too closely, he went past his empty barn to the little adobe house at the rear. He knocked several times on the door, then pushed it inward.

His eyes were gratified by a placid domestic scene. Tommy was still in bed, but reading a book. The baby was in its crib. 'Vangeline, in a ragged gray dress, was stirring some broth with a big spoon, at the table. Her inquiring face turned toward Huntington as he came across the sunny threshold.

"Oh!" she gasped, jumping up. "We were wonderin' when you'd come!"

The reception cheered the wanderer, who went to the bed and grasped Tommy's hand.

"How is he? Getting better?"

"Oh, he'll pull through," assured 'Vangeline. "Where have you been? We've missed you terrible!"

"I didn't desert you." Huntington had to smile, seeing what helpless babes-in-the-woods they were. "I've just been busy, that's all."

"Have any luck?" asked Tommy, trying to sit up.

Huntington pulled a chair from the table, slumping into it, with his powerful legs outstretched. Here he could relax. This place was home to him. He rolled a cigarette.

"No. No luck. No matter which way I turn, I run against a brick wall. I can't find an opening. Fact is, I'm almost a fugitive."

"You look all rumpled up," agreed 'Vangeline, peering into his face. Then characteristically she changed the subject, taking two letters from a washstand drawer. "Here's something for you. I thought I'd take 'em out of the mail before some one else got 'em."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Huntington, for she had never done anything so sensible before. His implied compliment caused her to flush with pleasure while he took the letters and tore them open. His eyes widened at their contents.

One was from a big express company, offering to route packages via Huntington's stage-line into Columbia. The other was from the Post-office Department, suggesting that he bid for a regular mail route.

"We've got to do it!" he shouted, jumping up.

"Do what?" demanded 'Vangeline.

He handed her the letters, then went to the bed. "Tommy! Get well! We're going to slam a stage-line through to the railroad again!"

Tommy tried to sit up at the incredible statement. "How?" he gasped.

"How?" Huntington's mind began to work fast again as he started pacing up and down. "Oh, let's see. We'll get some new horses. Get a light wagon. Take no passengers for a while. Fill the wagon with shotgun guards. Put plowshares along the sides, for breastworks. Make the wagon a traveling armory, see? No, the horses could be shot down. We'll get more horses, then. Tow 'em behind the stage. Or have riders following along behind us."

"That costs," demurred Tommy.

"Mr. Langdon said he'd back me. It can be done. *If Bascom fools with that stage, I'll have the whole United States Government on his neck!* And the express company. You bet I'll connect with 'em. We'll—"

'Vangeline raised a quick warning hand. "S-sh!"

Heavy footsteps crunched on the boards outside the door. Spurs jingled. 'Vangeline looked around frantically, grasping Huntington's arm to shove him somewhere out of sight. He understood. On tiptoe he stole to the front wall where the door would open upon him. He unsheathed his six-shooter, wondering what was coming next.

The door came open, swinging around on Huntington. A hearty voice greeted 'Vangeline. It was the voice of Wild Bill, the blustery Marshal.

"Well, well! How's the sick man? How's the little wife? How's the kid? Cute kid, eh? Hello, you li'l devil! Kitchy-kitchy-kitchy!"

Huntington pushed the door away while the Marshal's back was turned. It was the easiest way to forestall accidents.

"Hands up!" he commanded.

The Marshal spun around with his arms in air and his mouth wide open under the longhorn mustache.

"Oh!" he bawled, "You!"

"Yes, me. 'Vangeline, take that gun out of his holster. And that derringer up under his vest. Yes, I thought so. Well, Mr. Marshal, do you visit this house every day? Is that the way you're trying to spy on my movements?"

Wild Bill's eyes grew round with insult.

"Spy?" he bawled. "I aint no spy! What do I care what you do?"

Huntington stared at him and began to believe him. An open-faced clock could have no more guile and hardly more brains than this large and breezy officer. Huntington pointed to a chair.

"Sit down. I want to reason with you."

"You can't reason with *me!*" defied Wild Bill.

"Well, I can try, can't I? Sit down! I don't want to fight you. I've got other troubles."

"Oh. Bascom, eh?" taunted the Marshal. "Yeh. I heard about your latest ruckus in the mountains."

Huntington looked blank. News traveled fast in this country!

"Well, then you can see what I'm up against," he argued. "You ought to be fighting the same gang."

"Who? Me? That aint none o' *my* business!"

"How about my stolen ponies?"

"That's a private row between you and Bascom. I aint mixin' into private ruckuses. Not me. I've got trouble enough to keep this town peaceful!"

"Oh. You quit!" Huntington could only stare at him. "Well, if that's the case, why should you want to bother me?"

THE Marshal eyed Huntington for some time and then leaned back in his chair, thumbing his suspenders judicially.

"The only trouble with you is, you're too brash and likely to go off at half-cock. I aint talkin' about your personal brashness to me. We'll forgit it. But take that business in the mountains, for instance. You seemed to think you was chasin' robbers and cattle-rustlers."

"I was."

"No. No. Mebbe you've been talkin' too much with Bill Burnham—I dunno. But you're wrong. Of course there's considerable scallywags hitched up with Chris Bascom, but Bascom, personally, is sort o' respectable, you might say."

"Great Scott!" gasped Huntington.

"Wait a minute. There you go again. I aint claimin' that Bascom didn't rustle cattle and raise considerable hell around here, but now he owns a ranch and a couple saloons and a few stores, so you might say he's sorter settled down."

"Oh!"

"Yep. He don't have to rustle cattle, ex-

cept mebbe to pester Bill Burnham. He's a rich man, I guess, and generally speakin', he's willin' to let folks alone if they let him alone."

"Is this a peace offer from Bascom?" demanded Huntington.

"Nope. I aint runnin' his errands. I'm only explainin' that he's a leetle too strong for you to tackle."

"He started it."

"We-ell, he was sorter mad. I guess he wanted to make an example of you."

"Well, could I run my stage-line again?"

"Nope. After that raid of yours in the mountains, I guess you'd better git out of the country. Somebody told Bascom you was goin' to chase him till you got him. That aint healthy. Not with Bascom. You'd better go!"

There was no guile in that broad face.

"Is this a promise or a threat?" asked Huntington, for experiment.

"It's only a friendly warnin'," explained Wild Bill, with an impatient wave of his hand. "When a man sees a gopher organizin' to fight a mountain lion, it's only Christian charity to talk to that gopher, without prejudice either way. We've only got one undertaker in town and he aint very good, so I'd advise you to git out o' the country before Bascom or some of his friends figger you're annoyin' 'em too much."

'Vangeline nodded during this oration, and even added her pleas when the Marshal had gone.

"You've *got* to leave!" she entreated, grasping Huntington's shoulders. "You've got to! Got to!"

"But where?" demanded Huntington, drawing away. "Where could we go? How could we get there? We've got no wagon, no horses; a sick man; two dead animals to pay for; borrowed money to pay back. Suppose I left you behind? Where could you earn a living and 'tend a sick man? No! The thing's impossible! I'll drop out of sight for a time, yes; but if you think I'm going to run away from my debts and forgo that United States mail contract . . . ."

"They'll shoot you!" she whimpered.

"They'll try it," he agreed, with a nod. "Maybe they intend to make a public example of me. It's an issue with them. From their standpoint, they can't afford to let me defy them. I see all that. Yes. But, darn it, they've got me in a position where I can't retreat!"

"Haven't you got any friends in town?"

"Yes. Probably lots of them. But I don't know who they are. They're cowed. I don't even know exactly who my enemies are. We're almost strangers in town. That makes it tough."

"Well, what'll we do?" she insisted.

For reply, he counted out five twenty-dollar gold pieces.

"You stay where you are," he ordered. "Get Tommy well. I'm going to Rangoon, at the railroad. I'll buy horses, beg 'em, borrow 'em, do anything to get 'em till I arrange with Mr. Langdon for more money. Take care of yourself!" He went to the door, and opened it.

"You're in a terrible hurry!" reproached 'Vangeline.

"Yep. I can hardly wait till I get that mail contract!" He closed the door and walked into blinding sunlight, in a town apparently dozing. Without mishap he crossed the main street, returned to his horse, mounted it, circled the town, and started toward the long downhill road which led southward.

A cloud of dust appeared over the sagebrush near by to the westward, along the base of the mountains. The dust came nearer.

A team of horses emerged over a little rise. They galloped full-sized out of the reddish-brown cloud which they created. They were traveling in a hurry. Their heads were down; their eyes were wild; their bodies were lathered, and their feet were working like frantic pistons. All this Huntington observed in his first quick glance. Then he looked above the horses.

They were hitched to a buckboard. It was bouncing half in the air. Helen Langdon was holding the reins. At her side was her father, swathed in bloody rags, swaying in the seat.

CHAPTER VII

"THEY attacked us without warning," said Helen, in the little adobe home of Mr. and Mrs. Tommy Muldoon, where Huntington had taken the injured rancher.

"Who did?" demanded Huntington.

"I don't know. I was in the house. You had left. Everything seemed peaceful. Suddenly a half-dozen men rode down from the back hills. Dad jumped into the house. He took down his rifle and went out to the porch. The riders seemed to hesitate.

Huntington hurled himself through the air like a football tackler, yanking Bascom off his horse. The alarmed animal shied away.

Dad expected them to parley, but one of them fired a pistol. Dad fired back. Then it was terrible. Dad's two men were in the field. They got to the barn and fired on our enemies, but by this time Dad was so badly hit that I feared for his life, so I made him come inside. Then the horsemen began to shoot at the barn. Our men were so badly outnumbered that they jumped on horses and escaped by the back door. After that, our enemies went away. That's all I know."

Huntington whistled.

"It sounds like a nightmare! A lot of riders go into a valley and empty their six-shooters all over the place. No motive, no system, no brains, no manners, nothing but a lot of yahoos firing pistols. It sounds like the crowd that was following me. Maybe they were angry because your father sheltered me."

Helen looked at him thoughtfully.

"Not altogether," she judged. "Dad was known to be a friend to Mr. Burnham. Then there were other things."

"But those men wouldn't have come there if I hadn't started them in that direction," he insisted. "I pulled a hornet's nest down on your head. Why, that crowd was the scum of the whole Bascom gang!"

"Well," croaked old Langdon, through his bandages, "they had sense enough not to bust in where my gal was, didn't they?"

Huntington was startled at this shrewdness.

"You're right!" he agreed. "That's the one thing that would be fatal in this country. There's more brains in that crowd than I thought!"

He was looking down on the old veteran in Tommy's bed, whose silvery longhorn mustache appeared through bandages smelling of arnica. Tommy rested on a couch of hay and old coats in a corner. 'Vangeline brought in the golden-bearded doctor, who hesitated at sight of Huntington, then slammed the door shut. There was a crowd outside in the twilight.

"You here?" demanded the Doctor.

"Sick man." Huntington pointed to Langdon.

"Yep, and you'll be sick, too, if you don't watch yourself. Some one's likely to shoot you in the back!"

"I'm going soon," promised Huntington.

"You'd better!"

Helen made a little hopeless gesture.

"Is there no way to stop this thing?" she exclaimed. "Does Mr. Huntington have to be hounded like a criminal? Is it necessary that my father be attacked and shot? Do rogues own this country? Must honest

men be made fugitives? Have the people no feelings, no courage, no public spirit? Is there no end to it?"

"There would have been if you'd been hurt," grunted the kneeling Doctor, as he cut away the bandages over Langdon's forehead. "Otherwise, not."

"Why don't you do something about it?" she demanded.

He reached for a basin of water which she gave him swiftly.

"I don't want to die a hero," he grunted. "I keep my mouth shut."

She said no more but clenched her hands. Huntington patted her shoulder, then joined Tommy in the corner. She gazed at his back for a long time as she held the basin of water in the darkening room.

The door burst open. In came McKay. His eyes were popping and his arms were waving.

"My God, Miss Langdon—Helen—I just heard of it! An outrage! An outrage! To think of you among those bullets, in danger—my God, it makes my blood boil! And your heroism! Your heroism! They say you went out and dragged your father inside, though bullets were raining through the doorway!" He shivered, making an eloquent gesture.

"Is that true?" gasped 'Vangeline.

Helen smiled wanly.

"I had to help Dad inside," she admitted, "but then those men stopped shooting. Fortunately."

"My God, if they'd hit you!" wailed McKay. "I—we couldn't stand it!" He grasped an empty chair and swung it around for her. "You must be tired. Fagged out. Sit down. Rest. Rest. Take it easy." She shook her head, and he hurled the chair away. "Well, what can I do? Tell me, what can I do?"

