

DECEMBER
MAGAZINE

Five Novels

20¢

MAY

Monthly

RIDE 'EM TO GLORY!

A Great Rodeo Romance

By L. P. Holmes

5

NOVELS for
MAY

CONGO DRUMS

Adventure in Africa

By J. Murray Reynolds

MAGNIFICENT PETER

A Racing Classic

By Charles B. Parmer

DISASTER MANS THE SHIP

A Stirring Sea Novel

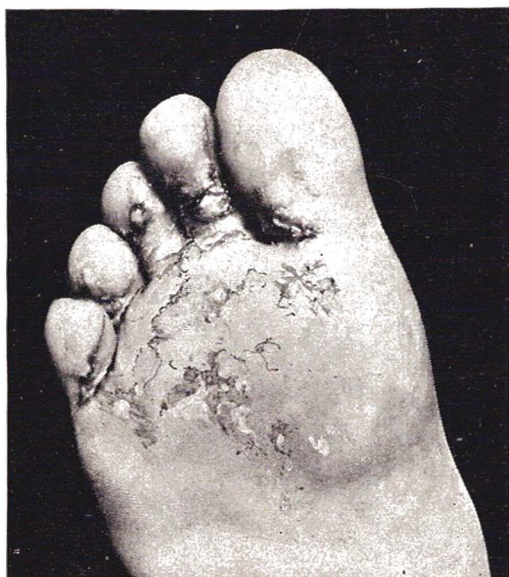
By David Allan Ross

SO MURDER TALKS POLITICS!

And Someone Pays the Piper

By Emile C. Tebberman





FOOT ITCH

ATHLETE'S FOOT

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According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28, at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form, and the skin cracks and peels. After a while, the itching becomes intense, and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

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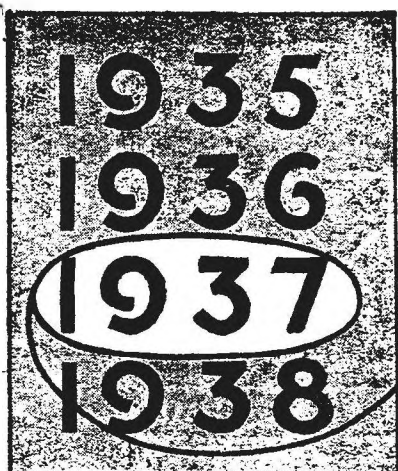
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Five Novels Monthly

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MAY, 1937

NUMBER 2

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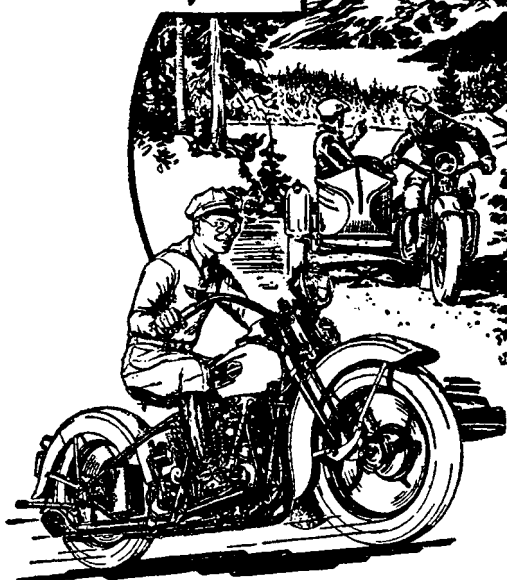
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Ride 'em

by
**L.P.
HOLMES**

Out of a long-standing feud comes a great rodeo battle, as the Ballards and the Dixons top the mean ones for first money and riding fame



"First Money to a Dixon—"

THE voice of the announcer carried across the arena. "Watch the chute, ladies and gentlemen—watch the chute! Chick Ballard coming out on Ten Spot. Watch the chute!"

Perched on the top rail of the rodeo corral, Lee Ballard relit the cigarette which had gone dead and squinted his gray eyes into the slanting sunlight as his kid brother, atop a squealing chestnut equine bombshell, came rocketing into the open.

Lee gripped the rail with both brown hands to hide the tremble of them. Funny how he always went a little spooky when the kid came out on a tough one! If he himself was out there on Ten Spot, it wouldn't have worried him a bit. He'd have been icy calm and sure of himself. But with the kid riding, it was different.

Not that Chick couldn't ride. He could—plenty. But any time a man topped a real wild one, the hazard of danger was strong. And things could happen to the best of them. Take Riley Hagan, for instance—one of the best who ever pinched sinewy knees under the bucking rolls. Riley traveled with a crutch now, his right leg withered and useless. When eleven hundred pounds of maddened, fighting, outlaw horse-flesh crashed into a stout rodeo arena fence, something had to give. Riley Hagan's right leg, which had been between the horse and the fence, had had to take it. Yeah—there was always danger staring at a man up there on a tough one.

"Chick's doing a job of it, Lee," came a drawing voice. "He sure looks good!"

It was Riley Hagan himself. He was leaning against the fence, his crutch clamped in his right arm-pit.

to Glory



Lee darted in front of the screaming, pawing horse 'hrew his hat in the brute's face, then grabbed Tommy

"Yeah," Lee muttered, "but I'll be glad when it's over!"

Chick was putting on a ride, all right. He was sitting his saddle free and straight up, scratching Ten Spot in the most approved fashion and fanning the bronc's ears with his hat. Chic's yellow hair glinted in the sun and the shrill, yelping cadence of his voice cut through the roar of the crowd.

"He's laying it on, the reckless cub!" growled Lee. "There's no need to scratch a bronc that high. Lucky he's up on old Ten Spot. I've seen broncs that would have had his shirt dusty by this time."

"Chick's riding to win," said Riley. "He knows that topping Ten Spot don't rate with a clean ride on Firefly, which is what Bo Dixon showed the judges."

Lee didn't answer, for at that moment the thin crack of the timer's gun sounded and the pick-up riders closed in.

LEE swung around and dropped down by Riley. A grin twisted his lips. "That's over," he drawled. "Once more I can breath natural again!"

Riley built a cigarette. "You're a queer one, Lee. If you had to go up and kiss a grizzly bear you wouldn't blink an eyelash. Yet if Chick was going to have it out with a blind, spavined ole jack-rabbit, you'd go green with worry!"

"I know," said Lee. "I'm scary as hell where Chick is concerned—just can't help it. I'm chicken-livered in some ways."

Riley snorted. "Yeah—like a lion is!"

Chick was walking toward them now, waving his hat to the cheering crowd. Lee knew more than one feminine heart in the crowd was beating fast, because Chick sure was good to look at—a lean, yellow-haired, handsome kid, full of reckless laughter.

He grinned across the fence at Lee. "Well, old deacon, here I am, safe and sound. Now you can enjoy your grub again."

"There was no call for you to scratch Ten Spot so high," Lee grumbled. "If you'd tried that on a bronc like Blue Moon or Firefly, you'd have been piled higher than a blackbird's nest."

Chick vaulted the fence and reached for the tab of Lee's tobacco sack, tugged it from the vest pocket and began to build a smoke. His face had turned sober.

"I was up on poor old Ten Spot and knew what I could do," he said. "I was trying to kid the judges, but I reckon you can't fool those hard-headed old pelicans. All I'll get is second money. That ride Bo Dixon turned in on Firefly will win first. Damn those Dixons anyhow—seems like they're always besting us, Lee!"

"Forget 'em," said Lee. "After all, second money ain't to be sneezed at. Me, I'm satisfied. Now we can get back to the sensible business of raising cows."

"Did you see Waters?"

"Yeah."

"What did he say?"

"Wasn't what you'd call enthusiastic. Said he'd think the matter over."

"That sharp-nosed old money-grabber! He's skinned every buffalo on every nickel he ever owned!"

"Take it easy, kid," said Lee. "You'll be insulting Riley in a minute. Waters is Riley's boss."

Riley's eyes narrowed to a queer, shadowed bitterness. "Call him anything you want, Chick, you can't hurt *my* feelings."

Lee looked at him keenly. "Meaning what?"

THE crowd about the arena was breaking up. Chick's ride had been the last event of the day. Groups of spectators headed for town. Over in back of the chutes cowboys were taking care of the bucking stock, shunting them into the big cavy corral beyond. Riders jingled by. A big, dark-featured man on a magnificent palomino horse, reined over and stopped beside Lee and Chick and Riley. It was Slade Dixon, Bo's brother. There was a mocking glint in his black eyes, and his hard, thin-lipped mouth held a sneer.

"You'd have been tops today, Chick," he said, "if it hadn't been for Bo. Looks like it would pay you to ride in rodeos where Bo ain't entered."

At the mocking insult in the tone and

words, Chick began to flame. Lee gripped his arm.

"Easy, kid," he cautioned. "He's just trying to spur you. Let him brag. That is typical Dixon stuff, anyhow. If you had drawn Firefly instead of Ten Spot, you'd have taken first money."

"That's right," nodded Riley Hagan. "It takes a real hand to make a good-looking ride on a worn-out buckner, and that is what you did, Chick."

Slade Dixon's black eyes shifted to Riley. "I hear you lost your job, Hagan," he sneered. "You must be just like Ten Spot—worn out."

Riley's lean, sensitive face burned and the bitterness in his eyes deepened. He didn't reply. Lee Ballard turned swiftly to him.

"That correct, Riley?" he asked. "Did Waters—?"

"Yeah," broke in Slade glibly. "He did. Waters tied the can to Hagan yesterday."

Lee Ballard's gray eyes ran up and down Slade Dixon and turned to a liquid ice. "That fits, Dixon," he said, his voice dangerously soft. "Yeah—that fits. You and that fat-headed brother of yours are a pair—a pair of skunks. Just half-breed skunks!"

Slade Dixon jerked almost as though someone had struck him. A twisted snarl whipped over his face, his black eyes seeming to shade to a feral red. His hand slid toward the gun at his hip. "That's fighting talk, Ballard," he rasped.

"I meant it to be," Lee purred. "I sure meant it to be! Get off that bronc and see how much I meant it!"

But Slade Dixon did not get off the palomino, nor did he move any closer to a draw. His eyes flickered and moved away. "You Ballards always lose, don't you?" he taunted. "You never beat a Dixon at anything yet—and you never will. Don't get impatient—you'll get all the fight you want, one of these days."

And then, before Lee could answer, Slade dug in the spurs and the palomino lunged away. Lee stood staring after him. Chick was almost weeping with rage. "damned, arrogant coyote!" Chick blurted

"That Dixon swagger drives me loco. The hell of it is he's right, Lee! As far back as I can remember, the Ballards have never licked the Dixons at anything. Always the same story—just like today. First money to a Dixon, second to a Ballard!"

"I never saw a trail yet that didn't have a turn somewhere," Lee growled. "This one won't be any different. Our turn will come, Chick. Just forget 'em." He turned and laid a hand on Riley Hagan's shoulder. "You're working for the Tumbling B now, cowboy."

Riley shook his head. "Nothing doing, Lee. I don't want charity, and that's what a job for me amounts to. I'm no good on a cattle ranch—with this." He shifted his crutch slightly. "The wonder is that Waters did not can me long ago. I'll find something to do around town. Wait on bar, or something."

"You're riding for the Tumbling B," said Lee gruffly, "and no argument about it! Cattle and the open range is in your blood, Riley. You were never cut out to stand behind a bar. There'll be plenty for you to do to earn your wages. So it's all settled. We might as well drift over to town. Me, I'm feeling the need of grub. Let's go!"

They walked slowly across the flats to town.

MESA CITY, normally a single-streeted, sleepy little cow-town, was roaring with life this sunset. Twice a year the town knew these excited, moiling crowds, for twice a year Mesa City held its rodeos; every spring and every fall.

The fame of the events had traveled far. From a radius of fifty miles people gathered. Riders from the Silver River range, way up north. Lean, sun-blackened men from the country to the south, the sage and mesquite range. And broad-faced, beady-eyed Shoshone Indians from the reservation over on Battle Creek. Lone riders—riders in groups of twos and fours and half dozens; ranchers in buckboards, with their womenfolk and excited youngsters.

For three days those rodeos held sway

—roping, bulldogging, bronc-twisting—three days of dashing color, roaring action, flaunting danger—with thrills and spills, good rides and bad, winners and losers. And then, on the third night, the grand finale—the dance in the Odd-Fellow's hall, when the winners would be announced and the prizes distributed, where old friendships would be renewed and new ones made—and enmities and hatred and envy would simmer and boil beneath the surface of gaiety. Normally a mild, sleepy lamb, this final night Mesa City would be a roaring lion.

The moment they turned into the street, Lee and Chick and Riley Hagan were caught up and whirled along with the crowd. Friends greeted them, here and there, complimenting Chick on his final ride, commiserating with him on the fact that he had drawn a second-rate buckner instead of a horse which would have enabled him to show his full ability as a twister. It was apparent that all realized that Bo Dixon would win first money and, though the remarks were kindly meant, both Lee and Chick knew a galling bitterness. First money to a Dixon—second to a Ballard—!

Sounded an excited cry and a flurry of dark-haired femininity descended upon them. Slim arms went around Chick's neck and warm lips planted a resounding kiss. "That for a swell ride, Chickie m'lad!" said the slim, laughing-eyed girl.

Chick colored hotly at the guffaw of the crowd. "You wild little devil!" he said. "You ought to be licked. Ain't you got no sense of shame?"