"You might get some fresh water," she suggested.

"Yes, yes. Fresh water." He grabbed a bucket, went out, slammed the door, returned in one minute, flung the door open, slammed it, and hustled the bucket to the bedside. Then he teetered on his toes, staring with eager eyes around the room.

"You must have better quarters. Yes, yes. A good bed. Rest. Take my rooms behind my store. I'll move out. Right away. You must be tired. Your nerves must be unstrung. I'll make the place ready for you. Right away. Ten minutes." He darted to the door. "A bed for your father, too. Yes. I have an extra one."

"No!" roared old Langdon, trying to sit up while the Doctor pushed him down.

McKay yelped:

"But this place is not fit for you! Not convenient. Dirt floor. Unhealthy!"

"Thank you," said Helen, "but we have already accepted Mrs. Muldoon's offer to stay here."

McKay steadied himself as he held the knob, sending an oblique glance toward Huntington. "Oh! I see!"

Huntington said nothing. McKay teetered at the doorway. The Doctor's deep voice arose as he inspected Langdon's wounds:

"Creases on neck. Crease across forehead. Hole in fleshy part of arm. He's lost a lot o' blood. He's weak. Keep him quiet, feed him up, and mebbe he'll be all right." The Doctor sent a disapproving glance at Huntington. "Well, Mister Trouble, I suppose you'll furnish some excitement so's to give the old man a relapse, eh?"

"No." Huntington took his hat off the table. "I'm going."

"Where?" demanded Helen.

He looked down upon her, wondering at the new trepidation he saw in her eyes.

"I'll tell you later," he soothed. "It's all right. I feel that I can leave you folks now. Anyhow I'd only be in the way."

HE walked to the door, opened it slightly and looked out, ignoring the stare of McKay, who seemed affronted. It was dusk outside, nearly dark. The town's back alleys were deserted. The crowd had left. Perhaps some of them had recognized Huntington, but that couldn't be helped. Anyhow they were gone. Only his saddled horse stood near the door.

"Is it safe, what you are intending to do?" persisted Helen, coming up behind him.

"As safe as anything else, I guess," he replied whimsically. "How do you know I'm planning to do something?"

"It's natural. You're always busy!"

"Like a jackrabbit chased by wolves," he bantered. "Bouncing over fields, jumping fences, scurrying across gardens, doubling on its tracks, diving into the brush, vaulting hills, and racing all over the place. There isn't much dignity to it, but look at the motive!" He waved his hand as he went through the doorway. *"Adios.* I'll

try to keep ahead of the wolves!" And he strode outside, leaping on his horse, while a cry from Langdon caused Helen to hasten to his side.

McKay followed outside, closing the door quickly. His embittered red face glared up alongside Huntington's left thigh.

"Is this the way you work for me?" gibbered McKay.

"Is this—what?"

"Is this what I hired you for? Is this what you call acting like a friend?"

'Vangeline's thin calico-clad body had also slipped through the doorway, but Huntington did not notice this.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"You know what I mean!" snapped McKay, whose eyes seemed inflamed with little reddish veins. "Her, inside. Playing your own little game, eh?"

The astounded Huntington leaned away to appraise this new, inexplicable McKay.

"Game? What game? What are you driving at?"

McKay pointed a trembling hand toward the closed door, where a tiny chink of light came through a crack.

"I helped you; I paid you; I fed you when you were crawling around, down and out; I gave you my best horse so you'd go up to Langdon's and talk for me. Did you? Eh? Did you, you turncoat, you traitor? Does it look like it?"

"My gosh!" exploded Huntington, but this innocence failed to placate the other.

"You played your own little game, eh? Got real friendly, eh? Brought her to your house, eh?" McKay shook a vehement finger. "Well, let me tell you this, Huntington: I'm a peaceful man, but by God, if you get in my way, you'll answer to me!"

Huntington stiffened with utter astonishment. It was as if a gopher had leaped at him with bared teeth; yet his perverse habit of seeing the other fellow's viewpoint caused him to pity this rattled Romeo.

"Oh, shucks! This is no time for that sort of talk. I did the best I could for you, McKay. I'm sorry I couldn't do better, but that's luck. Anyhow, I'm busy. Forget it!"

"Then don't look for more trouble!" growled McKay, turning away.

Huntington stared dazedly at the retreating brown figure. Then he noticed the thin face of 'Vangeline standing in semi-darkness against the door.

"Well," she remarked, pertly, "he's right at that!"

"Who's right?"

"He is. I suppose you don't know it!"

Huntington grasped the horn of his saddle, as he stared at her.

"Know what?" he puzzled.

"Oh, you men make me tired. I saw it right away. Helen Langdon."

"You saw it—Helen Langdon? You're dreaming!"

"You're dead slow!" she retorted.

"Maybe." He gathered up the reins, inspecting them with great care. "I can't believe it," he decided, but he was shaken.

'Vangeline tossed her head. "If ignorance is bliss, you're in Paradise," she retorted. "Your head's as thick as your boots!"

"But I've only seen her three times!"

"Well, I've only seen her once, but I'm a woman," observed 'Vangeline, with crushing superiority. "Even McKay saw it. But then he's sort of a woman, too."

Huntington looked afar toward the low roofs and the blowsy back-yards behind Main Street, where occasional window-lights sent reflections on grass, sagebrush, packing-boxes and old bottles.

"But what can I do?" he asked.

"Well, the way's clear for you," advised 'Vangeline.

"I can't believe it," he demurred. "I'm no hero; I'm a target. I think she pities me, yes; but how can a girl find anything romantic in a fellow who's generally in the position of a cornered rat? I guess you're dreaming, 'Vangeline."

"Humph!" scoffed 'Vangeline.

He tarried no more. Abruptly he spurred his horse and it rushed for the southern road; but the impact of 'Vangeline's message still stunned him. He rode in a daze for many miles.

BUT the next three weeks kept him busy. He got in touch with the Post-office Department; he signed up with the express company; he borrowed a few more dollars, and bought or rented eight horses while he and a sooty-faced blacksmith in Rangoon rebuilt a light spring wagon in a locked shed behind the smithy. The vehicle's sides and ends were replaced by iron barriers where marksmen could entrench themselves. Over this was built a square box-canvas, which made the heavy wagon look extremely innocent. It was somewhat hard to pull, taking six horses; but when it started to

Columbia, with three tough but dependable men lolling among the packages inside, he felt ready. Its only vulnerable point was the horses, so he towed two extras on the long trip.

He bowled over the long desert miles, with a south wind behind him, growing in intensity until it pushed sandy dust out under the horses' hoofs. There was no untoward incident. Gratified, he clattered up to the empty barn at midnight.

The noise attracted everyone near by. Lanterns began to bob all over the place. A scene of industry started which reminded him of old times. 'Vangeline and the limping Tommy hustled in via the rear door, bracing it shut with their shoulders against the wind. Huntington and his three men unloaded packages. They bedded the horses in their stalls while hay flashed down upon them from the loft. Vagrant winds, admitted by chinks in the rear walls, blew hay upon the animals' shoulders.

"Those hosses look restless," said Tommy. "Look at that gray fellow pawin' at the floor!"

"It's the wind," surmised Huntington. "Listen to it shake the rear wall!"

THE back door opened. A gust blew through the barn. Helen came with it, carrying a lantern which sputtered as she shoved the door shut. He hastened with outstretched hands to meet her.

"How's your dad?" he asked.

"Doing very well. He's talking to friends in there. Hear him? Listen!" She drew him close to a wind-blown gap in the board wall. The old man's voice floated through:

"——And I tell you, sooner or later us respectable folks will have to stomp down our foot on this sort o' business—"

"We can't!" exclaimed an irritable voice. "Everybody gits licked!"

Huntington nodded as he stepped away from the wall. Helen smiled tiredly.

"Dad's trying to organize some sort of vigilance committee," she informed him. "He has plenty of friends, but he can't stir them up." She held the lantern toward the wagon. Her brows knitted as she examined it. "You're certainly a man to keep trying," she conceded. "But—is it safe? Is it really advisable?"

"What else can I do?" he asked simply. "I can't see any way to quit, lie down or run away, so I've got to keep trying."

She smiled.

"You wouldn't quit or run away. Still, don't you think they might forget you or let you alone now?"

Huntington stared at a bright yellow wheel-spoke, where the lantern-light flashed on an iron tire.

"No," he decided. "I'm only hoping to make it too expensive to attack me, or make them do something which will arouse folks against them. Otherwise they'll get me."

It was no bid for sympathy. It was a clear statement of fact. She stood silently for some time, listening to the munching jaws of the horses. One animal was pulling back on its manger-tether while it ate. Another kept stamping with a forefoot.

"Queer!" said Huntington. "They're all nervous tonight when they ought to be dog-tired. I guess it's that confounded wind Listen to it! Unusual, at this season!"

"The door of our house is rattling," she added. "That reminds me. We ought to get you men some supper. Come, Evangeline! Everybody's hungry!"

"We'll be there in a minute," promised Huntington, and the girls left.

He sent Tommy to help them. Then he stowed packages in his little office-bedroom, examined the animals, apportioned his three armed men to sleeping-places in the hay, and finally led two of them to the warm little adobe house at the rear, while the third man, a lanky fellow with a hooked nose, stayed behind with one lantern to guard the dark barn.

Helen and 'Vangeline had coffee and sandwiches on the table. The stove was going merrily, for the night was turning cold. Huntington glanced at a cheap clock on the wash-stand. It was two in the morning. Old Langdon lay at ease in the low bed, surrounded by four ranchers and miners, who nodded to Huntington. One of them seemed a trifle abashed. This was the black-bearded William Lovett, assistant superintendent of the big mine.

"Hello!" greeted Lovett, as he came forward to shake hands. "I hear you've had considerable trouble. Too bad." He coughed. "I've always felt sorry to think we couldn't—er—help you a little bit more."

"Oh, that's all right," said Huntington, as he sank into a chair. "These big Eastern companies don't understand conditions out here, that's all."

"No," conceded Lovett. "They don't understand. Fact is, we were nearly fired for losing shipments when your stage was being held up so often. When we stopped

A flash of steel in Burnham's hand, a thudding report, and Bascom slumped to the ground.

the hold-ups, we saw there was going to be more trouble. We've shipped all our stuff by slow freight lately. With plenty of guards."

Huntington leaned forward.

"That costs," he observed. "Why not use that money to help guard my stage-line? Make it all one outfit?"

Lovett looked away watching Helen pouring coffee for Huntington.

"No," mumbled Lovett. "No. Our orders are to keep out of trouble. At all costs. That's why we've stayed away from you like we'd stay away from smallpox. You're trouble!"

"Oh!" said Huntington, sitting back.

Old Langdon's keen eyes held a sardonic gleam, but he said nothing but puffed on a cigar.

"Listen to that wind!" said 'Vangeline, as a gust soughed around the outside of the strong old building, jiggling its door. "Seems like wolves runnin' around outside."

"Wolves stay home on a night like this," snorted Langdon. "Wolves have got a heap of sense. Set down! You make me nervous!"

But 'Vangeline was too restless. She moved a can of hot water on the stove, swept a stain near the door, inspected a loaded six-shooter reposing on a soap-box, straightened the old mirror on the wall, and meandered to the little back window, laying her snub nose against its pane.

She jumped back as if the window had bitten her.

"Look!" she screamed. "The barn! The barn! It's yellow! It's aflame! It's burning up!"

The barn was a whirling mass of fire which leaped far above its roof, sending boards and showers of sparks straight forward. It started so suddenly that when Huntington and his friends ran around the corner, the wind-blown conflagration was roaring with a deep bass bellow like a herd of angry bulls.

The lanky guard came reeling around the corner, shielding his face against the fierce heat.

"I cut the halters!" he cried. "The horses got away!"

"Good work!" approved Huntington. "Where did they go?"

"I don't know. I didn't dare go out front. Look!"

Past the glowing sides of the barn, where the winds curled the flames as they licked out through the boards, Huntington beheld a cavalcade of horsemen on the main street, whooping up and down, firing pistols; yet their noise was drowned by the hum of the wind and the roaring of the flames. The horsemen were like wild-looking imps in a moving-picture. They gesticulated in the firelight; they reared their horses; they sent little sparks from the muzzles of their pistols; they screamed and howled with open

mouths, and one of them was lucky to dodge a flaming board which whizzed past his neck; yet not a sound of it came to Huntington's ears.

"So that's it!" he gasped, halting. "They've come down on me at last!" He whirled around, bumping into Lovett. "Back! Back! Get into the house! They'll be attacking that next!"

"I can't!" snarled Lovett. "Those sparks are heading for my mine houses!"

"How are you going to get across the street?"

Lovett stepped backward. "That's right. How am I?"

HUNTINGTON had no time to figure it out. He trotted after his friends toward the door of the little square house, but as he looked back over his shoulder, he observed that some of those red riders on the main street were carrying wet sacks, and leaning over toward McKay's smoldering front door, which they beat with the sacking. He saw instantly that this gave him a respite. He knew those raiders hadn't expected to fight fire. They had come to fight Huntington.

"They can't control it!" he exulted. "The fools, the fools, they didn't count on the wind!"

Eagerly he rushed to help defend the house, where excited men were gathering, pulling six-shooters out of holsters at their hips. He closed the door, then as suddenly opened it again, after he had unslung his own pistol. He had a better idea.

"Listen!" he roared, over the confused noises of the room, where 'Vangeline was falling over a chair to get at her screaming baby. "If they come here, surrender!" The startled crowd gaped at him, even Helen, who was trying to soothe her father. "Yes," he insisted, "I mean it. What's the use of fighting, putting women in danger? Those fellows are not after you. They're after me!"

"I'm damned if I'll surrender!" shouted old Langdon, sitting up.

"All right. Fight, then. But tell them I've left here. It will make it easier for all of you. Probably you wont have to fight. So long. I'm gone!" He backed out of the doorway.

"Where?" cried Helen, in dismay.

"Out in the brush."

"How about my mine?" moaned Lovett, outside as a new orange glare appeared beyond the high flames of the barn.

"I don't know," said Huntington, closing the door and trotting up to him. "Come with me. We may get there."

"Come with you!" jeered the exasperated official. "Why, dammit, you're the cause of all this trouble! Yes, you confounded stubborn pest, you've kept naggin' and schemin' and fightin' till you've stirred these people up at last! Nice job you've done, Mister! Look at it! Fine sight, eh? Nice for our mine, eh? Nice to report to our Eastern directors, eh?"

"But why don't you blame the other fellows?" demanded Huntington.

"Why blame a gun for goin' off when somebody pulls the trigger? You knew it was loaded; everybody knew it was loaded! You thick-legged, thick-headed lunatic, you had warnin's enough—why in hell didn't you pull out of here, before it was too late?"

The stinging unfairness of it caused Huntington's left fist to clench for a swing, but he checked it. It was plain that this underpaid assistant superintendent—with a wife and six children to support—was due to lose his job if the mine was crippled. The pitying Huntington turned away.

"Sorry," he said. "I'll see you later, then."

He trotted to the shadows of a back alley. A rear door opened near him. An excited citizen, drawing on his pants, rushed past and made for the sagebrush. Three other running men came through another rear doorway, hastening for shelter, while still more were milling around the western end of town, shouting to each other. Glass crashed from a window somewhere. A child yelled. A woman dodged past the flickering firelit shadows of a yard; yet these were the laggards in the rush for safety. The rest of the folks had escaped already.

The fire roared and boomed, throwing out Niagaras of sparks overhead. Its reddish light even reflected faintly on the granite pinnacles of the mountains beyond the town. The flames were pointed straight northward. McKay's store was right in the path.

The whooping riders seemed drunk. Huntington could hear them now, easily.

A squadron of these raiders galloped around the eastern end of town, surrounding the Muldoon home. Huntington, behind a shed, saw the cavalcade come into the firelight of a back lot, then merge with the dark shadows. There seemed to be a parley at the house. The door opened once,

throwing out yellow illumination. Then it closed. The riders began to melt away. One of them fired a few careless shots into the air. He was in the shadows, making his spitting pistol look like a roman candle.

Huntington expected them to come toward him, but they veered back to the main street, yelling at their companions.

"Bang!" A sudden terrific concussion made his teeth rattle. A flash of flame leaped up beyond the further buildings to the northward. It vanished quickly, leaving a mushroom of smoke against the stars.

The explosion could only mean one thing. The fire had reached a small store of powder in one of the nearer mine buildings. Huntington wondered what the miners of the night-shift were doing over there. Then he began to wonder why he, the quarry of this raid, was not pursued to a finish.

"They're too drunk!" he discerned.

His ears began to catch a new sound, or lack of sound. The whooping and popping began to diminish, though the fire continued its insistent roaring monotone. Somehow the cessation of that jubilant racket caused his spirits to go down as he considered his own case. What had he left now? What was he going to do? Where could he go?

He wandered to the side-porch of an empty barber-shop, where he sat down moodily in the shadows of the deep-dark little alley, where only a strip of the wall reflected the dancing orange firelight.

TWO frantic horses galloped along the main street, then a third. Huntington only saw them flash past the mouth of the alley, yet in that swift glimpse he discerned the third man leaning forward, slashing with a quirt at the two cowering ruffians whose arms shielded their faces. Huntington jumped up with a queer ferocious thrill at sight of that man. He recognized the tough face with the U-shaped jaw and broken nose instantly, even though the fellow wore conventional gray store clothes over his boots and spurs. The man's face was a challenge, an insult, a maddening thing!

Impulsively Huntington slipped to the rear of the shop, going westward behind the jumping black shadows of several stores and houses. He didn't know where he would end up; he had no plan in mind; he only knew that Chris Bascom had traveled westward.

Huntington came to a broad alley which gave a side-entrance to a deserted merchandise store, where boxes and old stuff encroached almost to the edge of the main street. He halted as several riders went racing past, with a snarling, raging fury slashing at them with a quirt. One big bawling lout turned back, but his brown-and-white pinto pony reappeared again suddenly while the demoniac Bascom whacked down on the rider until the tormented victim turned his horse's head squarely into Bascom's face, causing the latter to swerve sharply.

"It was an accident!" bleated the big fellow. "Dammit, can't yuh see the fire got away from us? Quit it! Quit it!"

"Accident!" raged Bascom. "Didn't you see the wind? You crazy lunatic, was you tryin' to turn the whole town against me? Is that it? Eh?" Bascom drew back his quirt.

"But you told us to!" bawled the victim loudly.

"Told you to! Ya-a-a-a-a! I told you to get that fella when he came to town! I told you to smoke him out! Him, not the town! Dammit, why didn't I have some men I could depend on? You lunkhead, you fool, you stray coyote, get out o' my sight before I blow your head off!"

The big fellow's horse spun around. He raced away, but not before Bascom tried for his head with the quirt. Its vicious swish caused Bascom's excited animal to dance around into the cleared space in the alley, where its flank was only twenty feet from Huntington.

Huntington leaped.

Without hesitation, without regard for possible raiders still lurking in town, he hurled himself through the air like a football tackler, yanking Bascom off the horse. They slammed to the ground together, while the alarmed animal shied away.

Bascom came to action with the suddenness of a panther. The attack was unexpected, but he was trying to wriggle away from it before he reached the dirt. Then he became a thing of steel springs.

His right arm whipped downward. It dragged a six-shooter from his hip, alongside the ground. Huntington grasped the wrist. The pistol exploded, burning his sleeve, but still he struggled to bend the arm backward. Bascom strove against it, then rolled away. Its suddenness whirled him over on top of Huntington, and past him. Here the power of Huntington's mighty legs came into play. Bracing himself, he shoved with all his strength so that

the two of them strained against each other in a writhing human pyramid.

There was no parley, no talk, no explanations, nothing but fight.

Bascom's arm with the pistol tried to come forward again. Huntington held it back while he sought his own weapon. It was a mistake. A savage fist struck his forearm as he yanked the six-shooter outward, causing the thing to be knocked out of his grasp. It was lost in the shadows but he didn't see it go. The muzzle of that other weapon was pointing toward him again.

Wildly he held it back. Desperately he flung his right hand around to help the left. Their combined momentum jerked Bascom's arm backward and nearly snapped it. Crying with pain, he released the weapon. His left fist flailed into Huntington's face. Crash, crash, crash! So eager was Bascom that his whole body lifted itself off the earth.

Huntington became numb. He butted his forehead upon Bascom's nose in order to get too close for that fist to operate. Then his mind began to clear. Slowly, methodically, he began to look for openings where he delivered smash after smash, while Bascom bit, clawed, pulled hair, and strove to throttle him.

IT ceased to be a fight. It verged toward murder. They were equally strong from the waist up, but Bascom was the quicker and Huntington the solider. Panting, snarling, sobbing, hitting, wrestling like two fiends in the shadows, they struggled and battered until Bascom lay writhing on the ground, unable now even to clench his hands.

Then Huntington lurched to his feet, searched in the shadows, and recovered his pistol.

"No!" gasped Bascom. "No!"

"No," panted Huntington. "But you'll come with me. Yes. Get up!"

Shortly thereafter he staggered across back lots with his half-conscious captive, arriving abruptly in the doorway of the little adobe home, in the presence of Helen, 'Vangeline and Langdon, where he pushed Bascom forward.

Bascom slumped to the floor. Huntington stared at him dazedly.

"Well," muttered Huntington, through thick lips, "that's one down!"

"My gosh!" yelped Langdon, sitting straight up. "Chris Bascom!"

BUT Helen wasted no time in exclamations. With one look at the battered horror that was Huntington, she grasped a towel, filled a basin, made him sit down, sent Vangeline for the Doctor, and started to work, while Bascom climbed to a cracker-box, and sat sardonically waiting for attention also.

Things happened quickly. The Doctor came with five men whose clothes were wet and smoking. The Marshal arrived, taking charge of Bascom importantly.

Old Langdon gazed at the prisoner for some time.

"Now that we've got you," remarked Langdon, at last, "what in tarnation are we goin' to do with you?"

Bascom looked up.

"I dunno as you can do anything," he mumbled.

"No? You persecuted Huntington, ruined him, shot his hosses, burned his barn—"

"Well, he made us do it!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Huntington. "How?"

Bascom found it hard to talk through swollen jaws. Sometimes he grimaced with pain.

"Stage-line. You kept it up. I told you not to. You was stubborn. Kept it up after—I told you not to. People were startin' to laugh at me—I couldn't—afford to let you keep on after I told you not to; I couldn't—afford to back down in front of everybody—like that—and my own gang. The boys are—hard to control and I—couldn't afford to let you—keep goin'."

There was a half-minute of silence.

"Oh," said Huntington. "I guess, then, you couldn't afford to let me live!"

"No," Bascom nodded. "That was a mistake."

Helen gasped. The Marshal clenched his fists.

"I guess we've been fools!" said the Marshal.

"But suppose his gang comes back?" asked some one.

"We'll handle 'em!" boasted the Marshal. "This here town's roused now! We'll handle 'em!"

"But I didn't intend to burn the town!" argued Bascom. "Those fools—some of my lunkheads—were in town when McKay told 'em—"

"McKay!" yelled Huntington, lurching at his feet. "What about him?"

Bascom hesitated, but decided to speak

"Yeh, McKay. He's got it in for you. He told my men you'd come back. With a six-horse stage. So my men started to smoke you out. I was on my way to town. Too late. They were drunk. They done everything wrong!"

"I'm going to look for McKay!" announced Huntington, starting for the door.

Helen held him back.

"No!" she pleaded. "What's the use? The poor man is probably frightened to death. His whole place is burned, anyhow. Isn't that punishment enough?"

He saw it.

"I suppose so," he hesitated, looking into her eyes. "Ye-es, I guess he's had rough going, considering everything. We'll forget him, then, if you want to."

"We'll forget him," she agreed, with a nod.

"Question is," said old Langdon, "what do we do with Bascom? Try him legal?"

Bascom whirled around on him.

"What for? Shootin' horses? Burnin' a barn?"

"Shooting Mr. Langdon," said Huntington. "And Tommy. And other things."

"I didn't do 'em. It was my men."

The Marshal's jaw drooped. Old Langdon scratched his head. The wily Chris Bascom was proving too much for them!

"You're wriggling out from under!" accused Huntington; "your men were acting under your orders!"

"Does it look like it?" jeered Bascom, jerking a thumb toward the roaring main street. "Do you think I'd be fool enough to burn the town?"

"You're their boss," insisted Huntington. "You're responsible!"

"Yeh? Well, you'd have a hard time to make that stick before any judge or jury in this country, Mister!"

Huntington took a sharp breath. Its truth hit him like a blow in the face.

Looking at this shrewd, cynical, masterful rogue, he realized that the man was still dangerous as dynamite. Given a week or so to rally his friends while the present excitement was dying down, the fellow could browbeat or tangle up any jury in this free-and-easy country, and then win their admiration by some piece of devilment which would give him greater prestige than before. Why, he was even baffling the hostile Langdon and the zealous Marshal right now! Huntington had to head him off.