Her laugh rang clear as she wedged herself between Chick and Lee and locked arms with them. She turned to Lee. "Look at the lad blush, Lee!" she grinned. "Why, there are men in this town who would commit murder for a kiss like that!"

Lee laughed. "I can believe that, Skeet. Maybe when Chick grows up, he'll feel the same. Us three are heading for the nose-bag. Want to come along?"

"Do I! Boy!"

They found a table in Joe Lingle's Happy Chance. Lee and Riley Hagan took

one side, Chick and the girl the other. Chick had recovered from his embarrassment now and was drawling nonsense for his partner's benefit. Lee knew a certain warm content as he watched the two of them. They made a mighty good-looking pair, those two did. Dora Henshaw, affectionately known as Skeet by her friends, was a mighty pretty girl, with her dark hair, her vivid blue eyes, her rich coloring and the quick gleam of her white teeth when she laughed. And there was such a striking contrast between her dark head and Chick's yellow one. You bet they were sure good to look at, those two!

There was the bustle of movement at the door, and when Lee looked up he went suddenly grave. Three people had just come in, were looking around for a table. Bo Dixon was one. The second was grizzled, high-headed old Dave Ashley, richest and most powerful cattleman on the mesa range. The third was Barbara Ashley, old Dave's daughter.

Lee had always thought that there was something stirring about Barbara Ashley. Maybe it was that proud poise of her auburn head, the tilt of her chin, her smooth, graceful, swaying stride—

Riley Hagan touched Lee's arm. "Leave it to Dave Ashley to string with a winner!" he murmured. "Me—if I owned a daughter like Barb, I'd see to it that she never had anything to do with a jasper like Bo Dixon."

"Bo is better than Slade," said Lee.

"Which still is saying damned little!" Riley said.

Barbara Ashley's eyes had been sweeping over the room and now they met with Lee's steady regard. For a second Lee thought she wasn't going to speak. Then the color burned up in her cheeks and she nodded, with just the faintest hint of a smile. Then Bo Dixon, tall and powerful and swarthy dark like his brother, though lacking some of the flinty hardness of features, took her arm and led her toward the other end of the room.

Again a wave of galling bitterness swept over Lee Ballard. First money to a Dixon—second to a Ballard. . .

On the Cutting Edge of Things

LEE held open the door of the Happy Chance for Skeet. "You and Chick run along to the jig," he said. "Riley and I will be along later."

"All right," said Skeet. "But don't you run out on us, cowboy. Remember, I've promised a dance to you."

"Beat it," grinned Lee. "I'll be there."

Skeet and Chick went off, while Lee and Riley drifted along with the crowd. In front of the Gilt Edge they met Matt Henshaw, Skeet's father. "I'm looking for that young pepper-box of mine," said Matt. "See her around anywhere, Lee?"

"She just ate supper with Chick and Riley and me," said Lee. "Now she and Chick are at the jig."

Old Matt grinned. "Thank the Lord! She had me worried. There are some hard cases in town tonight. If you've just grubbed, you boys won't be wanting a drink. But I'll buy the cigars. Come on."

They pushed through the swinging doors of the Gilt Edge, into a welter of jostling humanity. Bib Stovall had three bartenders behind the mahogany and was wearing an apron himself. They found a vacant place at the bar, lit their cigars and looked around.

The first pair of eyes Lee met belonged to Slade Dixon. Slade stood a few paces up the bar, and it seemed to Lee that in Slade's look was that same red, banked fire they had had that afternoon. At Slade's side stood a big, gorilla-armed rider with badly bowed legs. The fellow, a stranger to Lee, carried two guns, low hung.

"Looks like Slade is going in for tough friends," murmured Riley. "Who is that pug-ugly with him, anyhow? Do you know, Matt?"

"Stranger to me," answered Matt. "By the way, Lee—I understand that old man Waters isn't going to renew those notes of yours."

Lee rolled his cigar carefully in his fingers, stared at the glowing tip of it. "Waters didn't tell me that," he said slowly. "He said he'd think the matter over. Where did you get that angle, Matt?"

"Slim English told me. Anyhow, the reason I mentioned it is this. If Waters does turn you down, Lee, just remember I've got a few pesos put away. Yours for the asking."

"That's mighty white of you, Matt. I may have to take you up on it. I can't meet those notes now. A year from now—maybe even by this fall—I could handle them. But not now."

"If you get stuck, Lee, you come," rumbled Matt. "Your Dad did the same thing for me one time."

Lee's brow was wrinkled in thought. "Let's be moving," he suggested. "I want to have a talk with Slim English."

As they started for the door someone jostled Lee violently. "What's the matter with you, you clumsy fool?" growled a heavy voice. "Drunk, or just plain blind? Look where you're going!"

Lee turned, facing the two-gun stranger who had been with Slade Dixon. And Lee immediately understood, for just past the gunfighter's shoulder he could see Slade Dixon, a mocking sneer on his swarthy face.

"Did you say you wanted trouble, Ballard?" jeered Dixon. "Well, it's looking you right in the eye."

Normally cool, conservative, Lee saw red. Maybe it was that oft recurring thought of first money to a Dixon, second to a Ballard. Maybe it was the memory of Barbara Ashley with Bo or perhaps it was the effect of what Matt had just told him about his notes. At any rate, Lee laughed, and there was a note in that laugh which Riley Hagan, who had known Lee many years, had never heard in it before.

"Trouble, you say?" Lee snapped. "Well, here it is—right on the dime!"

And Lee hit the gunfighter, hit him with a fierce surge of power that snapped the gunfighter's head back and dropped him with a crash. Right over the fallen man Lee went, to tip Slade Dixon's head back with a looping left and then literally pulp the swarthy features with smashing blows. Slade went down. Lee, crouched and quivering, stood over him.

"Trouble has sure caught up with you

Dixon," Lee gritted. "Get up and take it, you half-breed whelp!"

"Lee!" yelled Riley Hagan. "Lee—!"

Lee whirled, just as a gun roared. His hat lifted slightly, then settled back on his head. Something seemed to have laid a line of fire against Lee's scalp. Up on one knee was the gunfighter, cursing. Smoke was rising from the muzzle of the gun he held, and as he lifted it to throw down for a second shot, Riley Hagan made a pass at it with his crutch. But Riley missed, and Lee did the only thing he could do. He drew and shot, all in one blinding movement.

The flame from Lee's gun seemed to reach halfway to the gunfighter. The fellow's head jerked queerly, and he collapsed.

A HALF hour later Lee sat in the office of Sheriff Buck Sanderson. Others were there: Riley Hagan, Chick, Matt Henshaw, Bo and Slade Dixon. Buck Sanderson was talking to Slade.

"No, I'm not arresting Lee. Matt saw and heard the whole thing. So did Riley, so did Bib Stovall, and a dozen others. They all tell the same story. You and that pug-ugly stranger went out of your way to start trouble. What you got was coming to you. You got a smashed face, and the gunfighter ran his luck into the ground.

"The dead man took the first shot at Lee—tried to shoot him in the back. He'd have gotten away with it, too, if Riley hadn't jabbed the gun with his crutch. He was pulling down for another shot when Lee beat him to it. No—there'll be no arresting done. But I am putting out a warning to you, Slade. Don't hunt trouble, and it won't bother you. That's all. Bo, you and Chick better be getting back to the jig. They'll be announcing prize winners pretty quick."

The Dixons went out together, their eyes bleak, their faces hard. Lee got up and put out his hand. "Thanks, Buck," he said. "You're square. Believe me, I feel plenty bad about all this."

"I know, Lee," said the sheriff. "You're no killer. But tonight you had no other

out. Forget it. Go to the jig and have a little fun."

Lee, Chick, Riley and Matt went into the Odd-Fellow's Hall together. Fiddles were singing, guitars strumming. Gliding dancers made a continually shifting scene of life and color. Skeet came dashing up, eluded both Chick and her father and gripped Lee by both arms. Her face was sober as she looked up at him.

"I heard," she said. "Don't let it hurt you too much, cowboy."

Lee smiled, though the smile was a little twisted. "Kenol" he said. "Come on—dance."

They moved smoothly out into the crowd.

"I see Barb Ashley dancing with Bo Dixon, and I don't understand it," Skeet said.

Lee didn't answer, but he might have echoed Skeet's words, for he did not understand it either.

The dance over, Lee worked his way over to Slim English and led him aside.

"Who told you that old man Waters wouldn't renew my notes, Slim?" he said.

Slim looked startled, but answered honestly. "Slade Dixon. He didn't tell it to me direct. There was a bunch of us out by the chutes this afternoon, and Slade mentioned it, kinda off-hand.

"I see," said Lee. "Thanks, Slim."

Lee moved outside the circle of the dancers and stood alone awhile. His eyes, shadowed and thoughtful, saw nothing of what went on. He was wondering how Slade Dixon had known anything about the renewal of those notes—wondering why he had gone to the trouble to get a more definite decision from Waters than Lee himself had been able to. It was plenty queer.

As a dance had ended, the change from music to a chatter of voices and laughter jerked Lee out of his thoughtful isolation. He looked around, stood very still. There, right beside him, was Barb Ashley. For the moment she was alone. Swift impulse swept over Lee.

"I wonder if you'd dance with me, Barb," he said.

She seemed startled, and stammered slightly. "I—I'm sorry, but the next dance—is promised."

Lee could see Bo Dixon pushing his way toward them, and a biting, cold anger gripped him. As the music began, Lee slid his arm about the startled girl.

"It's time you danced with somebody besides a half-breed," he gritted, and swung her out onto the floor. He could feel her tauten against his arm, knew that she was angry. Recklessness ran through his blood. He drew her close, laughed down into her blazing eyes.

"This time it's going to be first money to a Ballard," he said. "Better be good. If you fight me, I'll get rough."

She stared stonily at his shoulder. "There is nothing I can do," she said icily. "No one dares resist a—a killer."

Lee went cold all over, the momentary exultation dying out. There was no triumph in this—nothing but dregs of bitterness.

"I'm sorry, Barb," he said, his voice emotionless. "I thought you were bigger than that. I'm sorry, because to me you've always been a sort of star. This leaves me in a kind of blackness. Yeah, I'm mighty sorry. Good night."

His arm fell away and he left her standing there, staring after him as he pushed through the crowd and left the hall. Her lips moved. "A star!" she murmured. "To Lee Ballard—?"

Bo Dixon was beside her. "That jasper's manners are something less than

nothing," he growled. "He stole my dance and then left you standing here—with everybody looking on!"

She pushed his arm away. "I'm not dancing any more tonight, Bo," she said. "Take me to Dad."

OLD Zeb Waters, Mesa City banker, was not in the best of humor. He was about ready to turn in for the night when Lee's knock brought him to the door.

"What do you want, Ballard?" demanded Waters crossly.

"About those notes, Mr. Waters. I'm wondering—"

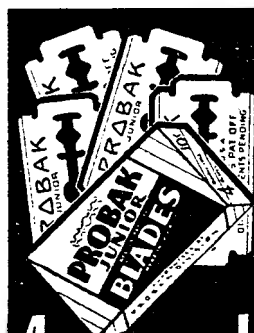
"I do all my business in the bank," snapped Waters. "I told you I'd think the matter over."

"Is that what you told Slade Dixon?"

The banker's chin dropped, his eyes wavered. "I don't—say, what are you driving at?" he sputtered.

"I think you know," said Lee. "Frankly, I don't know why Slade Dixon should be interested in my business—nor why you should tell him anything about it. Mr. Waters, Slade's telling folks that you don't intend to renew those notes. I hope he's lying. Is he?"

From long experience Zeb Waters had developed a technique calculated to bewilder and dismay and impress his clients. He tried to muster this manner now, but could not do it, for those gray eyes boring at him were too cold, too searching. So the banker, close to stampede himself, got mad.



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"I told you I'd think the matter over," he shrilled. "I have. I'm not renewing your notes, Ballard. I'm going to demand full payment as they fall due."

"So you did tell Slade Dixon!" gritted Lee. "Why you told him, I don't know. I do know this: Anybody who concocts private schemes with the Dixons is crooked. It will be tough—at your age—to be found out, Mr. Waters. *Adios.*"

Lee stalked back up the street, wondering why it was that, when trouble once hit a man, it came so thick and fast. Just about everything that could go wrong had gone wrong this day. He was glad it was about over with.

From the Odd-Fellow's Hall came a burst of sound—cheering and applause. That meant the prize winners of the rodeo were being announced, the prizes given. Here was one cause for relief. As soon as that was done with, he'd collect Chick and Riley Hagan and head for home. It would be good to get back to the ranch—away from the crowds, the turmoil, the trouble. Of a sudden Lee realized that he was weary.

He waited outside the hall until the music started again. Then he went in and met Riley Hagan. "Get hold of Chick, Riley," he said. "It's time we hit for the ranch."

While waiting, Lee saw Matt Henshaw. "I just had another talk with Zeb Waters," he said. "He's turning me down. I've got fifteen days left, Matt. If something doesn't break in that time, I'll be over to see you."

"You do that, Lee," said Matt heartily. "We'll fool the old skin-flint!"

Lead—for a Ballard

BLUE MESA proper was controlled by five ranches. The northern third was taken in by Dave Ashley's Diamond A and Matt Henshaw's Jinglebob, the Diamond A running east, the Jinglebob, west. The southern two-thirds comprised the Bridle-bit—run by Luke Mearns, but owned by Zeb Waters—by the Tumbling B, which was the Ballard spread, and by

the Dixon range. The Dixons ran an iron called the Circle Cross. Of these lower three, the Bridle-bit was west, nearest Mesa City, the Tumbling B next to it, and the eastern portion going to the Circle Cross.