"I'm not going to argue with you," remarked Huntington. "That's useless. So I'll leave you here with the Marshal—unless the Marshal decides to let you go."

"Not me!" roared Wild Bill. "This man goes to the calaboose right soon!"

"Don't let him get away," pleaded Huntington.

"Seems like you're excited!" snorted the offended Marshal.

"I am," confessed Huntington. "The case is desperate now. More desperate than you think. Almost life and death. If that fellow's tongue gets the best of you tonight, we might as well all leave the country!"

Bascom's malignant gray eyes jeered at Huntington through narrow lids which were ringed with purple.

"Scared of me, eh?" sneered Bascom.

HUNTINGTON intended to clip his wings right now, but he saw no reason to declare his plans. He merely went out through the doorway. He was bruised, dazed and weak, but now he had a marvelous stimulation.

"Where to?" pleaded Helen. "You're not very well, you know!"

He nodded a negative to her, walking out to where citizens were struggling against any further encroachment of the flames. Then he looked around.

His barn was gone. Iron hoops glared white-hot among the ruins to remind him of his lost stage. He saw four hoops exactly where they ought to be; otherwise the stage was a glowing orange-red cinder in the middle of smoky embers. The building at the left of the barn was scorched but still standing. McKay's store was a litter of rubbish. Most of the nearer mine buildings were consumed, though the stamp-mill and office had survived. They were farther away. In the vague dancing light of the dying fires, he discerned dark forms still working with buckets on the sloping roofs.

He had some idea of organizing these men because of their present vexation at Chris Bascom, but he did not know just how to start it. The miners and townsmen were scattered all over the place. His own condition was another drawback. It made him lethargic when he should have been keen. Still, by the aid of his own hired guards, he managed to arrange for a general meeting of the townsmen before noon, and then he decided to seek a little rest. He dismissed his guards at the edge of the burned space, between the mine and the unburned part of town.

BILL LOVETT came out of the shadows to the westward. Huntington braced his feet, but Lovett beckoned him toward the office-building, saying nothing while leading him into the presence of a crisp, gray-mustached little man sitting behind a table. This was Jenkins, the superintendent, who had been absent for some time. The light of dawn came through the big windows, shining wanly on his broadcloth clothes and upon his fine white pompadour.

"So you're the man who has been fighting this Bascom crowd!" remarked Jenkins, eying Huntington keenly. "It looks, young man, as if you've succeeded in ruining everything around here!"

"It was the other fellow," retorted Huntington. "I've captured him."

"Who? Bascom?"

"Yes."

The superintendent looked at Lovett and sat back. He seemed astonished.

"Well," he said, at last, "you seem to keep at things, anyhow. May I ask what you're planning next?"

"Attack. Go after the gang. They're leaderless. Gather a posse. Chase 'em out of the country, once and for all!"

"Have you any followers?"

"Not many yet."

"How many do you want?"

"Fifty, a hundred, all I can get."

The superintendent reached into a drawer, producing a scrawled paper. It was a telegram from the East. He handed it across the table. It said: *"Coöperate with local authorities at any cost to get rid of this menace."*

"That means Bascom," said the superintendent quietly. "I sent a wire when the fire started. It's daytime in New York. Our president got out of bed. He sent this. I'm sorry we have no local authorities to coöperate with, except the Marshal, who is not very efficient, so we've decided to enlist your assistance. Things like this fire are a little too expensive!"

Huntington held the telegram in hands which trembled. Its tardy help aroused his exasperation.

"Why, why, why didn't you people get into this thing before now?" he cried. "Before I was smashed? Before people were shot? Before the mine was burned? I've begged, pleaded, argued my head off to get a little help—even after Lovett had engineered the shotgun business that started all the trouble—but I couldn't get you people to see it!"

The superintendent frowned.

"I was tempted sometimes to get behind you," he confessed, "but Lovett, here, is sort of an—er—diplomat. He knows local conditions. He advised us to keep aloof. Possibly he was right. We might have been raided to death. Everybody would have looked on it as a joke on the company. A big business organization is never popular in a Western town. Perhaps it's not popular anywhere. Therefore it is very vulnerable to attack. It can't afford to enter lightly into local feuds. Mr. Lovett and I considered these things. Even now I am not inclined to criticize Mr. Lovett's judgment. The fire was plainly an accident. The cause of it, though, was so wanton and unjustified that our company is forced to act. How many men do you want?"

"All you can give."

"Very well. Fifty. When do you want them?"

"At noon. Right here."

"And you know where these bandits are?"

"I know where they should be."

"Very well. Noon, then."

"And after we're through with that," said Huntington, boldly, "I intend to start my stage-line again. I'll have to borrow capital. Anyhow, I want your business."

The superintendent smiled. He was a man of quick decisions.

"We're willing to give you the business if the road is clear. As for capital, that must be discussed later. It will depend upon your thoroughness."

HUNTINGTON whistled happily as he left the office, and then he started back toward the main street, stepping blithely past the still-warm embers of McKay's shop, which looked ashen in the light of sunrise. Huntington had forgotten McKay. Indeed, he never saw McKay again.

There had been a scene in that building which Huntington never saw, a scene where a quavering, cowering McKay lurked behind a counter, wringing his hands, gazing with pop-eyed horror upon this holocaust which he had helped to create, and wailing, "My God!" until the galloping black raiders ceased beating with sacks upon his steaming porch, because it was useless. Little tongues of flame licked through the tiny aperture under the door. Smoke made him cough. Then, with the flames beyond the windows throwing yellowish flashes on

his face and shoulders, he gave up hope, stuffed money into his pockets, retreated by a rear door, saddled a horse and stole away. Hours later, he looked back toward the flickering orange skyline far to the westward. . . . . Then he kept going.

A CAVALCADE came riding into town from the westward just as Huntington reached the main street. He found Helen, 'Vangeline and the limping Tommy serving coffee and food from the top of an old half-charred packing-box to citizens whose faces were smudged with ashes. They stopped eating to gape at the oncoming horsemen.

A great beefy-faced, bullet-headed paladin on a weary black stallion rode in the lead, while the sunshine flashed redly on the Mexican silver decorations on his saddle, spurs, bit and martingale. It was Bill Burnham, armed to the teeth, at the head of six men.

He reined in his horse in front of the refreshment-stand.

"Thirty miles in four hours!" he triumphed. "How's that for ridin'? We seen the flames from our cook-wagon, 'way out on the plain!" He moved his tottering, foam-flecked animal toward the smoking ruins, to get a better view.

"Seems like the mine got kinda warm, eh?" he remarked; but no one answered.

There was a stir at Huntington's right. He looked that way. Several men were shouldering past Helen, who stood aside. In the lead was the scowling Chris Bascom. Behind him strode the Marshal, apparently escorting him toward the calaboose, some distance down the street.

Bill Burnham turned his horse as he opened his mouth for some more amiable comments. The muscles of his jaw tightened. The color left his face while his little blue eyes took a demoniac glint.

He had sighted Chris Bascom!

Bascom looked up, halted in surprise and took a step backward. His lips seemed to move, but Huntington was never sure of that.

A flash of steel leaped into Burnham's right hand. A quick light blazed in front of Huntington's eyes. A thudding report stunned his eardrums. Hot smoke stung his nostrils.

It happened in a whip-lash of time. The smoke seemed to linger for an eternity, but it was only an instant. Then something tumbled. It was Bascom. There was no staggering, no dramatics, no waste motion. He slumped to the ground, shot like a dog.

"My God!" howled the Marshal.

"Well," came Burnham's satisfied voice, "that ends *that!*" And he sheathed his six-shooter with a gesture.

Huntington was dazed. It was too sudden and too ferocious, like a thunderclap from the sky. He stared up at the beefy lord of the ranges, and then dimly he noticed that Helen had turned away and was shielding her face with her hands. He went to her, supporting her with his arm.

"It had to come sometime!" he said.

IT is on record that the Huntington posses swooped on the old Bascom stronghold in the mountains, scattering the gang forever while liberating a fine herd of stolen cattle and incidentally many horses, including a matched quartet of sleek little ponies.

It is also on record that Bill Burnham laid claim to everything, and nearly started a new war, but this matter was adjusted when the majority voted him all the cattle, which was more than he deserved, and gave all the horses to Huntington, who thereby paid his debts and equipped himself for a new business career.

It is also on record that the first outward trip of the fine new stage was a honeymoon tour, with the bride and groom on the front seat, while Tommy, 'Vangeline, the Marshal, Bill Burnham and several hundred citizens stood alongside the newly built barn at the edge of the burned area, waving handkerchiefs or shooting pistols upward to encourage four agile ponies and two fine new wheel-horses to scamper down the main street as fast as their feet could clatter.

They swung into the long road like race-horses. Huntington pulled them down, then gazed ahead to the rolling sagebrush hills while his left arm supported Helen. He said nothing for a long time. Then:

"I was right. There's peace now. Without Bascom, that crowd didn't amount to anything!"

She smiled up at him.

"Why think of it?" she asked. "Isn't it all over now?"

"Yes," he agreed. "It was a long drag, through battle and fire, but the road's clear now."

He clucked at the ponies. They put their shoulders into the collars and pulled the swaying coach across a little sagebrush valley, and over the hills and far away.

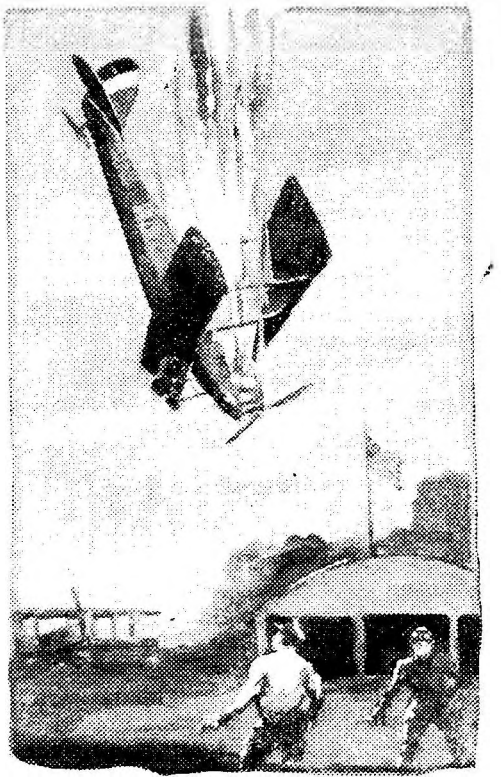
THE END.

REAL EXPERIENCES

Greatly Exaggerated

By **Rex Bixby**

The amazing chronicle of an instructor pilot who crashed and who later had the privilege of reading his own obituary.



"LIEUTENANT, you will use 3700 for your new class today."

It was Major Clark speaking as he emerged from the eerie darkness of Hangar "D" into the penetrating chill of the California morning. As Flying Officer at the Army Air Service Field, he was assigning planes to ten of us instructors, who were clustered in the driveway between the hangars waiting for our classes of new cadets to be marched over from the student barracks.

In the drive to prepare men for the air squadrons at the front in 1918, many precautions were of necessity abandoned. Certain common-sense bounds were observed, of course, but the big idea was simply to turn out as quickly as possible flyers who could take battle planes and fly the wings off of 'em if necessary. And flyers they were! Some of those lads could almost fly a kitchen table. Some were wild—and how!

The long hours made necessary by the high-pressure schedule had to be broken in the middle of the day because of the blistering heat at March Field and the resultant air bumpiness. This required an early start, and the first take-off was at five-forty-five A. M.

A great game. The uncertainty, the hourly gamble, the thrill of kicking those "Jennies" and T-M birds around in the clouds, the close fellowship in the barracks, all combined to make those days never-to-be-forgotten. But by golly, there were necessary risks and then again, unnecessary risks. When the Major assigned me 3700 that morning I figured it was time for this Irish shavetail to protest.

"Major, that crate isn't safe with the gang I drew yesterday," I insisted. "Three of them are wild, and one of them hasn't any more sense of equilibrium than a frog has eyebrows."

"That's all right, Bixby. We'll have your regular ship ready for tomorrow, and 3700 is all that is available today," was the Major's reply.

Quod erat demonstrandum!

The point in my protest was this: My regular dual-instruction ship, 3687, was tail-heavy, and I had turned it in the previous day for realignment. Where it had

a long stick in front for the instructor and a short one in the rear cockpit for the pupil —to give the instructor leverage in taking the controls if a pupil should develop wildness—the stunt ships, of which 3700 was one (the identical one, incidentally, in which I had taken my own stunt instruction from one of the finest of them all, Lieutenant Howard Rough) had long sticks in the rear for the pupils, and short ones in front for the instructors. This was because a cadet who had reached the stunt or acrobatic stage in his training was presumed to be past the wild stage and needed merely guidance in the performance of his wing-overs, spins, loops, and what have you.