With virtually no topographical barriers anywhere on the mesa, range limits meant little. Cattle from all five ranches ranged far and intermingled. Spring and fall round-ups were cooperative affairs, and calf branding was a mutual affair of honor. The round-ups always preceded the semi-annual rodeos, the rodeos in fact having been originally scheduled as periods of celebration and relaxation after toil.

Things were fairly quiet at the Tumbling B. The last rodeo was now two weeks past. Despite his withered leg, Riley Hagan could still sit a saddle, and he and old Boley Oakes took over the prosaic task of riding range, keeping an eye open for bogged cattle, for coyotes and other pests. Chick kept busy with his first love—horses—taking the kinks out of a few wild ones for the cavvy herd. Lee put in a lot of time worrying about those notes.

He didn't like the idea of having to go to Matt Henshaw, but he knew he would go, rather than see the Tumbling B slip away from him and Chick, into the greedy hands of Zeb Waters. Now, with only a week of grace left, he determined to have another talk with Waters before going to Henshaw.

When he and Chick had a cold snack together, Chick said he'd ride into town also.

"I'm going to try and get in touch with Johnny Frayne," Chick said. "You remember him, Lee—that red-headed kid who won the bulldogging last time. He's from up Silver River country somewhere. He was telling me about an outlaw bronc he knew of up there. Said it was the wickedest brute he'd ever seen in action, and he thought I could get the bronc pretty cheap. I'd like to bring a buckner like that in for the fall rodeo—a bronc Bo Dixon couldn't stick. Me—if I could just see Bo with his shirt all arena dust just once—say, I believe I'd go on a binge. One thing is

certain: if the announcement after the fall rodeo is still first money to a Dixon, second to a Ballard, I'll sure leave the country."

Lee said grimly, "If we didn't have anything more to worry about than that, we'd be lucky."

They were in the saddle, ready to ride,

This could only be satisfactorily settled by a physical showdown, the fierce joy of feeling his fists smashing into Bo Dixon's face.



when Riley Hagan and Boley Oakes came spurting across the creek and up to the corrals, their faces pretty grim.

Chick grinned at them. "You jaspers look like you'd seen something!" he said.

"We did," Riley rasped. "Just look at this!"

"THIS" was a saddle-horn with the rawhide bindings so badly gashed and torn as to expose the steel core. "A rifle slug did that," said Riley.

"How come?" snapped Lee.

"It happened over by Mosquito Creek," said Riley slowly. "There was a little bummer, not ten days old, following one of our cows, and that bummer was packing a fresh-burned brand—a Circle Cross—a running iron brand. That poor little devil of a calf had been branded right at the start. It was sick and lame, and spindly from the shock."

"You sure it wasn't an orphan, that had picked up with our cow?" asked Lee.

"The cow was full of milk and the bummer was feeding when Boley and I came up with it. And the bummer was a dead ringer in markings with the cow."

"I see. How about that saddle-horn?"

"I roped the calf and Boley got off to take a close look at the brand. Down creek a rifle cut loose. The slug came in angling, missed my good leg by less than an inch and smashed into my saddle-horn. It cut plumb through the dally of my rope and did this to the horn. The folds of the dally kept the lead from spattering too much, though my right hand did get scratched up some."

Riley held out his right hand. There were dried streaks of blood on it.

"And after that?" Lee's voice was harsh.

"Boley and I dragged our Winchesters and lit out down creek. Whoever had done the shooting had pulled out fast. We found some sign, but lost it down in the sycamore flats, where the creek spreads out into those long shallows. After that we came home."

"Stick around the ranch," said Lee harshly. "Chick and I are going to town. I'll let Buck Sanderson know about that

calf—and the shot, too. I'm beginning to wonder about a lot of things."

THE first man Lee saw when he and Chick hit town was Buck Sanderson. The sheriff was standing in the doorway of his office, puffing at a black cheroot.

"I'm going into the Gilt Edge and see Bib Stovall," said Chick. "Bib was one of the rodeo judges, and he'll maybe be able to get me a line on Johnny Frayne's address."

Chick jingled off to the Gilt Edge and Lee crossed to the sheriff's office.

"Hello, Buck," he said. "Got something for you to think about." Tersely he told what had happened to Riley Hagan, and about the calf. Buck Sanderson's long brown face was impassive as he listened, but a glimmer came into his deep-set eyes.

"That's got a nasty sound to it, Lee," he said, when Lee finished. "But I've been wondering for a long time why nobody ever tried to take advantage of this free and easy set-up we've had on the mesa. Looks like it's started—and it may be hell on wheels before it's finished. I'll go right out. I'll pick up Riley and Boley and have them show me where it happened—and show me the calf, too, if we can locate it."

Lee thanked Sanderson, then went over to the bank. George Ryan was at the teller's window. "Waters around?" asked Lee.

Ryan nodded toward the door of Waters' office. "In there, Lee. But I'm afraid you're wasting your time. Man to man, I don't mind telling you I don't understand it. Those notes of yours should be renewed. This bank has made far riskier loans. But Waters is dead set against renewing your loan. He told me this morning that he was going to foreclose. He's been queer lately. I don't understand him. But don't tell him I said any of this, Lee."

"I won't, George," Lee promised. "Thanks."

Zeb Waters was sitting behind his private desk as Lee stepped in. He scowled and moved restlessly. "If you've come about those notes, save your breath. I've given you my answer, and it sticks."

Lee nodded. "Nothing I can say will change your mind?"

"Nothing."

Lee smiled thinly. "I wonder just what your scheme is. Things have been happening here and there. I'm beginning to think they all point in one direction."

"I don't know what you're talking about," snapped Waters. "You sound like your mind was—"

There came a distant, muffled thud somewhere along the street. Lee jerked around, his lips thinning, his eyes narrowed. He knew what that thud was. A gunshot, fired indoors. There was something ominous about that single shot. Premonition caught at Lee's throat and he left the bank at a run. As he broke into the street a man darted out of the Gilt Edge, whirled into a saddle and spurred off wildly. Hardly had he gone when another man ran out and cut across the street toward the office of Doc Ames.

Lee sprinted for the Gilt Edge, swung through the door. Chick—Chick was lying there on the floor, in front of the bar. Bib Stovall was on his knees beside him, trying to get Chick's chaps off. Bib was literally crying with rage.

Lee plunged forward, a harsh croak breaking from his lips. "Chick—?"

Then he saw that Chick, his face white and twisted with pain, was grinning crookedly up at him. "Only a smashed leg, Lee," he gasped. "I'm a long way from dead."

Lee helped Bib get those chaps off. There was a hole in Chick's jeans, over the center of his right thigh. Blood was pouring out in a jerky, pulsing stream.

"Artery," gritted Lee between set teeth. "Gimme a towel."

The bartender brought a clean towel, and Lee knotted it over the leg, drawing it as tight as he could. "Help me get him up, Bib," he snapped.

They made a cradle with their arms, got Chick up and started for the door. "Over to Doc's place," panted Lee.

As they crossed the street a crowd began to gather, but Lee and Bib ignored all questions. Doc Ames saw them coming and held the door wide.

"Thigh wound, Doc," said Lee. "Artery cut and bone smashed, by the feel of it."

"Right in onto the table," snapped Doc Ames, closing the door in the face of the curious. Doc called his wife, and she came and began laying out instruments. Doc was already reaching for a hypodermic. "You boys get out of here," he said to Lee and Bib. "Mary and I can handle things now."

Lee caught at Chick's hand. Chick mustered up his old, gay, twisted grin. "Run along, old deacon," he said. "I'll be around to plague you a long time yet."

Lee stood for a moment outside of Doc's place and, though the sun beat down strongly, he shivered. Bib took him by the arm. "You need a good stiff jolt, Lee," said Bib. "Come on."

IN the Gilt Edge, Bib got a bottle and two glasses and led the way into the back room, away from the looks and questions of the curious crowd which was jamming the saloon. Bib poured a brimming glass. "Put that away, and then another like it," he ordered.

The liquor burned much of the chill away, and Lee steadied and built a cigarette. "All right," he rasped. "Who did it—and why?"

"Another stranger packing two guns," said Bib. "He came in about half an hour ahead of Chick. He asked me about that hombre Terry—the one you had to rock off. I only told him I'd seen it happen and that Terry asked for what he got. He took a few drinks and then sat down at one of the tables and began playing Chinaman's Luck."

"Chick came in, had a beer, and asked me to get in touch with that Johnny Frayne, the red-head who won the bulldogging, and tell him to bring that outlaw buckner down. I said I'd do it, and Chick and I just sat gabbing quietly about the usual things. Then Bob Stock stuck his head in the door and asked if Slim English was in town. I said I didn't know. Bob said 'Hello, Ballard,' to Chick and went on about his business."

"Chick and I were just going for an-

other beer when this stranger got up from the table and walked over to us. 'Your name Ballard?' he asked Chick. Chick said yes. Then this jigger asked Chick if he was the one who fixed Terry. Chick said no, that his brother had done that good job. Quick as a flash that stranger threw a gun.

"'Race Terry was my friend,' he snarls, 'and I'm evening the count.' Me, I didn't think—I just threw my glass of beer at him. He throws one shot, Chick lurches and goes down. In two jumps that damned gun-thrower was out the door and riding. I was just looking after Chick when you came in. That's all of it, Lee. All but this: any more strange gun-packers show up in this place and I go to work on 'em with my old double-barreled Greener."

Lee inhaled deeply. "Throwing that beer glass like you did, Bib, probably saved Chick's life."

Bib shrugged. "I hope it did," he said simply. "Anyway, that pole-cat shot low."

Lee spent a wretched hour, waiting, fighting off the painful pictures his anxiety dragged before him. At length word came that Doc Ames wanted to see him. Bib Stovall went over with him, and they found Doc Ames cheerful and smiling.

"Get those ghosts out of your eyes, Lee," said Doc. "Chick is doing fine."

"How much damage did that slug do?" asked Lee.

"You made a pretty good guess. An artery was severed and the thigh bone smashed. But I did a good job, if I do say it myself. Chick will have a perfectly good pair of legs under him again—providing, of course, he stays off wild broncs for the next year. Oh, he'll be able to ride all right—but not on buckers. A smashed-up bone like the one he has takes a long time to get really sound again. But if he uses a little judgment, he has nothing to worry about."

"Can I see him?"

"He's sleeping now. I've got him under opiates. I'd advise complete rest for a day or two."

"Okay. Thanks a lot, Doc."

"That sure is tough," said Bib, as he

and Lee reached the street again. "Chick had his heart set on giving Bo Dixon a trimming at the fall rodeo. The way Doc talks, Chick won't be able to compete—not before next year, anyhow."

"Long as the kid gets his health back, that's all I care, Bib," said Lee. "Well, I've got business to tend to. You might keep in touch with Doc, and if something does go wrong, get word to me right away."

"I'll do that, Lee. And you—you keep off of ridges."

Lee nodded. "I intend to."

Fight Fury Breaks Loose

THE first person Lee Ballard saw when he rode up to Matt Henshaw's Jingle-bob spread was Skeet. She had on overalls, an old shirt and a battered sombrero. She was busy digging about in a tiny flower garden. She greeted Lee with a gay wave and a sparkling smile.

"Hi, *compadre!* Glad to see you. Why all the trouble on your handsome phiz?"

Lee swung to the ground. "Chick's laid up, Skeet," he said. "Bad leg. Some rat of a stranger shot him because he was my brother!"

Skeet went white, then red, then white again. Fear clouded her eyes. "Chick shot! Not—not too bad, Lee!"

She had dropped her spade and gripped him by the arm. Lee patted her hand. "Pretty bad, but not too bad, Skeet. He's at Doc Ames'. He'll be laid up for quite a time, though."

Skeet blinked rapidly and a couple of tears rolled down her cheeks. "Can—can I go nurse him?" she said huskily.

Lee smiled. "You're swell, Skeet. You bet you can go nurse him. I was hoping you'd want to."

Skeet ran up the porch steps. "Dad is down around the corrals somewhere, if you want to see him," she called over her shoulder. "Tell him to saddle a pony for me."

Lee found Matt puttering about the saddle shed and delivered Skeet's message. "She aims to go to town and nurse Chick, Matt," he added.

"What's wrong with Chick?" said Matt. Lee told the story briefly. Matt looked thoughtful.

"First that Terry gunman tried to get you, Lee. Now a friend of his cuts down Chick. There's trouble building on this mesa, Lee. I'm sure glad it ain't too serious with Chick. Well, I might as well saddle that bronc. If Skeet says she's on her way to nurse the kid, she's on her way."

"Skeet's the pure quill, Matt."

Skeet showed up in riding clothes, packing a pair of well stuffed saddle-bags. She kissed her father and scrambled into the saddle. "Don't know when I'll be back," she called, "but you know where to find me."

She spurred away. Lee built a cigarette.

"I made one last try with Waters today, Matt. I wasted my breath. George Ryan said he could see no reason why Waters would refuse the extension of time—said the bank had lots worse loans out than mine and was satisfied with them. But Waters is dead set to foreclose on me."

"How much do you owe Waters, Lee?"

"Seven thousand, plus three months' interest."

Matt glanced at the sun. "Too late to do any good today," he said, "but I'll meet you in town tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. Then we'll pin back Zeb Waters' ears—plenty, the damned old skin-flint! I'll take over your notes, Lee, and not worry a damn about it, either."

Lee looked steadily at the horizon. "Having a friend or two like you, Matt, sure makes it easier to hang on to your faith. I can only say—thanks."

GOING home, Lee cut across the mesa range to the southeast. His emotions were mixed. There was a lot of relief in knowing that the note worry was settled with. On the other hand, there was the thought of Chick, lying back there in town with a smashed leg, victim of a would-be killer's slug—a feud slug—thrown because he himself had cut down a strange gunman who had gone out to get him.

Blue Mesa had long been free of pro-

fessional gunthrowers, but now, within just a few weeks, at least two of the breed had shown up, both intent on killing, both directing their hatred at the Ballards. The first of the two had been in the company of Slade Dixon, had worked with Slade to make trouble. Clearly, the Dixons were determined to force the hostility between themselves and the Ballards into the open, into something ominous and deadly.

There was that calf incident, and the shot at Riley Hagan. The lines about Lee's mouth grew deeper, more grim. If this feud kept up, there was no telling where it might lead.

He struck the upper reaches of Logan Creek, followed it down, threading from one pleasant meadow to another, unconsciously noting the condition of the cattle he passed. And then, at the head of still another meadow, he reined in abruptly. Down there, walking slowly along, each leading a saddle bronc, were two people. Barb Ashley and Bo Dixon!

Lee knew a gust of sudden fury. What in the world was the matter with that girl, anyhow? Why, of all the folks on Blue Mesa, did she seek the company of Bo Dixon? Everyone knew there was cross blood in the Dixons. It was physically obvious.

Of a sudden Lee realized that he was trembling, gripped in a white, reckless fury. Above everything else in the world, he wanted to ride down there, beat hell out of Bo Dixon and give Barb Ashley a talking to she'd never forget. He almost started to, but the calculating, conservative habits of a lifetime made him pause.

After all, it was none of his business. If Barb Ashley wanted to hobnob with Bo, that was her business. He would have to mind his own affairs. Violence never settled a thing of this sort.

A little wearily, Lee started to swing his horse away. He'd circle the meadow, out of sight, go home and forget Barb Ashley. Life was too short to go on eating your heart out for any woman.

Lee's lips twisted. He knew very well he'd never be able to forget Barb Ashley, not if he lived to be a hundred.

Suddenly he reined in again. Something was wrong down there in the meadow. In the last glance he threw at Barb, he realized that her head was higher than ever, her figure straighter, more defiant than usual. Barb was upset, angry about something.

Even as Lee watched he saw her turn on Bo, say something with an emphatic toss of her head, then thread the reins about her pony's neck and start to swing into the saddle. Bo caught her by the arm, jerked her roughly away from her horse. And while she struggled, he held her, his dark face hard with anger.

Lee forgot all about minding his own business. He sank home the spurs, tore down across the meadow. He was almost up to Barb and Bo Dixon before either heard him. Bo's black eyes glittered with fury as they rested on Lee, and in Barb Ashley's face was unutterable relief. But Lee had not even looked at the girl. His gray eyes, frosty and hard, bored at Bo. He left his saddle in a leap and prowled straight at Dixon.

BO DIXON backed a slow step or two. His right hand crept toward the gun at his hip.

"You low-down, half-breed whelp!" Lee gritted.

Then he leaped. Bo dragged his gun, but as it cleared the holster Lee had him by the wrist. Instantly it was a furious battle for that gun. Lee had a weapon on his own hip, but he never even thought of pulling it. This was something more personal than a gunfight. This could only be satisfactorily settled by a physical show-down, the fierce joy of feeling his fists smashing into Bo Dixon's face. But first he had to get rid of that gun.

Chest to chest they stood, and muscles knotted and crawled in that initial test of strength. The fierce, savage energy in Lee met Bo Dixon's best, held him even, then crept above it. He began twisting Bo's arm up, aside, and back. A flicker of fear showed in Bo's eyes. Of a sudden he gave back, whirled, tried to drag free. But Lee spun in under his gun arm, jerked it down

across his shoulder. Bo cursed in sudden agony, the gun dropped from his fingers.

Lee laughed coldly. "Now!" he said.

He hit him then, a hooking smash which made Bo's knees sag. But there was vitality and power in the fellow. He was thick through the shoulders, heavy of bone, the kind of man in whom life lay deep, the nerve centers padded by bone and muscle.

Snarling, he came lunging back, both fists flailing. Lee felt the shock and pound of blows landing on him, yet they registered no pain. The warm clamminess of his own blood ran down his face, but he did not know it. He was like some savage automaton, driven by a brain apart.

He drove Bo back, step by step, taking blows and landing them. He knew a savage joy every time the shock of a solid punch traveled up his wrists and arms and into the writhing muscles of his shoulders, felt a fierce satisfaction at the sight of blood welling from Bo Dixon's mashed nose.

He ripped punches into Bo's body, and when the fellow's guard dropped, Lee smashed fistfuls of fury on his adversary's jaw.

Something had to give before that relentless, battering attack. That first fear which had shown in Bo Dixon's eyes grew and deepened, for Bo had never fought a man like this icy-eyed, tawny-headed terror. This man was impervious to the most vicious punches, while throwing blows of his own that jolted a man clear through.

Bo became scheming, shifty, vicious. He drove a sudden knee at Lee's stomach. Lee twisted, took the cowardly blow on his hip and then knocked Bo flat on his back with a straight right hand which fairly whistled.

Bo wasn't out, but he did not get up. He was afraid to. Naked and ugly, that fear showed in his rolling eyes. Of a sudden, Bo Dixon was nothing but a craven, shrinking coward.

The red mist burned away in front of Lee Ballard's eyes. He knew there would be no satisfaction in punishing Bo now. Panting, his voice dripping with contempt, he barked a curt, "Get up! Fork your bronc and get out!"

Bo got to his feet, shambled to his horse and spurred away. Lee watched him out of sight, then turned on Barb Ashley.

She was staring at him, her face pale except for twin spots of crimson burning high in her cheeks.

"Lee!" she whispered. "Oh, Lee!"

Lee's words struck her like a lash. "I ought to finish this right here," he said. "I ought to take a quirt to you. I don't understand people like you, Barb Ashley. With every conceivable advantage in the world, you choose to throw your favors to a dog like Bo Dixon. You look like you had pride, dignity, but I don't believe you have, or you'd never go riding with a half-breed whelp!

"After the rodeo, in Mesa City, you favored Bo Dixon above a hundred better men. You ate with him, went to the dance with him. Maybe you're one of the vain kind who want to be seen with the winner. Well, Bo won that rodeo, but just now it was different. I showed you what he was deep down: a swaggering, yellow four-flusher. You ought to be proud of him—and of yourself! Yeah, just now you saw another winner. But you can't tie your kite to this one. I'm done with you. For a long time, I thought you were pretty fine, but my eyes are open now."

He swung around, went to his horse, swept into the saddle and rode away, his lean face dark with bruises, smeared with blood, but his eyes still blazing.

For a long time Barb Ashley didn't move. She was dead white. She began to shiver, as though the cruel lash of Lee Ballard's words was still beating on her. Oh, the savage, searing contempt of them! Her head dropped, she buried her face in her arms. Then suddenly she flung herself down on her face in the sun-warmed fragrant meadow grass, sobs shaking her like a tempest.

Her pony came over and nuzzled her shoulder. It even whickered. The girl quieted, turned on her side, felt the sun in her face. Presently she got to her feet, climbed into her saddle and rode homeward, a strange, brooding resolve in her eyes.

Dry-Gulcher's Lead

BOLEY and I went out with Buck Sanderson," said Riley Hagan. "We went straight to where that cow and calf had been. We couldn't find a sign of the calf, but we did find the cow."

"Dead, you mean?" Lee said harshly.

"No, but sure huntin' for her baby and plenty mournful because she couldn't find it. She was bellowing her lungs out, that old mammy was."

Lee rolled a smoke, his face grim. "It doesn't make sense—hardly," he said. "Mis-branding one calf wouldn't make or break this spread. Whoever did slap that brand on stood to lose a lot and gain damn little. No, I can't see the sense of it."

"There's one angle," said Riley. "It might have been bait."

Lee tensed. "Bait!"

"Yeah. Bait to stir you up, get you to make a break. Suppose, for instance, you had lit out for the Dixon spread and called them on that brand—they could have had a nice little set-up all arranged for you. Somebody fires a shot. You go down. Then they claim you rode in there, crazy wild about some mistake in a calf, and went to shootin', so they had to drop you in self-defense. Just where would you be?"

"Buck Sanderson would know I wouldn't be fool enough to pull a stunt like that," Lee argued.

"Yeah," Reily agreed drily, "but what he'd know and what he could prove would be two different things. And all the time you'd be dead. I tell you, Lee, those Dixons are after you and Chick. Just why, I don't know. But they are. And any way they can get you will serve their ends. Cowboy, take a tip from a friend. Ride low in your saddle, keep your gun light in the leather, and believe nothing you hear, and only half of what you see. Play a waiting game. The Dixons will overreach, if you give 'em enough rope."

As he lay in his bunk that night, Lee Ballard did a lot of thinking. What Riley had told him ran through his mind again and again—particularly about believing nothing he heard and only half of what

he saw. He applied these words to what had happened that day. He thought of those furious, scathing things he had said to Barb Ashley. Maybe he'd been wrong. Maybe he had jumped at conclusions. Maybe Barb had not gone riding with Bo, but had just happened to bump into him. Maybe he himself had made an everlasting, pig-headed fool of himself.

Furiously Lee pounded a pillow into shape. Shucks, he was losing his grip, making fool plays—and that, as Riley believed, was exactly what the Dixons wanted him to do! They wanted to stampe him, force him to make a break that would give them the chance to throw lead into him.

LEE hit town early the next morning and went straight to Doc Ames' place. Skeet, looking a little tired, let him in. She answered the question in his eyes.

"Chick's doing fine, Lee. He had a pretty rough night of it, but Doc Ames says that's to be expected. You'll be able to see him later."

"Don't you go wearing yourself out, Skeet. You look tired."

She smiled. "I'm happy, doing this for Chick. But you—you're looking more grim, more savage all the time, Lee. And your face—it's all bruised up. What happened?"

"I made a blasted fool of myself," Lee growled. "If I had my needings, I'd be horsewhipped!"

Lee met Matt Henshaw at the appointed time, and they went into the bank together. Matt drew a check and slid it through the wicket to George Ryan, who looked at it, then at Matt, startled.

"Seven thousand dollars!" he said. "That's a lot of cash, Matt."

"Seven thousand, one hundred and five, to be exact," Matt growled. "My balance will cover it. Fork it out."

George Ryan glanced at Lee, smiled briefly. "Gladly, Matt," he said.

Matt turned the bundles of crisp currency over to Lee. "All right, Lee," he said. "Go jam that down Zeb Waters' throat. I hope it chokes him. I'll meet you

at Jim Curry's office and we can have him draw up the papers between us."

Lee was smiling grimly as he strode into Waters' private office. He found the banker scowling at some correspondence on his desk. The scowl deepened when Waters saw who his visitor was.

"If you've come—" he began.

"I'm here to pay you what I owe you," Lee cut in. "Get those notes, sign 'em paid, and take your money."

Waters stared at the pile of currency Lee tossed on the desk.

"No," said Lee, "I didn't rob your bank. But there it is, including the interest. I want those notes."

The banker's eyes narrowed warily. He cleared his throat. "If you had let me finish what I started to say, Ballard, you'd have learned that I'd reconsidered this matter. I'm ready to give you an extension on those notes. You see—"

"I don't want an extension—I don't want to owe you a red cent. You're too oily and changeable and slick to suit me, Waters. I'd feel safer owing the money to someone else—like Matt Henshaw."

Waters bit his lip, shrugged and went out. Soon he came back with the notes, and in fifteen minutes the deal was closed. Lee pocketed the canceled paper carefully.

"The policy of this bank is to do no business with anyone who doubts its integrity," said Waters pompously. "If you should need financial assistance at any time in the future, do not come to me for it, Ballard."

"Thanks," Lee said drily. "It's the last place I would come."

IT WAS nearly noon when Lee went back to Doc Ames' place. Chick greeted him with a weak wave of his hand. "I'm a lucky dog," said Chick. "Look at my nurse!"

Lee smiled. "She's sure a wonder. Chick! How you feeling?"

"Kind of savage in that bum leg. But Doc says I got to expect that for a few days."

That wound had taken a lot out of Chick. He had lost flesh and color.

"You take it damned easy!" said Lee.

"One thing gets me," said Chick. "Doc tells me there ain't a chance of my riding against Bo Dixon in the fall rodeo—says I'd raise the devil with this leg if I tried it. And I was all set to cut that coyote's tail! Looks like you'll have to do the twisting for the Ballard family, Lee."

Lee laughed grimly. "Forget rodeos and bronc twisting. Just you get well, and the rodeo can go to blazes."

Chick was staring at Lee's face. "What happened to your phiz?" he asked. "Somebody been throwing punches?"

"Two of us," Lee said. "And this time it was first money to a Ballard, second to a Dixon."

"Bo?" said Chick, startled.

"Yeah."

"What did you scrap about?"

Lee shook his head. "No sabe. I licked him, if that will make you feel better. Now I've got to be rolling. So long, kid. Be good to your nurse."