The instructor sits directly behind the OX5 motor in the JN4-D ships such as were then in use. Knowing from plenty of observation that a crash usually resulted in that hapless individual holding the motor in his lap with almost inevitably fatal consequences to both man and motor, it struck me as but natural that one should view with no particular tranquillity the prospect of going into the air with wild pupils and a ship which would give them all the leverage on the controls. I did not mind taking my chances. As a matter of fact, the uncertainty was half the thrill of the game. But I never like to play when the cards are known to be stacked against me. However, even in the Air Service, a major was a major and a lieutenant merely a lieutenant. I took 3700.

AT five-forty-five, with dawn just beginning to tinge the crests of the Sierra Nevadas far to the east, the air was still as a millpond. By the time I had given the first of the boys some verbal instruction on what we were to do and what was expected of him, the mechanics had the motor of 3700 warmed, tuned and idling smoothly. The soft swish of the propellor and the rhythmic hum of the motor sounded a musical invitation to us.

Helmets, goggles and safety-belts being attended to, I signaled for the boy's hands to be placed on the cowl; the wheel chocks were pulled, and easing the throttle slowly forward, I took the ship swiftly across the smooth surface of the field. Then with an easy snap of the stick I lifted her nose so that we climbed in a large, effortless circle to the left. The dark bulk of the hangars and barracks dropped away from us, and the indistinct rectangle of the field melted into the semi-darkness.

Dawn, bursting in splendor over the top of Mount Russell, met us at the fifteen-foot level. I headed the ship for a spot some eight miles from the field, where a water-tower and a farmhouse, spaced just right, gave us an ideal spot for doing easy "eights."

In the next two minutes my hunch on the wisdom of taking a stunt ship that morning proved to be absolutely correct. A quick stall, the dread *H-a-a-a-woosh-h-h* of the tail-spin, the swift calculation of chances, the brown earth being lifted with unbelievable swiftness to meet us, a quick hope that the blooming crate would not catch on fire, and—

SOME few hours later I surprised the flight surgeon, Captain Bannister, and quite an assemblage of nurses and assistants by demanding in the loud but emphatic voice of delirium why in Tophet some cold water was not put on my legs to stop the burning.

I have been told, and believe, my language established some sort of a record at that time, both in vigor and breadth of vocabulary. I ran the gamut and did not repeat once.

It seems that the gasoline had spilled generously, and the motor having been considerate enough to stop its advance into my embrace some couple of inches away, my legs had received a copious splashing. A few hours on the operating-table while the doctors worked on a concussion and extracted enough glass from my left eye to make half a dozen pairs of the "unbreakable" goggles I had worn, stitched away like tailors on spots where I had injudiciously run afoul of the metal fittings of the plane when we crashed—well, a few hours with gasoline-soaked duds against one's epidermal covering produces most annoying burning sensations. I could not feel the other things because of the shock, but hearsay has it that I carried on at some length regarding the apparent indifference to my creature comfort. I have letters from some of those who were there, and I reckon that I provided plenty of chuckles for all who heard me.

FOUR days afterward I found that certain bandaged members in which I had taken but an impersonal and academic interest during the opiate stage actually belonged to me and would move—reluctantly, but they would move, at my direction. I

felt I was entitled to a rest, but a hospital cot exerted little appeal. Accordingly after the routine of reports was attended to, I sent application to Headquarters for a ten-day leave of absence to go to the Mission Inn at Riverside and recuperate in more luxurious surroundings.

It was granted. That afternoon I took a field bus to Riverside, my appearance much that of an animated Egyptian mummy, but my anticipation keen at the prospect of the enjoyable days at a most restful hotel.

I had just registered and turned to point out my luggage to the bellboy, when I received a shock that almost upset me. There in the doorway, his face gray with strain and his eyes staring fixedly at me, stood my father. Two thousand miles he was from our Nebraska home, the last person in the world I expected to see at that time, and his whole bearing indicative of a severe strain.

Well, I could do nothing but take his arm, and together we managed to get to the merciful comfort of one of the large lobby divans. I think it must have been several minutes at least before my father could speak. He stared at me as though not believing the evidence of his eyes. My wonder grew, and my apprehension. What—what could have so completely upset that rock-ribbed, sturdy Vermont temperament? Some family catastrophe, it must be, I thought. It did not occur to me that my own situation could possibly have so unnerved him.

Finally words came, and this is the story—one I've never heard paralleled.

THROUGH some impulsive error, some one had jumped at conclusions when I was lifted from the ambulance and did not regain consciousness for so long. From the field-telegraph office had gone a message to my parents, stating:

"Your son died in crash this date. Funeral Tuesday."

That was all. It was plenty. Supposing the message to be authentic, of course, my family accepted the news as would any other normal family, the eldest son of which had gone west in military service.

Wires were dispatched to my two younger brothers, one at the Observers' School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, the other at the University of Nebraska. The latter came home at once; the other got a leave of absence permitting him to leave just in time for the funeral at home, and he awaited further word.

My father took the train next day for Riverside to get my body and take it home for burial.

My old Infantry outfit, then at Camp Dix, N. J., heard the report, and sent a wonderful letter of condolence to my family—a letter I cherish above most things, because it came from my buddies.

The Riverside paper got hold of it and ran quite a little feature on it, the theme being that in my case, as in that of Mark Twain, the report of my death was slightly exaggerated.

My ten-day leave of absence was, under the circumstances, extended to permit me to accompany my father back to Nebraska and convince the people that I was far from being a candidate for post-mortem eulogies, et al. Wings, bandages and everything, and looking a good deal like an accident going somewhere to happen, I boarded the Union Pacific with my father, and we went back to straighten out the situation.

LET it suffice that I had the unusual experience of reading my obituary in two newspapers, distributing with largess enough flowers and floral pieces to stock a good-sized florist's establishment, speaking at a service originally planned as a memorial, and generally having the privilege of looking over the effect produced by news of my death.

My one regret, naturally, is the shock through which my family carried on. The affair aged both my parents greatly. It is tragic indeed that such errors occur, but in the stress of wartime activity I presume the marvel is that such cases were not more numerous.

Had I actually passed out, of course, I would have been simply another one of the boys who paid one hundred per cent. As it was, I have quite a scrapbook filled with evidences that it was indeed a most unusual experience.

In another month I was back, getting more enjoyment than ever out of the motor pulsations and the whistle of wind in the flying wires. I love the game now. I hope to enjoy many more thousands of hours in the air before it becomes necessary for anyone to write further obituaries for me, for likely I'll not have the privilege of reading any more of my own. . . . .

The cadet who had been with me? He was uninjured.

The Man Who Was Afraid

By

Will M. Maupin

You'll find thrills aplenty in this stirring chronicle of desperate adventure.

BRAVERY is not merely being unafraid of danger—rather does it consist of being afraid of it, but having the intestinal fortitude to face it and play out the string.

More years ago than I like to recall I was a typographical tourist, although that was not exactly what they called us in those days.

During this time I had many buddies on my journeyings to and fro across the face of the earth. We were seeking employment at our trade, and usually hoping we wouldn't find anything like a permanent job. While a journeyman printer, with the accent on the "journey," I had divers and sundry adventures, in none of which I played a hero part, but in one of them I was an eye-witness—too much so for comfort—of what I consider the bravest thing within my personal experience.

Early one summer in the eighties, I cashed in my string on the Omaha *Bee*, took out a traveling card, and in company with a fellow printer named Heine Ashroth started for the Pacific Northwest. Those were the days of the railroad pass, the days before the hordes of tramps made life a burden to trainmen and a fellow really in search of work had little difficulty in finding friendly trainmen. I secured passes for Heine and myself to Denver over the Union Pacific.

We figured on working in Denver for a few weeks, and then starting for Portland and Seattle, making our way in the manner to which peripatetic printers were accustomed.

Union Pacific trains were not then the palatial affairs of today, although they carried Pullmans. That meant nothing to us, however, as our passes did not include sleeping-car accommodations, and we rode in the forward day-coach.

THERE had been an epidemic of train robberies during the early spring, so quite naturally train-robbing and banditry were the chief topics of conversation with the smoking-car crowd.

Train-robbers interested neither Heine nor myself, as our combined worldly possessions, aside from the clothes we wore, were not worth the cost of the cartridges to load a bandit's revolver.

"I happen to know," said one of our fellow-travelers, "that this train is carrying a heavy shipment of gold and currency to Denver, and you can bet those train-robbers have inside information about such shipments. We may be in for a hold-up ourselves!"

Then the men in the coach began telling what they would do in case bandits stopped the train. Heine and I had been playing pitch with a couple of strangers. The man sitting next to me, our backs

toward the engine, boastfully showed a revolver which he carried in his inside coat pocket, and avowed that at the first sight of a bandit he would instantly begin shooting.

As the fellow flourished the revolver, Heine shrank down in his seat and actually turned pale.

"P-p-put that thing away," he stammered. "It might go off."

The man laughed in great amusement at Heine's evident fright and thrust the revolver back into his pocket.

Several passengers gathered around our card game and proceeded to tell what they would do. I knew what I would do, but I didn't think it necessary, in the circumstances, to tell. If any train-robbers showed up at the front end of the coach and backed their demands for "hands up" by flourishing guns, I was going to hold mine so high my fingers would scratch the paint from the car ventilators.

While the discussion was going on I went forward to get a drink, and while drinking from the old unsanitary tincup I noticed an elderly, well-dressed man sitting in the front seat just across the aisle from the water-cooler. He had evidently overheard our rather loud-voiced conversation, for when I put the cup down and started to return to my seat he put his hand on my arm.

I stopped, and the old gentleman asked fearfully:

"Do you think there is any danger of the train being robbed?"

"Not the least in the world," was my laughing reply. "Why, are you carrying a lot of money?"

"Not a great deal, sir, but it is all I have in the world," said the old man.

"Well, if train robbers show up, just hand it over and save trouble," I said and returned to my seat.

"Do you think there is any danger?" asked Heine as I settled down.

"If it is true that there is a lot of money in the express-car it is a cinch," I carelessly replied.

I felt rather sorry for Heine. He was pale and trembling like a leaf. The proposition that we resume our game of pitch met with a refusal from Heine, and I began to regret that I had picked such an arrant coward for a traveling companion.

So, the card game abandoned, and stories of train-robberies growing wilder and wilder, our train hurtled on into the night.

I had wearied, now, of the conversation, and was dozing. Every now and then I aroused myself, and every time I did I could see Heine's pale face, his mouth agape as he listened to those stories. If ever a man showed physical fear it was he.

As the night wore on time ceased to exist for me, as I was sleeping the sleep of the just and innocent; at least the sleep of one who didn't have anything to lose in a train robbery. The last thing I remembered before the storm broke was the Julesburg stop. But when I did wake up believe me I was wide awake!

I was awakened by a tremendous jerk of the train as the air-brakes set, and thrown forward into Heine's arms. Perhaps it would be better to say that we met in mid-air. The train came to a jolting stop, and then the air was filled with the din of revolver-shots.

"My God, it's a hold-up!" shrieked the man who had so bravely shown the revolver, and he sank back into his seat beside me, about as near limp as a man could be and still retain consciousness.

II

HEINE was staring at the front door of the coach, and I remember thinking to myself that he looked like a bird being fascinated by a snake. I turned my head just in time to see a pair of masked men enter, flourishing their revolvers and yelling for everybody to "Stick 'em up high!" followed by further instructions to stand up and keep out of the aisle.

The demands were sharply emphasized by three or four shots that punctured the roof of the coach. Ahead we could hear shooting around the express- and baggage-cars, and behind us in the coaches and the Pullmans we could hear shots and shrieks.

Things might have quieted down and the robbery been carried out without a hitch, had it not been for one thing. The old gentleman in the front end of the coach foolishly tried to dodge past the bandits; one of them clubbed him brutally over the head with the muzzle of his gun. I grew sick at the sight of that old man sinking to the floor, the blood gushing from his scalp. As I sank down into my seat I half turned and saw Heine

pull that revolver from the inside coat pocket of the boastful man, who was now limp with fear at my side.

Eyes blazing like fire, Heine jumped into the aisle and started toward the bandits, shooting as he went. One man dropped his gun and went down. A bullet hit Heine in the shoulder and turned him half around. He staggered, but kept on shooting. Just as the second robber dropped, a bullet from a bandit at the rear struck Heine in the right side.