As the door closed behind Lee, Chick got up on a weak elbow and pounded his pillow with a futile fist. "Doggone it, my luck would break this way!" he stormed. "Here, with a lot of excitement breaking, I'm tied to this cussed bed. All my life I've been waiting for old Lee to go on the war path. Now he's doing it, I can't get to see the fun!"

"You'll see stars if you don't quiet down and go to sleep," threatened Skeet. "When your nurse says sleep, you sleep—understand?"

"Oh, all right," grumbled Chick. He sank back and closed his eyes. Skeet brushed his tousled hair back from his forehead. The tension went out of Chick's face.

LEE was in the saddle, about to leave town, when a buckboard came rattling in. Driving it was Dave Ashley, and on the seat beside him was Barb. The buckboard swung to a halt at a hitch-rail and Lee had to ride by it on the way out. Suddenly Lee wanted to tell the girl he was sorry for rawhiding her so unmercifully after that fight with Bo Dixon. He

reined toward her, took off his hat, started to speak. Then Barb stepped lithely to the dusty street, looked straight at Lee, through him, past him—just as though he did not exist.

Lee drove his pony at a savage pace for the first mile or two out of town. Then he pulled to an easier gait, shook himself angrily. "You're an ornery, mean-tempered old fool, Lee Ballard," he muttered angrily. "When you're mad, you've got no judgment at all. You give Barb Ashley an awful lathering and then expect her to fall on your neck! Serve you right if she never speaks to you again—you sure had that snub coming!"

Realization of the truth of these words did not help his mood any. The satisfaction he had known over straightening out his note trouble left him. He felt downhearted. He hated being on the outs with Barb Ashley.

Where the trail cut through north of the Bridle-bit headquarters, Lee bumped into Luke Mearns, who managed the spread for Waters. Mearns wasn't a bad sort, a gangling, shaggy-headed man, given to few words.

"How's Chick?" Mearns asked. "Heard he was shot in the leg."

"Doing all right," Lee answered.

Mearns looked all about them. "Keep to the timber, Lee—and off the ridges," he said. And then, before Lee could answer, Mearns rode on.

Lee pondered those words as he moved homeward. Just about the same thing Bib Stovall had told him. Well, he'd take the advice—he'd be a fool not to. Just then Lee distinctly felt the slug hit his horse. It struck forward of the withers and high up, breaking the luckless animal's neck, clean. The horse went down in a heap, rolled out on its side, pinning Lee's left leg to the ground. From the south echoed the keen, hard crang of a rifle.

For a moment, dazed by the suddenness of the thing, Lee lay still. Then that rifle snarled again and another bullet thudded into the horse. Lee began to struggle furiously, trying to get his leg free. Whoever had downed his horse was going to make

sure the brute stayed down, and then pick Lee off at leisure.

Lee doubled his right leg up, got some purchase with his bent knee against the saddle and put forth effort that knotted his face and throat with straining muscles. He gripped at the ground with his hands, pulling with all his might.

No go. His left boot, still in the stirrup and trapped under the dead weight of the bronco, was held as by a vise. Lee relaxed a moment, panting. Maybe if he could wriggle his foot out of the boot—

He tried that, pulling and twisting until sharp agony ran up his leg from his bruised and wrenched ankle. Now he heard a running horse, coming down on him fast. Lee quit trying to get free, but dragged his gun and waited. There wasn't much chance. The dry-gulcher could get behind him, cut him to pieces. Lee thought of Chick, of Barb Ashley.

Crouched low in the saddle of a madly running bronc, a man tore past him, circling slightly to get behind. The moment the fellow sighted him, he began throwing lead. It bit into the earth all about Lee, spattering him with dirt and torn fragments of lead. A slug dug into Lee's saddle, another cut a six-inch gash in the heavy skirt of his chaps.

Lee gritted his teeth, squinted his eyes against the stinging dust and shot twice, aiming for the fellow's horse. At the second shot it broke its stride, went straight up into the air and came down bucking madly. Its rider, caught by surprise, was piled on the second jump. He rolled over and over, came to his knees, dazed and shaken. And then Lee, his lips a straight white line, drove a third slug straight into that crouched figure. The fellow's knees gave way and he fell on his face.

FOR a moment Lee watched him, gun thrown high, ready for another shot. But the crumpled figure never moved. And now, from another angle, another rider came pounding up. Lee checked himself just in time, dropped his gun. The newcomer was Sheriff Buck Sanderson.

Sanderson left his saddle in a flying

leap, landed beside Lee, his stern face clouded with worry. "Lee! Did he get you? You hit?"

Lee shook his head. "I'm sure anchored to the ground by this dead bronc, though, Buck."

Buck Sanderson cursed. "The rotten snake! The whole thing happened right in front of my eyes. I saw you coming, was waiting for you over in the timber. Then *zowie!* Down went your bronc! There was another shot, and here that polecat came riding, knowing you were pinned, maybe knocked out. While I was still dragging at my gun, you creased his horse and off he went. Then you got him on the next try. Here—I'll throw a rope on that dead bronc and roll it off you."

A moment later Lee was free. He staggered to his feet, flexing his leg cautiously. He grinned crookedly, without mirth. "Nothing busted—but I sure know something lit on it!"

He limped over to the dead man.

"Stranger," growled Sanderson. "He never saw me at all, had eyes only for you. Lee, from the description Bib Stovall gave me, this is the same hombre who shot Chick."

"Catch that horse, Buck," said Lee savagely. "If I didn't nick it too deep, I'll be riding it—going straight for the Circle Cross. I'm fed up on this kind of stuff. I'm going to call the Dixons right in their own back yard. From what Bib Stovall told me, this jasper claimed to be a friend of Terry, the gun-thrower Slade Dixon siced on me in the Gilt Edge the night of the rodeo. If Slade was hanging around with Terry, he must be friends with this hombre too. Buck, Slade's set a gunfighter after Chick and me for the last time. Catch that horse!"

"I'll catch him," said Sanderson, "but you're not going out to the Circle Cross, you're going home! There is something damned queer about the things that have happened lately on this mesa. It all means something—leads somewhere. I mean to find out. What the Dixons don't know won't hurt 'em. If they're behind this, they'll show their hand real open, first

thing you know. Then I'll scotch 'em. If you ride into the Circle Cross now, it won't settle a thing. You might get one of the Dixons—you might get both—but they'd be almost sure to get you.

"You let me sniff out this trail. For instance, that"—and he pointed to the dead man—"that is going to disappear. We'll let the Dixons, if they know anything about him, wonder for a while. You hear, Lee? You stay away from the Dixons. I don't blame you for feeling like you do, but the law is going to handle this."

Lee shrugged wearily. "Fair enough, Buck. I'm no killer—and I reckon your idea is better."

Prize Money Hangs High

A FULL three weeks passed before Riley Hagan could bring Chick home in the buckboard. Chick looked a lot better, but he was stewing and fuming because he had another month of bed ahead of him. "Doc Ames is a cautious old lady," he grumbled to Lee. "My leg—"

"Doc Ames is a darned good man," Lee broke in. "He saved a mighty bad leg for you, and so you do as he says, kid."

Time passed quietly enough on the Tumbling B. Even Chick became reconciled, for Skeet rode over daily to sit an hour or two beside his bed.

No more untoward incidents took place, and though Lee several times bumped into the Dixons in town, they showed a willingness to avoid him, so Lee let matters stand that way. Once or twice Buck Sanderson dropped out to the ranch. The last time Lee saw him, Sanderson looked grave.

"I'm chasing a hunch, Lee," he said. "If I'm right—and I think I am—the folks on this mesa will have plenty to talk about one of these days."

As the weeks and months slid by, Lee Ballard thinned down to whip-cord and steel. He seldom smiled, even when Skeet Henshaw teased him. Though Lee was glad Skeet and Chick were happy together, their happiness accentuated his own loneliness. He often thought of Barb Ashley, and he

saw her now and then, but she never seemed to see him, even if they met face to face.

Chick was up and limping about now, and one day he gingerly tested himself astride a staid cow-pony.

"Doc was right," he said mournfully. "Here's the rodeo coming down on us fast, and right now I couldn't straddle a sheep. Lee, you'll sure have to represent the Tumbling B alone this trip."

"Not interested," grunted Lee. "I've got round-up and other things to think of."

"You're thinking too much," said Chick. "Maybe she's not worth it."

Lee didn't answer. Bitterness begets silence.

Summer passed into fall. Before Lee knew it, he was up to his eyes in the arduous toil of round-up. He took on a couple of extra hands to help Riley and Boley and himself, and from before daylight until after dark he pounded leather, parted out, roped and stretched, tended fire, flipped calves, set brands and cut ear-marks. He grew even leaner, and a certain cragginess carved his sun-blackened face. Toward the end, Chick was able to tend fire, so that speeded things up. Finally Lee made a circle of the ranches, exchanging tallies. At the Circle Cross he met real surprise. He saw neither of the Dixons, but ran across Luke Mearns, instead.

"Yeah," said Luke, "I was surprised too. Old man Waters foreclosed on the Dixons just before round-up. Me, I didn't even know they owed him any money. How'd the calf tally come out?"

AT the Diamond A, Lee was hoping to find Dave Ashley without running into anyone else. He saw Bud Hocken, who nodded toward the main house. "You'll find the boss up there, Lee," said Bud. "He's going over the tallies."

Lee went up to the house. He startled Barb, who had been curled up in the hammock, reading a book. Lee tried not to look straight at her, lest he betray himself. He pulled off his hat awkwardly.

"I've got some branding figures here for your father," he said. "Can I see him?"

"Go right in," she said coldly. "You know where his office is."

Dave Ashley, bluff, arrogant, though a good enough man, greeted Lee crisply. "Hello, Ballard! How was the calf crop?"

"Good enough. As usual, we ran more Diamond A's than anything else."

Ashley laughed. "I'm no hypocrite. That's the way I like to see it. But you didn't do so bad in *our* camp. Here y'are. By the way, will Chick be able to ride for us this trip?"

Lee shook his head. "Not a chance. His leg wouldn't hold up. I reckon the Tumbling B won't have any entrant in the rodeo this fall."

"That's too bad," said Ashley sincerely. "We're going to have some real prize money up this trip. We made money last spring. And the policy is, as you know, to keep our rodeos non-profit affairs. Every cent the committee rakes together, outside and above expenses, goes back in prize money to the boys who compete. And that's as it should be. First money in the bronc twisting is going to be one thousand dollars, Lee. Quite a chunk of dinero."

"A lot of money," Lee agreed. "Chick will sure be glum when he hears about it."

Ashley lit a black cheroot and leaned back. "Why don't you try for it, Lee? Chick often told me you could ride rings around him."

Lee smiled. "Put that down as a kid brother blowing about his family. Even if I did enter to ride, I wouldn't have a chance. That thousand-dollar prize money will draw twisters from a long way around. There will be some fine boys out there, topping the wild ones."

When Lee left the house the hammock was empty, and he rode away without seeing another sign of Barb Ashley. He grimly put thought of her aside and began doing some mental arithmetic as he glanced over the tally lists on Tumbling B calves which he had gathered at the different spreads. Rough figures ran through his mind. Not bad—not bad at all. Figuring an average winter ahead and a decent spring average of increase, he would be able, by next midsummer, to cut down

what he owed Matt Henshaw by nearly half.

He stared thoughtfully out past his pony's ears. Top money in the rodeo would be a thousand dollars. A lot of money, that. If he had that much to add to what he expected to pay Matt Henshaw—

When Lee got back to the Tumbling B he found Chick, Riley Hagan and Boley Oakes down at the cavvy corral, talking to two strange riders. One of those riders had a flaming top-knot.

"Meet Johnny Frayne and Ed Poore, Lee," said Chick. "Johnny brought that wild buckner down for the rodeo. Take a look at that bronc yonder and tell me if you ever saw a meaner-looking cuss."

Lee shook hands and looked the horse over. The animal was a buckskin, very dark, almost a claybank. A powerful animal, running around eleven hundred pounds, with a snaky head and neck.

"Fool's Gold, we've named it," said Johnny Frayne. "Whoever wins top money this trip will earn it. I tried to ride that skate. Lord! Just like a barrel of dynamite going off under a man—I lasted about half a jump!"

"There will be a lot try it," said Lee. "Top money is a thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars!" yelled Chick. "Where did you get that?"

"Dave Ashley told me."

Chick moaned. "And me with this bum leg! Lee, you've just got to enter—you've got to! A thousand pesos? Holy smokes!"

"I think," said Lee, "I'll be a damn fool and try for it. Yes—I'll enter."

Chick yipped joyously, grabbed Lee and waltzed him around. "At last!" he whooped. "This is one time when it won't be first money to a Dixon!"

"Nor a Ballard either," Lee laughed. "Don't count your chickens ahead of time, kid!"

IT was characteristic of Lee that, his decision to ride made, he went into training wholeheartedly. He had Riley and Boley throw the wildest ones of the cavvy herd into one of the corrals and began topping them off every day. These broncs,

of course, did not offer the caliber of bucking he would face at the rodeo, but they served to get in shape with.

Riley Hagan watched him with expert eyes, making a suggestion here and there, pointing out some trick of balance, of riding form. And Lee listened and profited, for in his day Riley Hagan had been the peer of them all in the mesa country.

The outlaw buckner, Fool's Gold, Lee left alone. When Boley Oakes suggested it might be a good idea to give the brute a whirl and find out what it had, Lee shook his head.

"I'd like to win that thousand simoleons right enough, but I don't want it unless I can win it on the up and up. I don't want any advantages over the other boys. When and if I tackle Fool's Gold, the bronc will be just as big a stranger to me as to the rest of the riders."

"You," said Chick, "stand so straight you lean over backward!"

The rodeo fever had hold of the entire mesa range now. With the opening a bare ten days away, things were beginning to stir in Mesa City. Contestants began drifting in from all points of the compass. Talk of the heavy prize money was on the tongue of everyone. Also, word got out that a whale of a tough buckner was going to be entered by the Tumbling B, so men rode out to the ranch to look Fool's Gold over with expert eyes, and they went away thoughtfully.

In town men were working on the arena, strengthening fences, repairing chutes. Old mossy-horned steers were brought in to the corrals, wild, truculent brutes on which the ropers and bulldoggers would work. At the Gilt Edge, Bib Stovall began putting on extra men at the bar, and other places in town followed suit. As the fever grew, it was confidently predicted that this would be the top show of all time for Mesa City.

Out at the Tumbling B, Chick was half loco with anticipation, and when the lists were open for entry he insisted that Lee get right to town, put down his entrance money and sign up. Riley rode in with them. They came up with Matt and Skeet just short of town.

"Here's our champ!" yelled Chick. "Look him over, folks!"

"I'll buy you a horn and a drum," Lee grinned. "Won't you feel foolish when I get my shirt dusted right off the bat!"

Skeet laughed. "I'm going to bet on you, Lee. I might even give odds."

She and Chick struck on ahead.

"What chance do you give him, Riley?" asked Matt. "You're an expert on this game."

"The bronc that piles Lee will pile everybody else too," said Riley quietly. "A top rider needs a lot of things, but more than all else he has to have legs—strong ones. Lee's got the best pair I ever saw. Whoever gets top money will have to take it away from Lee."

"Well, that suits me," said Matt. "I want to see somebody besides Bo Dixon win for a change. By the way, did you hear about the Dixons losin' their ranch? Thank the Lord I don't owe Zeb Waters any money!"

Entry books were handled in the Gilt Edge, and when Lee and the rest went, Bo Dixon was signing up. As he turned away, he found Lee beside him. Dixon seemed a trifle startled, then a sneer twisted his face.

"You're quite an optimist, Ballard!" he said.

"Maybe," said Lee. "I aim to ride, if that's what you mean. Let's see that book, Bib."

"If you don't beat that hombre, I'll disown you," Chick muttered fiercely.

"If I don't, you just cut me dead," said Lee.

Dusty and Dangerous Battle

RILEY HAGAN pinched out a cigarette butt and tossed it aside. "Listen, Lee," he said, "this is going to be a long, tough session. Before it's done with, it will cook down to plain, brute riding. There are three plenty tough broncs. Fool's Gold is the worst of the lot. But that Oregon horse, Green River, is wicked, and so is that big sorrel, Red Fire. The winner of this rodeo will have to top out all three of those devils. Fancy riding won't mean a

thing. Don't waste your time or energy doing any fancy scratching on these early broncs. Just make your rides clean and straight up, and save yourself for a roaring finish. All right, you're due to come out."

Lee climbed the chute fence and looked down at a quivering blue roan bundle of saddled and blindfolded horse-flesh. Chick and Boley had just done the saddling. Chick's teeth were chattering. Lee looked at him and laughed.

"Not cold are you, kid?" he teased.

"C-can't h-help it," said Chick. "I'm going to—to suffer like a dog until this damn rodeo is over with. I know this bronc, Lee—a straight-ahead buckner. Good luck, ole timer!"

Lee settled himself in the leather, gathered the hackamore rope in his left hand. He looked at the gate man and nodded. "All set," he said quietly.

The blare of the announcers' megaphone came across the arena:

"Watch the chute! Lee Ballard coming out on Rock Candy! Watch the chute!"

The gate swung aside, the blindfold whisked free. Rock Candy squealed and exploded into the open. Not a real good horse, not a real bad one, thought Lee. Had a trick of weaving its shoulders that would have been tough in a more powerful bronc.

The bellow of the crowd washed about him, but the mass of faces was just a blur outside the fences. The timer's gun cracked and the pick-up riders crowded in. Lee was amazed that it was over so quick. He slid across behind the saddle of Sam Sabin, who was riding pick-up, dropped lightly to the ground. He lifted his hat once to the cheering crowd, then sauntered back to the chutes.

Riley grinned across the fence at him. "Number one done with. That one was soft, Lee!"

Lee squatted on the fence with the others and watched the riders go out. More than one dusted his shirt. Bo Dixon went out on Black Arrow, a good horse, and made a clean, fine ride. Bo could twist 'em, and no mistake.

Young Tommy Travis, who rode for

Matt Henshaw, had the bad luck to draw Red Fire, and the big, powerful sorrel, coming out like a mad thing, piled Tommy high and wide, then went after his man when he had him in the dust. The hilarity of the crowd changed to alarm. Tommy was rolling fast, and the first drive or two that the sorrel made at him missed.

Lee left his perch as if he'd been shot from a gun, darted in front of the screaming, pawing horse, threw his hat in the brute's face, then grabbed Tommy by the shoulders and jerked him to his feet. Then the pick-up riders were on the sorrel, driving it back and away.

"You d-darn fool!" stuttered Tommy. "W-want to get your h-head kicked off?"

Lee laughed. "No—but I couldn't see yours kicked in!"

FOR his second ride that afternoon, Lee drew Tar-bucket, a long-bodied, rather slender horse, with the wickedest-looking eye Lee had ever seen in a bronc. Riley Hagan stood beside Lee while Chick and Boley fought the saddle into place.

"Use plenty of leg power on this one, Lee," said Riley. "That black snake is built too light for much straight ahead power. It'll be a weaver, and all full of tricks. Watch for it coming over backward."

That Riley could judge his horses showed the second Tar-bucket was out of the chute. The brute spun on a dime and bucked halfway back into the chute again, tried to crush Lee's leg against the fence, then came clear, squealing like a demon, and swallowed its head in three terrific lunges. Then, without a breath of warning, it came up and over.

Back by the chutes Chick yelled in despair and the crowd groaned. But when the black crashed to the ground, Lee was clear and standing beside it, and when it got to its feet again, jarred and dizzy from the fall, Lee was back in the saddle. For the rest of the ride the horse sulked, grunting and squealing as it lunged straight ahead, and when the timer's gun cracked, Lee was sitting his saddle, easy and poised. Lee got a big hand from the crowd on that

ride, the best hand of any rider so far.

Riley Hagan looked deep into Lee's eyes as Lee came sauntering up. Riley nodded "It's in the bag. I've found out all I wanted to know. I'm going out and bet my last sou on you, cowboy."

"Yeah," groaned Chick. "Of course he'll win! Look at him—cool as an iceberg! And me, I've got the unholy jim-jams. When that damned bronc came over backward—ugh!"

Lee chuckled. "Work's over for today. Enjoy yourself, kid."

Chick got some satisfaction a few moments later. Bo Dixon came out on Piñon, a chunky little roan, and came so close to being dusted that a big sigh went over the crowd as he regained the stirrup he had momentarily lost.

"That's day money to you, Lee," drawled Riley. "And Dixon lost a big gob of confidence right then and there—which won't help him any when the going gets tough tomorrow and the next day."

Riley and Lee, Chick and Boley had supper together, then sauntered down to the Gilt Edge to glance over the drawings for the next day. Chick groaned as his eye went down the list.

"Red Fire! You get that damned man-killer for your first ride tomorrow, Lee!"

"And Dixon—he draws two soft ones," growled Boley Oakes. "There's rotten luck for you!"

Lee shrugged. "Either I can ride that sorrel bronc or I can't. Forget it."

They found Skeet and her father on the hotel porch. Skeet hugged Lee. "Swell!" she cried. "Just swell—though I did swallow my heart when that black brute reared on you, Lee."

"You and Chick," Lee laughed. "Chick is still shaking in his boots."

Skeet drew Lee aside. "If it's none of my business, just say so, cowboy, but there was a certain young lady sitting with the judges, and when that black went over backward I heard her scream. It was genuine. When I looked at her afterward she was white as a sheet."

Skeet went off with Chick. Lee built a slow cigarette as he stared down across

the flickering lights of the carnival town. He knew he had seen Barb Ashley sitting with the judges. All day he had watched her. She had looked so trim and cool in her white silk blouse, her scarlet neckerchief and tall white Stetson. So she had screamed, eh, when it seemed he might be crushed beneath that treacherous black devil! Well, it probably didn't mean a thing—just the woman in her hating to see death in the making.

LEE didn't go near the arena during the morning hours, when the roping and bulldogging was going on. Riley okayed this idea. "Excitement works on the nerves of the best of us," he said. "You take it easy, Lee. You've got a ride to make this afternoon."

The build-up of tension for the afternoon events was terrific. Lee could sense it as he sauntered over to the arena with Riley. Chick and Boley were already at the chute, guarding Lee's saddle with jealous attention. Chick's eyes were haunted and his welcoming smile was wan when Lee and Riley came up. The crowd was noisy, wild with anticipation, for the word was out that Red Fire, Green River and Fool's Gold had all been drawn for rides that afternoon. Now the thinning out of the contestants would be fast. From the riders who still owned a clean slate by sundown, the final winner would come. Today's rides would be the battles of giants.

Lee, looking across the arena to the judges stand, saw the gleam of that scarlet neckerchief. Funny the satisfaction he felt in knowing Barb would be watching him have it out with Red Fire.

Joe Borg, a rider from the desert country—and a good one—came out on Green River. Lee watched with intense interest, marking the bucking tricks of the outlaw horse. He yelled in wild delight when it seemed for a time that Joe was going to make a clean ride. Then, even as the timer lifted his gun, Joe lost a stirrup. The next moment he was in the dust, with the riderless Green River bucking explosively down the arena.

And now they were bringing a squeal-

ing, fighting Red Fire into the saddling chute. It took five fighting, swearing punchers to get him in, and another wild battle to get Lee's saddle cinched into place.

"Shiver, you red hellion!" croaked Boley to the bronc. "Here's where you get rode!"

The announcer lifted his megaphone. "Watch the chute, ladies and gentlemen. Lee Ballard—coming out on Red Fire!"

A great sigh ran over the crowd, then a hush, a craning of necks. Then into the white afternoon sunshine came a roaring cyclone of man and horse. It looked as though Lee Ballard was riding a whirlpool of living flame. Screaming, grunting, lunging terribly, Red Fire went down the arena. It was like being astride a savage, brutal tornado. Never had Lee Ballard been up on such a power-brute as this. The wrenching and pounding were terrific. A cold paralysis gripped Lee, which seemed to place his mind and his body apart. How crazily the sun whipped here and there across the sky! And why wasn't the crowd yelling? They were seeing a real ride, weren't they?

Incredibly far away something cracked. And then through the haze of dust and movement men on horses were crowding in on Red Fire, knocking him off his bucking stride. An arm went around Lee and Sam Sabin's voice was shrilling at him, "Unfork him, boy—unfork him! Man, what a *ride!*"

THE world steadied as Lee stalked slowly back to the fence. The crowd went completely crazy. Chick was blubbering openly as he hugged Lee. Boley had hold of the fence, was kicking it, swearing crazily all the time. Riley, his eyes shining, gripped Lee's shoulder. "You sure rode to glory that time, Lee!"

Tommy Travis was doing a war-dance, waving his arms, trying to yell, but unable to make a sound. The tension went out of Lee and he laughed.

"We got even with Red Fire that trip, Tommy!"

Lee's second ride of the day was on

Pifion, the little bronc that had almost piled Bo Dixon the day before. The horse seemed like a breeze after Red Fire. But the crowd, remembering his ride on Red Fire, gave Lee an ovation.

"Day money again for you, Lee," said Riley. "You're not only licking the Dixons, you're running them into the ground!"

Lee had little chance to watch Fool's Gold in action. Ben Scally had come out on the horse, but Ben was two-thirds out of the leather before the horse really cleared the chute.

When the afternoon was done, one big fact was before everyone: just three twist-ers were left in the running—just three men had still come through with clean shirts—Lee Ballard, Bo Dixon and Harry Carter, who had come down from the Sweetwater country. These three would fight it out on the final day.

Back at the hotel, Riley insisted on Lee's having a scalding bath, then stretched him on a bunk and gave him a thorough rub-down. "Can't afford to let you stiffen up," he said.

Chick and Boley went down to the Gilt Edge and brought back the news of the draw for the finals.

"You get Green River, Lee," said Chick excitedly. "Bo gets Red Fire, and Carter gets Fool's Gold. Bo and Carter get to ride ahead of you."

Men dropped into Lee's room for a word and a handshake. Matt Henshaw showed up with Dave Ashley.

"A swell ride, that one on Red Fire, Lee," said Ashley. "A swell ride! And—ah—by the way, Barb would like to speak to you. She's down on the porch."

Lee found Barb Ashley sitting in the shadows, alone. "Your father said you wanted to see me, Barb," he said.

She was still for a time, twisting her handkerchief nervously in her hands. "Yes," she said breathlessly, "yes. I—I wanted to wish you luck, Lee, in the finals. I—gosh, I hope you win!"

Lee's heart leaped. "That," he said, "will help a lot, Barb. Maybe if you'd give me some token to carry—"

She stood up, facing him. "First, Lee, I

want you to know that I was not riding with Bo Dixon by choice that day you fought him. I—I started out alone and merely bumped into him. A token? Here—take this.”

She whipped off that scarlet scarf, pushed it into his hand and darted away.