He staggered to his knees, bullets flying over his head. But he managed to turn part way round, his left hand on the floor supporting him shakily in that kneeling position.

And with the last bullet left in his revolver he struck the outlaw at the rear of the coach squarely between the eyes. As the bandit sank to the floor Heine toppled over on his face and lay still.

The shooting in our car evidently convinced the other members of the gang scattered along and through the train that they were up against organized resistance, for in a moment or two the shooting stopped and a little later there was a sound of galloping horses.

It could not have been more than a few brief seconds—although it seemed hours to me, kneeling on that seat and looking down at poor Heine—ere the whole thing was over. Two dead bandits lay at the front door of the car, one dead one at the rear door, and in front of the two dead outlaws the old, gray-haired man was lying apparently dead, the blood oozing slowly from a ghastly gash in his head.

There in the aisle almost in the middle of the coach lay Heine the coward—the only man among a score or more who was frightened speechless at the mere mention of train-robbers—also the only man of the lot brave enough to stand forth and offer any resistance to them.

PICKING him up, we investigated his wounds. One slug had torn through his left shoulder; another had broken both bones of his left forearm; still another had plowed a horrible gash in his right side. Fortunately a physician was located back in one of the Pullmans and he bandaged the wounds as best he could in the circumstances. Aside from Heine and the old gentleman none of the passengers was hurt. The engineer had been brutally beaten over the head and the express messenger was nursing a perforated shoulder. He had refused to open up and had been perforated by one of the scores of bullets sent through the door and side of the car.

Heine was taken back to a drawing-room, and kindly ministered to by eager women until we reached Denver, where he was taken to a hospital. I worked on the old Denver *Republican* for three or four weeks, visiting Heine every afternoon. Before he was entirely recovered I pulled out for the Coast.

I DID not see Heine again for three years. In the meanwhile I had quit the road and settled down, persuaded thereto by a girl I had met in a western Nebraska town. I married her and bought the local weekly newspaper—or rather, I bought the local weekly newspaper and then married her.

We went on our honeymoon to the Pacific coast. This time I had a section in a Pullman. We stopped over in Salt Lake City for two or three days. One day we went into a fine restaurant for lunch, and as we entered the door I heard some one say:

"Hello, Bill! Welcome to our city!"

I looked around to see Heine Ashroth approaching, a broad smile on his face and his left coat-sleeve pinned up on his shoulder. He owned the restaurant.

Then he told me the aftermath of the story.

The surgeons had amputated his arm. Two of the bandits he had killed had rewards on their heads of twenty-five hundred dollars each, so the U. P. paid him five thousand dollars for the pair and an extra thousand for the third one. With this money he had gone into the restaurant business in Salt Lake City and was prospering.

Needless to say, Heine insisted on the honeymooners being his guests while we were in the capital of Mormonism.

That was the last time I saw Heine; he may be there yet, for all I know.

So I assert that Heine Ashroth was a truly brave man. He was scared to death—but he played the string out.

"It made me mad to see those fellows hit that poor old man over the head," was the only explanation Heine could ever give for that astonishing change in his behavior.

A chemical-factory worker finds there is deadly danger in his business too.

In the Acid Room

By

William Ferguson Pearce

THE work of a lead-burner in a chemical works is not, as a rule, very dangerous or exciting. His job is to join two sheets of lead by melting the edges together in such a way as to make them one solid sheet. He operates with a small blow-torch, which he holds in his hand, and plays on the edges of the sheets. As an assistant he usually has a boy, who operates a hydrogen generator, that supplies the gas for the torch.

Some years ago, though, I had a terrifying experience.

The superintendent of the sulphuric acid works, in which I was employed, came to me one Monday morning and said: "Bill, I wish you would fix up that leak in the pan of Number One chamber of Number Four set. We will have that off now for about five days, to get the tower lining fixed up. I told Callahan to keep sober, and report here Thursday morning. If he don't show up, I'll fire him. I'm getting tired of his sprees."

Callahan was the burner man, who ran the pyrites burners. Pyrites is the iron sulphide ore used to supply the sulphur gas for the manufacture of the acid. It is roasted and gives off dense clouds of sulphur oxide gas, which is pulled through the process by pumps and drafts.

About nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, I wheeled my gas generator up alongside of Number One chamber.

The chamber or room was ninety feet long, twenty feet wide and eighteen feet high, and its walls were composed of heavy lead sheets, burned together. An outside wooden framework prevented the heavy lead room from collapsing. The bottom was a huge lead pan, eighteen inches deep, into which the sheets dipped. When operating, this pan was nearly full of strong sulphuric acid.

It was now empty, and free from acid, save a few small pools in depressions in the floor.

I had on a heavy slicker, hip boots, and rubber hat, as the acid was dripping in occasional drops from the roof of the chamber. Entrance was made through a square hole in the roof. I put a ladder up against the chamber, and straightening out my gas hose, carried it up with me, and dropped the end of the hose to the bottom of the chamber.

Telling my helper, Jimmy, to stick around, and keep the generator working right, I tied a rope to the top rung of the ladder, and let myself and tools down into the chamber.

The inside of one of these immense chambers is most depressing. Hardly a sound comes through the leaden walls, and the only daylight comes faintly through the hole in the roof. The *drip-drip-drip* of the acid in the semi-darkness is most uncanny. A spoken word is reverberated

from the walls in loud hollow tones, suggestive of an underground tomb.

I didn't care much about working on this set, as it was a comparatively new one, and composed of hard lead—not pure lead, but an alloy, much harder and tougher than ordinary lead, also harder to burn.

The leak in the pan was only about ten feet from where I dropped from the rope, and as soon as I reached it, I lit my kerosene lamp, and pounded on the chamber wall for Jimmy to start the gas through the tube into my blow torch.

As soon as I had my flame going good, I worked steadily on the break, until it was repaired. I looked at my watch then, and found it was about eleven-thirty. Then I went hand over hand up the rope, and sticking my head out of the opening, called to the boy:

"Hey, Jimmy, you can go now. I'm going to look around in here a bit. See that you're back here by one o'clock."

"All right, Boss," returned Jimmy, and he went off whistling.

I went down the rope again, and thought I would look the pan over carefully, while I had the chance, as there might be some other weak place. I started near the rope, and went around the side toward the big pipe that led from the Glover Towers into the chamber. In about fifteen minutes, I was almost under the pipe, which entered the chamber about twelve feet above the floor of the pan. I held my lamp over my head, and looked up at it.

It seemed to me there was a faint haze coming from the pipe, and I wondered at it. The set had been shut down for two days, and I couldn't see how any gas could be left in the Towers.

"Probably some dust," I said to myself, and went on down the other side of the chamber. I was perhaps two-thirds of the way to the opening, when something caused me to cough. I stood up, and noticed for the first time, a slight smell of sulphur in the air. Holding the lamp over my head, I could see the same faint haze up above, that I had seen at the pipe, only somewhat heavier.

Although it seemed incredible that the chamber was filling with gas, I felt rather uneasy, and started to walk back to the pipe. If such a thing was happening, I was going to hike right out of there. Flirting with death had no charms for me.

Before two-thirds of the distance to the pipe had been covered, I received unmistakable evidence that the deadly sulphur gas was pouring into the chamber. The smell grew strong, and the haze much thicker; by holding the light up, I could now see the gas coming through the pipe.

I was not at all alarmed, but considerably peeved that any one should start up the set, without ascertaining that everything was right for the start. Moreover, the superintendent had assured me that he would not start before Thursday.

Stepping pretty lively, I made for the opening, coughing a little and not breathing so easily. The air was better as I neared the opening, and I made good time.

I held the lamp up as I approached the rope, and I thought for a moment I had gone blind.

The rope was gone.

FOR a few minutes, I acted like a crazy man, shooting the light all over the end of the chamber, as though the rope could have been secreted somewhere. Gradually my calmness returned, and I began to think more clearly. There was no danger for a little while, as the gas was not yet at this end of the chamber.

Where could the rope have gone? I held the lamp up as high as I could, and could see the opening, but no rope. It could not have become untied, or its weight would have caused it to drop into the chamber. I was forced to the conclusion that the ladder must have fallen over, dragging the rope with it.

It was of no use to yell, I felt sure. There was not a soul within hearing, and I doubted if I could propel my voice through those leaden walls. I tried it, though. In fact, I yelled myself hoarse.

I looked at my watch. It was twelve-five. Jimmy would not be back before one o'clock. Long before that I would be dead, unless I could find some means of escape.

It was impossible to scale the slimy lead walls—no footholds, and no way to make them. I seized the wooden mallet used to straighten plates, and pounded on the wall nearest me for several minutes. It dented the wall some, but not much, and made quite a lot of noise inside, but probably not much outside.

The air was growing noticeably thicker, and I coughed quite often. I tried to fight off any tendency to panic, assuring myself there must be some way out of this trap. It was ridiculous for an experienced acid man to die in this way.

I thought if I had had an ax, I could manage to chop a hole through the tough sheet large enough to let me through. I searched eagerly through my few tools, but there was no sharp tool of any kind, not even a screw-driver. I tried my pockets, and brought to light a small pocket-knife.

I attacked the sheet with this, but it made so little impression that I gave up in despair.

Even in this short time, the white fumes had grown so thick that breathing was difficult. My nose got so sore that I started to breathe through my mouth. It reminded me of mountain climbing—the quick short breaths, and wildly beating heart. I felt that I could not remain conscious much longer.

Suddenly there came to me an idea, which seemed good—if I could work it. I wondered why I had not thought of it before. It was to tear my clothes in strips, tie one end of a rope made from them to one of my big boots, and try to throw the boot up through the opening in the top of the chamber. It might get caught in such a way as to bear my weight.

In feverish haste, I tore off my slicker and trousers, and with the help of the small knife, cut both of the garments into wide strips, and laboriously tied them together

EVERY breath was now torture, and it was only with the utmost effort I could keep going. The air was so thick that the lamp gave forth only a sickly glow, and it was necessary to work as much by touch as by sight. Once the dangerous thought came to me to just give up the unequal struggle, and lie down, but I fought it off.

At last I had the boot fastened securely to the rope, and with a pain in my chest that was well-nigh unendurable, I rose to my feet, and prepared to try and throw it through the hole in the roof.

The first and the second attempt were failures, but on the third attempt the boot got caught in some way and as I pulled on the improvised rope, a thrill shot through me. It held my weight.

I thought of pulling off my other boot to help me climb, but as the sheet was wet with acid, I decided not to do it. This decision probably saved my life, for when I had gone up carefully hand over hand for more than ten feet, I felt a sudden jerk on the rope, and before I could even think of it, the rope parted.

As I felt myself falling, I instinctively threw out my hands, and my fingers came in contact with an old seam in the lead sheet. I hung on to this, and half unconscious, started to kick the sheet desperately but aimlessly with my boot.

To my astonishment and delight, I felt a piece of the sheet rip and the blessed cold air come seeping in. Revived a little now, I kept on kicking with my booted foot, and soon had a small section of lead loosened enough to squeeze my way through.

For a moment or two, I hung there—taking in great gulps of fresh air—a wonderful tonic to my seared lungs.

Then I looked around. The ladder and rope were lying on the platform. Probably the former had been jarred loose by vibrations of some kind.

As I hung there, I recalled cutting out this door in the lead sheet several years before, to get at a nitric acid spray, and not sealing it up very securely. For this oversight I now felt inordinately thankful.

I crawled down one of the heavy supports to the platform, and lay there—just glad to be alive. It seemed almost incredible that I was.

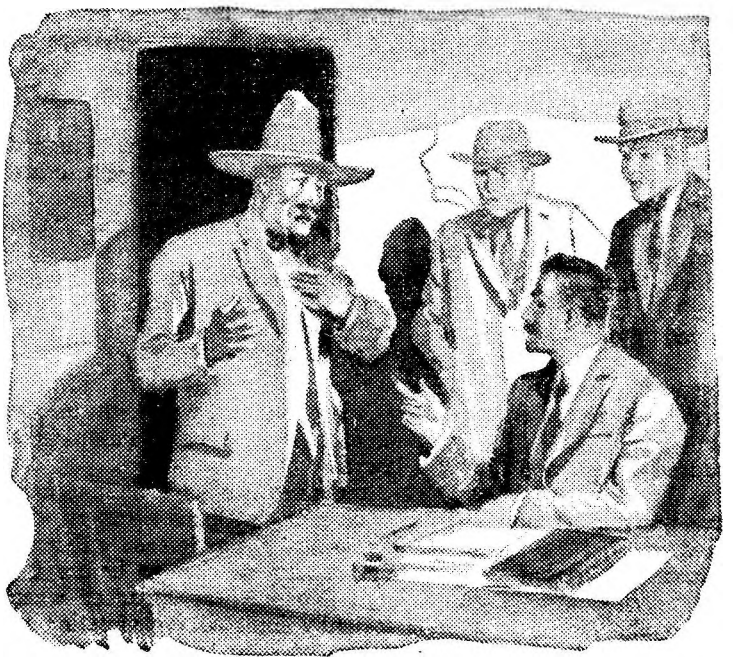
In a short time, the superintendent and Jimmy came up the steps on a run, and they almost cried with relief when they saw me lying there safe on the platform.