To a Roaring Finish!

“WATCH the chute! Harry Carter coming out on Fool’s Gold!” On the heels of the announcer’s words, the crowd roared. Here was the big day; here came those action-packed moments all had been waiting for. The last battle of the riding giants—the conflict which would mark the winner.

Harry Carter was a good man, a darn good man. He rode Fool’s Gold, that pounding maelstrom of horse-flesh, half-way across the arena. The encouraging roar of the crowd broke into a groan. Carter had lost a stirrup. Still he rode for three more jumps, fighting desperately. Then he went off.

“Somebody wins—somebody loses,” chattered Chick nervously. “And now for Bo Dixon on Red Fire. I hope Red Fire chucks him a mile.”

But Red Fire didn’t. It seemed almost as though the beating he had taken from Lee the day before had shattered something in the big red horse. His bucking lacked the venomous power and wild savagery of the previous day. Bo came through with a clean ride.

“And that,” murmured Lee, hitching up his chaps, “kind of puts it up to me!”

Lee rode Green River with cold, merciless concentration and turned in a mechanically perfect ride. There was a long conference among the judges. They sent for both Lee and Bo.

“You boys have left us in a tight spot, because you’ve both come through with clean shirts. On points, Lee would have to be given first money. But the suggestion has been made that you fight it out—on Fool’s Gold, the toughest bronc of the lot. How about it, Lee?”

Lee shrugged. “Suits me.” He looked at

Bo. “I’d prefer to decide it with a finish fight.”

“That goes with me,” Bo growled.

Drama came close to being fool’s comedy, for Fool’s Gold piled Bo Dixon in two jumps. The abruptness of it dazed the crowd. Bo came up, cursing and raving, yelling for a re-ride.

“They cut the bronc loose before I was set! They tricked me!” he cried.

Ashley waved him away. “Ballard up next,” he said coldly.

The pick-up riders brought Fool’s Gold back to the chutes. Bo’s saddle was stripped off, Lee’s cinched on.

“All ready,” said Riley Hagan.

Lee climbed the fence, settled himself in the saddle. The horse stood like a rock, all the more dangerous because of its couched readiness, its cold fierceness. Two jumps had piled Bo Dixon, who was a twister in any man’s language. What kind of dynamite horse was this, anyhow?

Fool’s Gold had no set system of bucking. The brute weaved, it sun-fished, it swallowed its head so deeply that Lee was looking straight down at the ground. Then the brute began to pound, and the shocks ran up Lee’s spine like the blows of trip-hammers. He felt his head begin to snap and he locked his neck muscles into rigid withes. It was suicide to let your head begin to snap.

A dull roaring was in Lee’s ears. Maybe it was the crowd, maybe it was the rush of blood from shattered arteries. That pounding—Lord! It seemed he was growing numb, that he was whirling through a vast and terrible cataclysm. Blood was pouring from his nose, from his ears. That awful pounding was tearing him apart.

The flesh seemed to melt from his face, leaving it a thin, haggard mask smeared with blood. His eyes were set, staring. He was an automaton, doomed to go on forever, riding this hell-born horse. He began to cough, his lungs shriveling under that relentless, demoniac pounding.

Shadows were about him, shouting at him, trying to drag him from the saddle. Like a man looking at ghosts, Lee fought them off and went on riding.

And now that pounding stopped and the steady scream of the maddened horse faded to coughing grunts, and Fool's Gold was bucking straight ahead, weakening with every jump. And as the pick-up riders drove in still again, Fool's Gold came to a dead stop, head down, foam-flecked flanks heaving. Fool's Gold was whipped, ridden to a finish.

Automatically Lee slid from the saddle. He nearly fell. He clung to Fool's Gold's mane and the crowd had a clear glimpse of him there, a bloody-faced man, leaning against the shoulder of the outlaw horse he had conquered. And the tribute to that terrific ride lay in the fact that men in the crowd were still and white-faced, while women wept openly.

Lee left the horse, walking slowly. That broke the spell. Roar on roar of cheering mounted up into the afternoon sky. They came over the fences after him. They engulfed him, swept him up on their shoulders. It was minutes before Lee could get back on the ground. Finally he was alone, with his own outfit.

"That's the greatest ride I ever saw!" said Riley Hagan, his eyes shining.

Chick blinked moist eyes. "The proudest day of my life, Lee. You sure pack what it takes."

Abruptly Sheriff Buck Sanderson was in front of them, his face grim and harsh. "Come arunnin', you boys!" he rasped. "Don't ask questions—just come along. Quick!"

Sanderson led the way back to town, then down toward the bank. "Chick, you and Boley get down below the bank. Lee, you and Riley stay with me."

AT that moment there sounded a muffled, thudding shot, then several of them. Buck Sanderson began to run, straight for the bank. A rider stepped from the bank door, looked up and down the street, and yelled a warning over his shoulder. Then he threw two guns and began to shoot. Buck Sanderson staggered and went down.

"Get 'em!" he yelled. "Get 'em! It's a hold-up!"

Lee heard Riley shoot and saw the rider in the doorway collapse. And now, out of that bank door, came five more men. Lee was almost dazed to see Slade Dixon in the lead, snarling savagely as he began throwing lead. The last man to come out was Bo, and he and the others carried canvas sacks.

Lee, seeing Chick and Boley begin to shoot, snapped out of his daze. He cut down on Slade Dixon and saw him wilt. One of the others seemed to stumble over nothing and lunge out on his face. Bo and the other two darted into a crush of tied horses and began fighting to get into saddles.

One of them, halfway up, slid back limply. The frightened horses began to rear. A rider spun loose from the crush, bent low in the saddle, shooting with every jump as he spurred his mount to a run. Lee shot twice at him and missed. Then Riley's gun coughed and the fellow came down in a long, tumbling fall. Bo Dixon's hands went up and he came stumbling into the open, yelling for mercy. Grizzled old Boley Oakes darted around the horses and knocked Bo Dixon down with a swinging gun. Then came silence, except for the startled cries of the crowd along the street.

Lee saw Chick come running, knew he was unhurt, so he turned back to Buck Sanderson, who was cursing a shattered leg.

LEE, Riley Hagan and Dave Ashley sat beside Buck Sanderson's bed. "I should have known what that crowd was up to," growled Sanderson. "Those four strangers were all hard-looking hombres, and I saw them and Slade with their heads together three or four times. But it wasn't until it was almost too late that I got the right hunch. I knew they were too many for me alone, so I grabbed you boys to help, Lee, knowing you'd go all the way with me.

"Oh, it was a pretty scheme. What with the 'take' from the rodeo and all the other money coming in from the business men of town, the bank was loaded with easy money. They waited until the last

day's 'take' was being banked. Bo—you heard him tell his side—if he'd won top money, he wouldn't have mixed in the hold-up, but he was crazy mad at losing out there, so he cut in with Slade and the rest. It was seeing Bo hurrying over from the arena that tipped me off. They came darn close to getting away with it."

"Too bad they had to kill Zeb Waters," said Lee.

"He asked for it," Sanderson growled.

"What do you mean?" snapped Ashley.

"He was behind those attempts to get Lee and Chick. He held those notes of Lee's, and was going to call them. But he knew that Lee, before he would give up his range, would strip it if he had to, and pay the notes. On the other hand, if Lee and Chick were wiped out while he still held the notes, he would be able to take over the Tumbling B, lock, stock and barrel.

"Waters also held a mortgage against the Dixons. He put this proposition up to them. If they would put Lee and Chick out of the way, he'd clear that mortgage in payment. Remember? As soon as Lee borrowed that money from Matt Henshaw and paid his notes, Waters foreclosed on the Dixons. They'd been a little too slow in their dry-gulching attempts. That was the scandal I told you would some day startle the range, Lee."

"How did you get wise to all that, Buck?" asked Ashley.

"George Ryan told me about it. He overheard Waters and Slade talking the day Waters foreclosed. They had the devil of a row. Robbing the bank was the way the Dixons planned to get back at Waters. And when Slade had the chance, he cut Waters down."

"A dirty mess!" said Ashley. "Well, from the sound of things, the crowd is making merry anyhow. Lee, you better go down and be lionized. It's coming to you."

"Not me," said Lee. "I'm going to hunt the hay pretty pronto. That Fool's Gold horse made an old man out of me!"

Yet Lee did go down and out onto the hotel porch. He kept in the shadows, content to rest and be quiet. There had been a lot of life poured into the last few hours of this day. And the Ballard star was riding high. First money to a Ballard—

His heart leaped. Was it a tricky shadow, or was there a slim figure—?

"I've been waiting here for you," Barb called.

There was a burst of joyous laughter in the street. Chick and Skeet Henshaw went swinging by, bound for the dance.

Lee turned slowly back. "This is my day—my night, Barb," he said, "but the whole thing is empty unless the big prize is for me."

"The scarf answered that," she said.

Lee took her in his arms. "Then it's first money to a Ballard?" he said huskily.

"Always, Lee—always!"

(The End)





*"Back to the ship—
and make it lively!"
he said to the startled
lascars.*

The Fugitive

THROUGH the steaming, gloomy thickets of the Dutch New Guinea jungle a white man stumbled. Sometimes he tripped and fell to his knees, sobbing. Each time he dragged himself to his feet, it was with a greater effort. His shirt had long ago been torn from his body, his trousers were in ribbons. His lips were

fever-blackened. He kept his right hand pressed over a livid wound in his side. In the other hand he clutched a small sandalwood box, curiously carved, stained now with the sweat and blood from his lacerated hand.

The sun was already setting when he fell full length on his face, his ravaged body shuddering with fever chills and the pulsing agony of his wound. He tried to get

The curse of the silver idol,
like an ill-blowing wind,
brings ships and men to disaster on a tidal wave of horror



Disaster Mans *the* Ship

by **DAVID ALLAN ROSS**

up. On the third try, the sandalwood box slipped from his hand.

He dragged himself to the sandalwood box and picked it up, and then stumbled on the beach.

He had enough strength left in him to crawl around, scraping up bits of driftwood and dried grass, before the sun set. He used the last match from his metal holder to light it, before he collapsed, unconscious. The night closed down, and the leaping fire glowed on the sandalwood case, showing the dark stains of sweat and blood.

ON THE bridge of the steamer *Island Trader*, Captain John Harvey, usually called Viking Harvey because of his powerful build and almost gold hair, paced from wing to wing, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his immaculate uniform jacket. There is a popular tradition that the masters of trampships are by nature untidy and careless. This is very often untrue, and never more so than with Viking Harvey, who had reached the rank of Commander in the Navy before peacetime navy life grew too wearisome, and he had decided to invest an opportune legacy

in a ship of his own. The *Island Trader* was a bluff-bowed, 3000-ton freighter, but he kept her as smart as a navy ship, and he saw to it that both he and his officers always wore clean, neat uniforms when on duty. He often said, "A man who hasn't enough pride in himself and his profession to keep his neck clean and his uniform pressed is a sloppy man. A man who dresses sloppily often thinks sloppily, and there's no place for him on a ship."

And so, as he paced the white boards of his bridge, tropic uniform freshly laundered, uniform cap pulled down over his right eye in the jaunty slant British navy men call the Beatty angle, he would have done credit to the proudest passenger liner afloat. Sylvia Matson, his fiancée, coming topside to suggest that dinner might be a good idea, paused a moment to watch him. She called, "Vik, stop pacing like a caged lion and come below. Dinner's been ready half an hour. The steward's having fits."

He laughed, picking her up in his arms and setting her on top of the flag locker. "All right, be right down. Bit worried about Douglass, though. He should have been here a week ago, unless—"

Sylvia turned to glance at the dark shore-line, with its ominous jungle fringe that stretched back to the distant mountains, endless miles of danger and fever, much of it unexplored. She shivered a little, and said, "A lot of other men have tried for the Silver Idol, and—and haven't come back."

"Yes. But Douglass—damn it, that man could go down into hell, tweak the devil's nose and come back without singeing his eyebrows, if he wanted to. Well—anyway, we might as well have dinner. Come on—" "Tuan."

The Malay quartermaster stood behind him. He turned. "Yes, Serang?"

"A light, Tuan. It is perhaps three, four miles along the beach."

He handed Harvey his binoculars. The Serang had lynx-eyes. Harvey sometimes thought the fellow could see almost as well as an ordinary man with powerful glasses. He turned, peering northward, but

saw nothing until the Serang directed his glasses. Then a little spark of light appeared, wavering uncertainly.

"What the devil—!" Harvey muttered.

"Fire on beach, Tuan. Perhaps Tuan Douglass has got off course?"

Harvey nodded. "It could be that. We'll get under way—see what it is."

He turned to the lascar watchman. "Boy, tell Mr. Crane to come topside at once."

He strode to the engine-room telegraph, shoved the handle down and up again to "Stand by." The gong jangled below, and then again as the engine room answered. He heard Crane running forward, still chewing a mouthful of dinner, shouting orders to the lascar crew. Presently his voice came from the darkness of the foc'sle head.

"Standing by the anchor, sir."

"Carry on!"

THE hissing rattle of the steam windlass, and the groaning grind of the anchor cable as it worked in through the hawsepipe and slithered like a muddy snake down into the chain locker.

"Cable's up and down, sir."

Harvey shoved the telegraph handle to "slow ahead." The ship began to throb gently, her propeller sending swirls of green-white water far astern of her as she moved slowly ahead. The forward motion jerked the anchor flukes from the ground, and the windlass began chattering again. Without turning Harvey said, "Bring her up, Serang."