Jimmy told me that he had come in about fifteen minutes before and saw Callahan firing the furnaces—so drunk he could hardly walk. Jimmy raced up to the chamber to see if I was all right, and seeing the gas tube still in the chamber, and the ladder down, he was frightened and ran down to Callahan. Trying to arouse the drink-crazed man to a realization of what was going on soon proved hopeless, and in frantic haste, Jimmy had sought the phone, and called the superintendent. Then he had lingered outside, afraid to go in.

The super had broken the speed limits to get to the Works, and as he came into the burner room, he rocked Callahan into a deep sleep with a blow of his fist. Then he choked off all drafts, threw some wet ashes on the ore and rushed up to the chamber, expecting to have to chop a hole in the wall, and drag out a dead man.

I was pretty tough in those days, however, and in a little while I was able to get up and go home.

The crazy fool Callahan was discharged, but for a long time I was afraid to enter an acid chamber unless it was well guarded on the outside.



A very real mystery consequent on the Mexican revolution is here described by a participant.

By
Hartley Ford

The Madero Jewels

WHEN I was a special writer for a San Francisco paper I walked into the office of the U. S. Special Treasury Agent one morning and found him talking excitedly into the telephone.

Two Customs agents overheard the conversation. They hurried to the special agent's desk as he hung up.

"A man giving the name of Manuel Salinar is at the Mason Jewelry Company offering to sell a lot of diamonds and pearls for half their value," the agent explained. "The proprietor will stall until you get there. Make it snappy, boys! Ford, tag along if you want to. Big jewel cases don't pop up every day!"

I was glad to be on the inside of a big jewel case, so I "tagged along." We lost no time getting to the address, but Manuel Salinar had become suspicious and had skipped. The jeweler was able to give a good description of the man and this was at once phoned to the office. Knowing something of how the Customs service throws out a dragnet for the man it wants, I went back to the special agent's office to watch the net tighten.

Immediately on getting Salinar's description, the special agent had sent a man to check the list of recent steamship arrivals. Three other men had been dispatched to make a thorough canvass of the hotels. Two others had been hurried uptown to watch the two leading jewelry stores, while two stenographers were busy telephoning to all jewelry stores to be on the lookout for Salinar and to notify the Customs office the instant he showed up.

The first report came from the agent looking up steamship arrivals. He phoned in that Manuel Salinar had arrived in San Francisco two days before from Mazatlan, Mexico. He had brought in one suitcase and a trunk. He had declared "nothing dutiable." The customary search of his baggage had disclosed nothing dutiable.

The special agent had no sooner hung up than the phone rang again. Manuel Salinar had showed up! He was at a jewelry store on Market Street.

AS we were leaving, the phone rang once more. This time it was from one of the agents canvassing the hotels. Manuel

Salinar had registered at the Palace Hotel two days before.

Instructing the agent to wait at the hotel, and leaving orders for another man to swear out a search-warrant for Salinar's room, the special agent and I then hastened to the jewelry store on Market Street.

Slipping unobserved into the proprietor's office, we learned that Salinar was still there. He was trying to negotiate the sale of four large diamond rings, six unusually beautiful pearls, and a double-handful of unset rubies and emeralds.

"Bring him in!" ordered the special agent.

Manuel Salinar was brought in. At sight of us, he showed surprise, but not the slightest concern.

The special agent introduced himself and showed his credentials.

"I understand you have quite a bit of jewelry for sale?" he asked.

"I have," snapped Salinar. "What of it?"

"Brought it in from Mexico, eh?"

"Certainly!"

"Why didn't you pay the Customs duty?"

"Customs duty!" Again Salinar showed surprise. "I do not understand."

The special agent laughed. "You're under arrest, Salinar," he said.

"Arrest! For what? For this—mere handful of baubles! You can not do it! I—"

"We've already done it! Come along!"

"But wait!" cried Salinar. "Let me tell you something! I am not a native of Mexico; I am an Armenian gentleman! You had better remember that! And I am very close to General Iturbe, of the Carranza forces. Very close! I shall cable the general about this at once!"

"You'd better wait until we get through searching your room," suggested the special agent. "Then you can tell him everything at once."

SALINAR fumed, but offered no further objection. As a precaution against any charge of planting evidence, the Customs agent had a representative of the hotel witness the searching of Salinar's room. Nothing was found.

Then something prompted the special agent to pick up an old suit of clothes that had been packed in the bottom of the trunk. The suit was probably worth not more than ten dollars; but, cleverly secreted in the seams, the lining, and other places, the agent found rings, bracelets, diadems, earrings, and a huge quantity of unset diamonds, pearls, rubies and emeralds —the whole appraised later at around a hundred thousand dollars!

"Mere handful of baubles, eh?" laughed the special agent. "What have you to say now, Salinar?"

"Nothing!" snapped the prisoner. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

At that, the special agent tried to get Salinar to talk, but after half an hour gave it up. Salinar and the jewels were taken to the Federal building. The jewelry was given into the custody of the United States Attorney, while Salinar was kept in the Marshal's office, where he communicated with a lawyer.

During the next two days Salinar held many consultations with his attorney, but he made practically no defense either at the Commissioner's hearing or before the grand jury. No one was surprised when he was formally indicted for violation of the Customs laws and the government started action to seize all his jewelry.

AT the trial, the whole story was told in detail. The government charged that Manuel Salinar had all that jewelry in his trunk when he declared under oath that he had "nothing dutiable." The special agent and his men overlooked nothing that would cinch their case.

Then Manuel Salinar's attorney put him on the stand.

"Mr. Salinar, how long have you lived in Mexico?" he asked.

"Fifteen years."

"Are you acquainted with General Iturbe, of the Carranza forces?"

"Very well!"

"And do you know Señora Iturbe, the wife of General Iturbe?"

"She is one of my dearest friends," replied Salinar fervently.

The attorney nodded. He pointed to the evidence table where, guarded by two armed deputy marshals, lay a heap of gems and jewelry.

"Mr. Salinar, I will ask you now if you recognize that?"

"Certainly!" Salinar replied. "Those are the jewels I brought in from Mazatlan, Mexico."

"Where did you get them?"

"They were given to me by my friend, the Señora Iturbe."

"Where did she get them?"

Salinar hesitated. He glanced at the heap of jewelry, looked up at his attorney, then turned to face the jury.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I cannot tell the whole story. Part of it I do not know. Part of it I cannot tell without betraying a confidence. But I can tell you this much—" Salinar turned and pointed dramatically to the heap of glittering gems. "There!" he cried in a ringing voice, "are the jewels stolen from the Madero family when Madero was murdered!"

A gasp went over the courtroom. The stolen Madero jewels! Every one remembered the brutal assassination of Francisco I. Madero. The Madero jewels, stolen by the murderers, had been diligently sought the world over.

WHEN the stir had subsided, Salinar's attorney asked:

"Who claims ownership of the jewels now?"

"They belong now to the Iturbe Orphanage," replied Salinar. "Parties whom I cannot name gave them to Señora Iturbe and she donated them to the Orphanage. You no doubt know that hundreds of children have been made homeless during the past four years of revolution. The orphanage is desperately in need of funds. I, myself, from my private fortune, have given over twelve thousand dollars. Thinking that those jewels would bring a higher price in America, the Señora sent them with me to be sold here."

"Didn't you understand that you couldn't bring those jewels into this country without paying the Customs duty?"

Salinar shook his head emphatically. "I did not know there was any such law. This is the first time I came to America by water. I had no idea of violating any law. If a duty must be paid on the jewels, I am ready to pay it and to apologize for my mistake."

"That's all," said Salinar's attorney.

Salinar started to leave the witness stand.

"Just a minute!" called out the Government's attorney. "Mr. Salinar, do you expect this jury to believe that story? If your intentions were honorable, why didn't you tell the Customs officers that you had those jewels the day you landed?"

"They didn't ask me," replied Salinar, smiling.

"But you swore you had nothing dutiable!"

"Certainly. I did not understand that jewelry was dutiable."

"And you hid that hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewelry and gems in that old suit in the bottom of your trunk so the Customs searchers couldn't find them, eh?"

"No," declared Salinar; "because I was afraid of thieves."

"Thieves! Tommyrot! Manuel Salinar, the thought of thieves never entered your head! You were thinking only of how you could cheat the United States government. Isn't that true?"

The Armenian gentleman sighed tragically.

"No, that is not true. I was thinking only of those poor, homeless orphans."

Whereupon the Government's attorney looked at the Customs agents, the Customs agents looked at the jury; then everybody looked at the prisoner—and the prisoner again heaved a deep sigh and got out his handkerchief.

AFTER considerable quibbling the case against Salinar was laid over for further investigation. That investigation, made through the Government's secret agents at Mazatlan, confirmed everything Salinar had said! Manuel Salinar was "an Armenian gentleman." There was a Señora Iturbe and she had founded an orphanage. In some way she had come into possession of part of the stolen Madero jewels and had entrusted them to Salinar to take to San Francisco to sell for the orphanage.

So Salinar got off with a trifling fine, the Government authorized the sale of the jewels, deducted the duty, and turned the proceeds over to Salinar, who left at once on the S. S. *Peru* for Mazatlan.

And now comes the part that to me is both tragic and humorous. Immediately on his arrival at Mazatlan, Salinar, through his influence with the Carranza forces, *had his private secretary arrested and hanged!*

"He is a traitor!" Salinar declared. "I had a wonderful scheme to beat the American government, but he tipped me off!"

Tragic—because the secretary was entirely innocent. The only tip the Customs agents got was from that San Francisco jeweler; humorous—because Salinar could weep at thought of those orphans, then turn around and hang the man he thought had tipped off his crooked scheme.

I've often wondered if the secretary's children were taken in at the Iturbe Orphanage!

'Gators Galore

Wherein an American alligator-hunter down in Panama finds the sport all too exciting.

By **Edwin Warren Guyol**

EIGHTEEN years ago the Isthmus of Panama was known to comparatively few persons. The Canal Zone, from Panama on the Pacific to Colon on the Caribbean, was then only a strip one mile wide and forty-seven miles long, inhabited by forty thousand Jamaica and Barbados negroes, five or six thousand Spaniards and white natives of various countries of Central and South America, with about ten thousand citizens of the United States in charge. The Canal Zone proper is twenty miles wide, but at the time with which I am dealing, few persons knew anything about any part of it except that strip that twisted along down its center, following the railroad from Panama to its crossing of the Chagres at Matachin, then the course of that infamous old stream until it wandered into the swamps west of Gatun, where we built the great dam.

Along that strip, sweating men, groaning machinery and detonating dynamite fought tropic floods, swarming insects, rock and dirt-slides, disease, careless powder-men, drunkenness and politics. Fifty feet away from that swarming line of march, at the very back doors of buildings housing families of these humans and almost-humans, grim old Dame Nature fiercely held her own, then and for years after the canal was actually completed and open to commerce. And it was grim! Stark, primeval wilderness, with nothing nice or pretty about it. Teeming with savage life, from all the insects in the world to the huge but gentle tapir. I shot a six-hundred-pound tapir within a hundred yards of a flood-signal station on the Chagres, and a black panther slowly stalked across the line of the old railway, within two hundred feet of where two of us stood and gawped—gunless. The forests and swamps were alive with wild hogs, turkey, deer, wildcats, cougars and jaguars, snakes, lizards ranging from chameleon size to the giant iguana, the black variety of which attains six or seven feet in length; singing lizards, that kept up an unearthly chant from dusk to dawn; huge tree-toads that barked like foxes all night long; black Congo monkeys that, in droves of from fifty to two hundred, would silently swing along through tree-tops, following you, unseen, for miles, then

suddenly break out with hideous boomings as they beat their chests and showered you with twigs and bits of bark.

Gatun Lake was created by construction of a huge dam of the same name, across the Chagres River. Before the dam was finished, it was necessary to remove forest growth from what was to become the lake bottom. Huge trees by the thousand were felled, their stumps afterward being blown up with dynamite. While this work was in progress, trees bordering the clearings were filled, every day, with monkeys—blacks, big reds and the tiny long-tailed Chiriqui *(Chee-ree-kee)*. Huddled together in family or tribal groups, they would earnestly watch every move of the destroying gangs of men, and when blasts would be shot, they would cover eyes and ears with their paws and moan with fright—or grief. And they stuck to their perches until the last possible moment, moving back only as the ax-gangs attacked.

Also there were alligators.

WHEN I speak of Panama alligators, I do not mean anything like the present-day half-tame Florida news-reel variety, nor those at the celebrated alligator-farm of Los Angeles. Nor are they comparable with those I hunted thirty-five years ago in Louisiana and Florida, when there were thousands to one nowadays, and far larger, naturally; all the old ones have been killed off long ago. Nor does the Panama 'gator yield superiority to his brother of the Atrato and Magdalena rivers in Colombia, South America, where I have seen miles of mud flats covered by literally thousands of giant saurians running up to twenty feet in length. These old fellows whose rest we disturbed down in Panama—and who did their best to welcome me to permanent stay "amongst their midst"—were the grand-daddies of all the rest. I *know* it, because I was up against them. And I have witnesses.

In 1909 Earl Harding and I, both of the New York *World*, were in Panama, on business for our paper. An American friend, General Herbert Ottley Jeffries, who had lived in Central America for years, owned a trifling few hundred thousand acres of virgin forest to the east and south of the Canal Zone, on the Pacific side. This is partly traversed by the Bayano, a splendid river that debouches about thirty or forty miles from the ancient, delightful city of Panama. The Bayano is a tidal stream, influenced for at least twenty miles up from its mouth by the tremendous tides of the Pacific—which average twenty-two feet rise and fall at this point. About ten miles from its mouth, the Bayano is joined by a stream called Lagarto (Alligator) Creek. Jeffries suggested an alligator hunt, promising us something entirely different from anything anyone else had ever experienced. We accepted. He made good!

IN a launch from Panama, to the Bayano and up to the mouth of Lagarto. Then up the creek in big dugout canoes, thirty or forty feet long. I was amidships in one, paddled by two Indians, followed by the other containing Harding, Jeffries and their paddlers. Slowly, silently, snakily, we slipped around a turn about a mile from the creek's mouth, and there came on a sight that threw me straight backward a few centuries, among dinosaurs and so forth. My paddlers held the canoe steady to let me gaze, and this is what I saw: Left bare by the receding tide, one bank of the creek was a great mole of mud, fully fifteen feet high, five hundred long and two hundred wide, bare of all vegetation, sloping down to the water on the creek side, and down about five feet to the bordering trees on the forest side. And covered, from end to end, edge to edge, by at least one hundred and fifty of the biggest alligators in the world! Huge, barnacled gray monsters, not one of them less than fifteen feet long, most of them between twenty and thirty. Sound asleep in the sun, the nearest not more than a hundred feet from me. For five minutes we stared; then, at a signal from Jeffries, three rifles cracked—and bedlam broke loose!

But it was practically entirely confined to the noise of our guns, as far as noise was concerned. The bull alligator bellows when mating or challenging to fight, but I have never heard a noise emanate from them otherwise, excepting a loud hissing and deep, rumbling grunt. Nevertheless these beasts before us made plenty of commotion as they reared and clumsily rushed, slid and scrambled to get into the water with mighty splashings and lashings of tails, then suddenly to sink silently out of sight. Seven big fellows lay on the mud, after we stopped shooting. Several were thrashing about, dying; others still and dead. But right at the top of the bank one huge bull crawled slowly upward, badly wounded, evidently trying to get to the

forest away from the creek. As I could not shoot to advantage from my angle in the boat, I jumped ashore, onto a log, dropping my rifle in the canoe, carrying only my Russian model revolver. I was barefooted. From the log, without one moment of calculation, I jumped as far up the bank as possible—and instantly sank to my thighs in mud. Sweet pickle!

Not more than ten feet away the giant bull slowly turned his head, looked me over carefully, then dragged his full length about and deliberately started crawling toward me, opening his enormous mouth to its full wide limit, hissing and grunting, emitting a horrible stench of musk and carrion, his great yellow eyes fixed on me in unblinking malevolence. I planted a .45 bullet in his brain, through the roof of his mouth, and he stopped stone-dead and still, with the tip of his snout about five feet from me. Filled with sudden pride and satisfaction, I turned my head to look at Harding and Jeffries—couldn't move my body, as I was now stuck waist-deep in the mud—to be met by looks of horror on the faces of both men as they pointed beyond me and yelled:

"Drop, you damn' fool! For the love of God, *lie down!*"

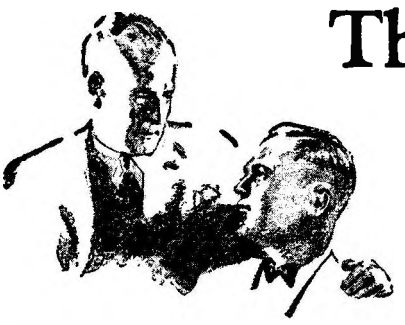
I DO not like to lie down, especially face first, in reeking, oozy mud. But when I looked back to what the men were now aiming their rifles at, I tried to do that very thing. At any rate, I leaned forward until my nose almost touched the mud—and "held it"! For two good, large reasons—both alligators. Hidden from our sight behind the ridge of their mud-bank, these two monsters had finally decided to get to the water, and as I saw them they both lurched forward, got their forefeet down the slope toward me, opened their hideous mouths and lifted their bodies high as possible, preparing to launch themselves with their full gigantic strength down that slope. Harding and Jeffries fired simultaneously. One beast stopped perfectly still, as if hit by lightning. But the other did not. Mortally wounded, he then brought me closer to a horrible death than was pleasant.

When hit, the alligator instinctively tried to complete his rush to the water, but his momentum only lifted him over the ridge and onto the down slope, in the mud of which I was held fast, directly in his path. Unconscious, blinded, he made no effort to attack me, but his struggles to reach the water brought him steadily nearer—although he was now headed away from me—and my danger was rapidly increased by the furious, steady thrashing of his powerful eight-foot tail, which swept ceaselessly from side to side with the speed and force of a Titanic scythe, while my two companions pumped bullets into his body as fast as they could pull trigger.

I resigned myself to getting pretty badly hurt, anyway, but decided that my best bet was to meet that tail halfway, when I saw that it could not miss me again, and hang on to it until it quit moving, or one of the men could get to me. When I had figured that I would tackle it on the third coming swing, the darned alligator curled his infernal tail forward and up over his back, just as a scorpion does, and brought it down with a terrific smash across the mud, covering me entirely with the filthy slime, filling eyes, ears, nose and mouth—I suppose I had my mouth open to yell—and then lay still, the tip of that terrible weapon resting inert some ten inches from my nose!

Hearing an odd noise as I mopped and scraped my eyes, I looked at Harding and Jeffries. Those two blithering idiots were leaning on each other and their rifles, standing up in the canoe, and *laughing!*

No, their canoe did not turn over with them. Perhaps it should have!



The Secret of Getting Ahead

The quickest way to bigger pay as proved by thousands every year...

WHAT are you doing to prove to your employer that he should increase your salary? It's not enough, you know, just to be faithful, hard working, a plugger. If you are, that's a help. But what he is *primarily* interested in, so far as his business is concerned, is—greater profits.

And the man who can help him *make* those greater profits is going to win promotion and win it fast.

How, then, can you do all this—in a way that will quickly mean an increased pay-check? Let's examine a few cases—out of the many that could be cited.

Increases Sales—Increases Salary

J. L. Aldrich was an order clerk. His home-study training with LaSalle—in Business Management—prompted him to take up selling. He knew that in the selling field he had real opportunity to build greater profits for his employer.

Joining the sales force of the Monroe Calculating Machine Co., Inc., he became one of their most consistent producers; his sales steadily increasing, until within two years he was made manager of the Fargo, N. Dak., district, with an increase in earnings of 153¾ per cent.

Changes Losses Into Profits

It took years for Ernest W. Neir to come up through the ranks in hotel work by the "experience route." Then he took up home-study training with LaSalle—in Higher Accountancy. His immediate task was to put the Hotel Rowe, one of the finest hotels in Grand Rapids, on a paying basis. With the aid of his training, Mr. Neir changed losses into profits—and increased his salary more than 100 per cent.

A Big Saving — and a Bigger "Raise" Than He Expected

H. S. Leavy, of Kingston, Pa., saw his chance in Traffic Management. He enrolled with LaSalle for home-study training, and during the first year saved his firm $40,000—simply by changing its method of packing for shipment, thereby obtaining a different freight classification and a more favorable rate.

"This saving," he writes, "procured for me the title of Traffic Manager and a salary above my expectations. Since starting my training with LaSalle my compensation has increased about 300 per cent."

Boosts Production 59 Per Cent

J. R. Hollingsworth was in charge of a shift of men in one of the big factories in Akron. To further his advancement, he pursued home-study training in Industrial Management. Read this paragraph from a letter to LaSalle:

> "With the aid of my assistants and the wholehearted support of the men, I have brought the shift from the most inefficient to one of the most efficient, with an increase in production of 59 per cent. When I started, my men were disgusted—almost ready to quit; their earnings averaged 68c an hour; they average 98c now. Haven't had to fire a man. Have made 27 suggestions so far, showing savings from $20 to $75 daily."

How can any man who pursues such methods—training in his spare hours for increased knowledge and ability to help cut expenses or get more business and profits for his employer—fail to win sure and swift advancement?

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Stop *IN 10 MINUTES —or costs you nothing*

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Pain stops like magic. Stand, run or dance with delight—wear stylish shoes comfortably. The secret is in the tension and stretch of the band. Nothing stiff to further weaken and cause discomfort. Nothing to misshape shoe.

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Test it 10 days, if not amazed and delighted your money returned. Go to druggist, shoe store or chiropodist. If they can't supply you use coupon below and pay postman. **Write for free book on foot troubles.**

1 *Trouble starts in weakened muscles. Tiny bones of forward arch are displaced. Pain follows.*

2 *A super-elastic band assists and strengthens weakened muscles, replaces bones. Pain stops instantly.*

3 *You walk, stand and dance with ease. Wear stylish shoes with comfort. Feet are permanently well.*

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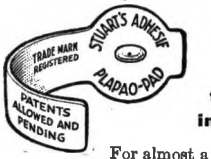

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The BLUE BOOK

Magazine for June

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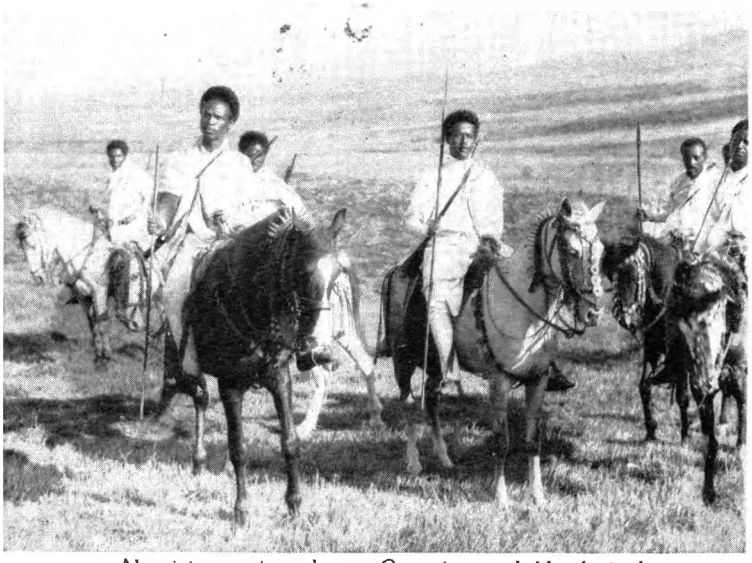
"SPEARS IN THE SUN"

A captivating novel of adventure in Abyssinia, the Forbidden Land of Africa.

By *JAMES EDWIN BAUM*

The historian and hunter of the Field Museum expedition has here written one of the most engrossing adventure stories you have ever read—a story, moreover, that by reason of its extraordinary and wholly authentic background, is unique..... Better order your copy of the June issue *now*.



Abyssinian warriors: they are Caucasians, probably of mixed Semitic and Hamitic blood.

Typical Abyssinian fighting man: they trace their descent from the Queen of Sheba, and have been Christians for over a thousand years.

LENORE ULRIC

"I always choose the Lucky Strike"

Lenore Ulric

"It's toasted"

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