"Bring her up, Tuan."

Harvey shoved the telegraph to half ahead and said, "Steady!"

The quiet voice from the wheelhouse answered, "Steady, Tuan."

Sylvia loved to watch Vik getting the ship under way. She thought of movies and books she had read about the sea, where everyone dashed madly about yelling "Ay Ay, Sir!" and her lips quirked in amusement as she watched the calm, but somehow constantly exciting, efficiency with which real seamen could start three thousand tons of steel surging ahead.

Harvey had got his glasses out again, and was concentrating on the spark of light. Sylvia slipped off the flag locker and stood beside him.

"Could it be—"

"It's a fire, all right. Might be some natives cooking fish or something. But we'd better investigate." He called to the chief mate, who was coming aft, "Mr. Crane, will you have them stand by the gig? I'm going ashore to investigate that fire."

It was an hour before Harvey returned to the ship. His face was set grimly. He carried something wrapped in a piece of cloth. When he climbed up the jacob's ladder he said curtly, "Mr. Crane, we'll have her under way, please. Lay your course for Manila. I'll come up in a short time."

He went into his cabin with Sylvia and put the little box down on his desk.

"It was Douglass," he said. "Poor devil was dead. But he got what he went after. We buried him and set up a marker, in case some relative wants the—wants him."

He sat down at his desk, studying the carved sandalwood case with interest. The lid was tightly fitted, but neither locked nor hinged. He picked up a paper knife to pry it open, but Sylvia caught his wrist.

"Vik—please don't! It's unlucky. I wish—oh, I wish you'd throw the horrible thing overboard and have done with it!"

Harvey laughed. "Nonsense! That's nothing but native superstition!"

"Maybe," Sylvia answered defiantly, "but you've got to admit it was unlucky for Mr. Douglass, and for everyone else

who ever tried to steal it. Vik darling, at least don't open it until we're ashore. I'm scared of it. I—I've got a feeling—"

He laughed again, but saw that her anxiety was genuine, so he thrust it aside, caught her in his arms and kissed her. "O. K., darlin'. And that reminds me—where's that dinner you were talking of?"

The Death Ship

WHEN Sylvia came on deck the following afternoon, she found the *Island Trader* slogging along at a steady twelve knots, shouldering the ranked waves contemptuously aside with her bluff, stubborn bows. Her officers were gathered on the port bridge wing, watching another ship. She glanced aft and saw a sleek white yacht, some four miles on the beam. For a yacht she was unusually large. She had a clipper bow, a slender bowsprit, and a clean-cut counter which gave her the appearance of riding on, rather than in, the water. Her masts were sharply raked, and so was the tall yellow funnel. She seemed to be holding a steady pace, neither gaining on the *Trader* nor falling astern.

Sylvia went up on the bridge. "That's a beautiful ship," she said to Vik. He nodded shortly. She saw Crane and the third mate, Corey, glance at each other, and wondered.

"That's Bull Mayhew's ship, the *Cygnets*," Vik said. The name meant nothing to Sylvia. Vik hesitated, then added, "I may as well tell you, because I suspect we're going to have a visit from him before long.

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He's the slickest, the most vicious and the toughest man in the Pacific."

"But what would he want with us?" Sylvia demanded.

Vik shrugged. "Douglass told me that, before he came to me, he'd talked to Mayhew about his proposition. Douglass was broke. He wanted to be financed; equipment and all that. He told Mayhew what he was after. Mayhew discussed the whole plan with him, and then turned him down, so he came to me. Douglass didn't tell me that till we were well under way from Manila, or I'd have turned him down too."

Sylvia stared at him. She had never known Vik Harvey to turn down any chance of adventure, no matter how dangerous, especially if there was any chance of profit in it. Seeing her amazement, he grinned a little and added, "Mayhew turned it down for one of two reasons. Either because he was certain the attempt was useless and couldn't possibly succeed, or because he preferred to let someone else take all the risks, and then try and grab off the prize for himself. That's his favorite way of doing things."

ALL that day the two ships kept company, never changing their relative positions. If the *Trader* managed to get on an extra knot, the yacht speeded up. If the *Trader* changed her course, the *Cygnets* followed suit. As the hours passed those on the *Trader* became increasingly uneasy. Vik never left the bridge.

Crane asked, low-voiced, "You think she's after us, sir?"

"Certain of it. She's waiting for dusk."

"Are you going to fight her?"

Vik hesitated. "You can bet your boots I would if—"

Crane nodded. He had never approved of taking Sylvia along anyway. A lone woman aboard a ship is a nuisance, and a woman can make a coward of a man—even Vik Harvey. Crane knew that Vik hadn't approved of it, either. In fact Vik had flatly refused—until, just before the *Trader* sailed, he had seen Captain Cooper's ship, the *Cigarette*, coming up the bay. And Sylvia had said coldly, "Very well, Mr.

Viking Harvey, if you won't take me on a voyage, I'll ask Captain Cooper to take me. I'm sure he'd be glad to—and maybe I'd rather go in a sailing ship!"

And Vik, also sure that Cooper would be glad to take her, had groaned and surrendered. And now this had happened. Now they were going to tangle with Mayhew, by the looks of things, and if Mayhew ever got his hands on Sylvia—well, Vik knew well enough that it was more than a mere rumor, around Hong-Kong docksides, that when opium and gun-smuggling got too hot, Mayhew wasn't above a little white slaving on the side. So he cursed himself for having given in to Sylvia, and he cursed Captain Cooper for having come into Manila when he did, and he even cursed Sylvia a little, because she could think of so many ways of working him around her little finger.

It was, as Vik had expected, shortly before dusk when the *Cygnets* began to show a sweeping bow wave, and smoke billowed in black clouds from her lean funnel. She could do eighteen knots when she was driven. The *Trader's* best was thirteen. Vik, his lips set grimly, served out rifles and ammunition to the officers. It would be worse than useless to arm the native crew. If he did, and they drove the *Cygnets* off, the chances were that the lascars would turn on their officers, take the ship over, loot her and desert to the nearest island. So Vik sent every possible lascar down into the foc'sle and locked them all in. Then he wrapped the sandalwood box up and gave it to Sylvia.

"For once," he said curtly, "you're going to do what you're told. You may not like it, but I am going to put you in the bosun's locker, where we keep the paint and the holystone and all the rest of the odd deck gear. You're going to take the idol with you and keep quiet, and promise me on your honor that you will stay there until the danger is over."

She refused at first. Her eyes sparkled at the prospect of danger, because she had no idea of the sort of danger it would be. When Vik explained, in straightforward terms, she went a little white and gave in.

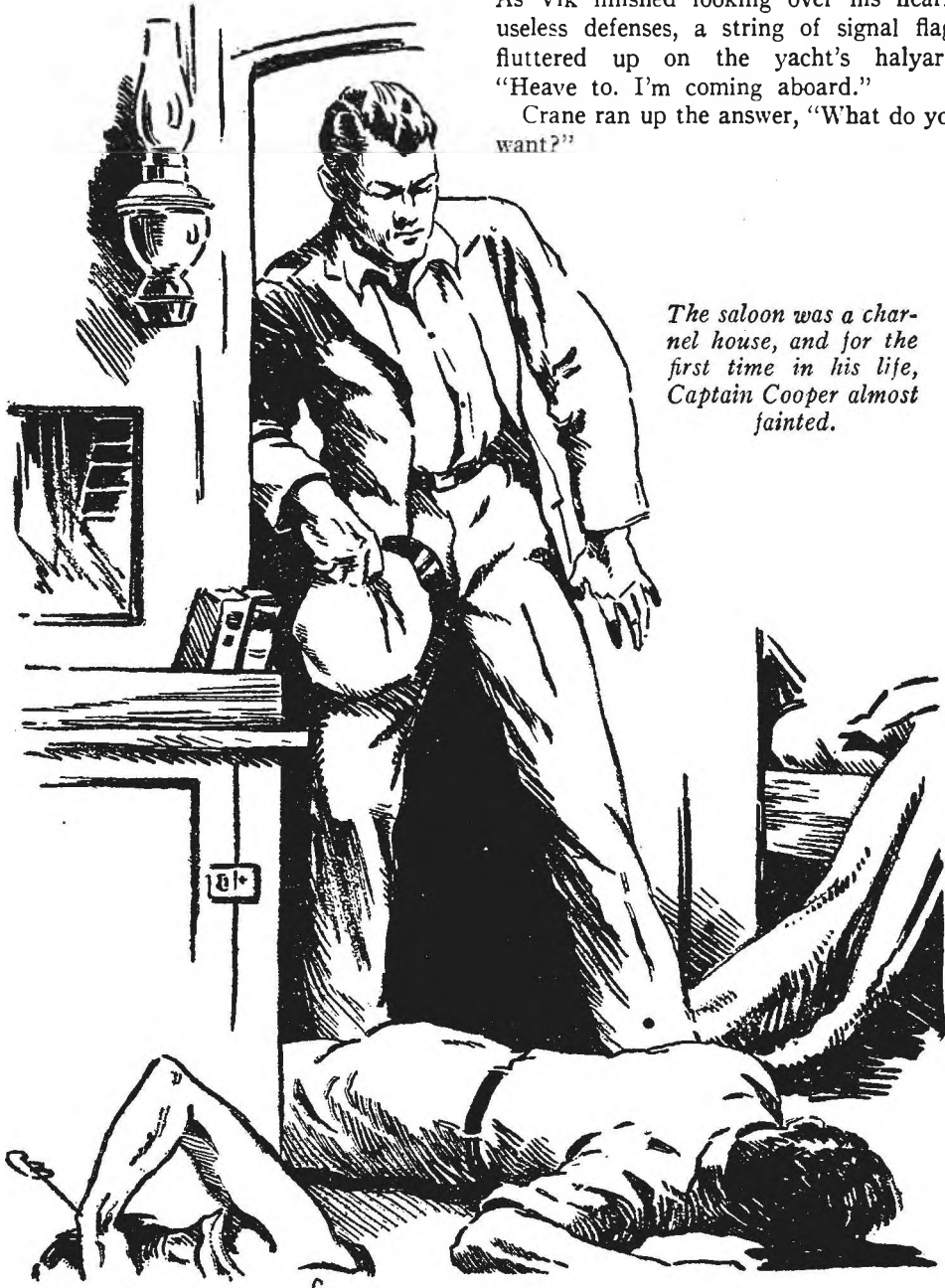
"Which is a good thing," Vik grunted, "because otherwise I'd have lashed you up and put you in there anyway."

WHEN Vik went back on the bridge, the *Cygnets* was no more than half a mile astern, coming up with a bone in

her teeth. The second and third mates and the second and third engineers were crouching behind the midships lifeboats, a barricade of cork lifebelts built up waist high. The only others on deck were Crane and the Serang, who stood quietly at the wheel, one eye on the compass, the other on Vik. As Vik finished looking over his nearly useless defenses, a string of signal flags fluttered up on the yacht's halyard. "Heave to. I'm coming aboard."

Crane ran up the answer, "What do you want?"

The saloon was a charnel house, and for the first time in his life, Captain Cooper almost fainted.



There was no response to that. The heave-to signal continued to fly, and the yacht edged closer. Vik could see Bull Mayhew on the bridge, a tall, powerfully built man with heavy jowls and a thin, down-turned mouth. Then he saw something else, and stiffened. The yacht had high, steel-plate bulwarks on her main deck. There were ports in them that could be covered by steel flaps, but they were not covered now, and behind four of them were deadly-looking machine-guns, each manned by a crew of three Malays. Vik pointed them out to Crane. Then he shrugged.

"We'll heave to. Let him come aboard. He doesn't know that we have the Silver Idol. Maybe we can fool him. We haven't a dog's chance against a machine-gun battery."

Angrily he slammed the telegraph to Stop. Immediately after, the boiling foam under the yacht's counter died as her engines were stopped. The two ships drifted, three hundred yards apart, slowly losing way, and then a boat put off from the yacht. Bull Mayhew sat in the sternsheets, and his crew was armed to the teeth.

Vik met Mayhew outside his cabin, on the lower bridge. For a moment the two measured each other; Vik angry, Mayhew cold, imperturbable as a striking snake.

"No sense wasting words, Harvey," Mayhew said curtly. "I've come for the Silver Idol. You know my reputation. It would be better for you if you hand it over without any trouble."

Vik shook his head, grinning. "Sorry. No can do. I haven't got it."

"Don't be a fool!" Mayhew snapped. His eyes glittered.

"Douglass managed to reach the shore, but he died before we found him. He didn't have the Silver Idol with him. Either he didn't get it, or he lost it on the way back, so you're wasting your time."

Mayhew shook his head. "You're a fool. I was waiting down the coast. I was in touch with the natives. All the jungle knows that the idol has been stolen, and that the man who got it escaped. Whether he died or not I don't know and don't

care. But he had the idol with him when he reached the shore, and you found it."

Vik shrugged. "I haven't got it. What are you going to do about it?"

For a moment Mayhew stared at him. Then he smiled, a cold, icy smile. "Very well, if you want to be stubborn. I'll take this ship apart, plate by plate, if I have to. If the idol isn't aboard, then you've hidden it somewhere, and I'll find ways of making you tell me. I'm an expert at that, Harvey."

He turned to his men and said curtly, "Round up all the crew. Take 'em to the saloon. Maybe we can—"

His face livid with fury, Vik snatched for his gun. "By hell you'll—" he began. One of Mayhew's crew brought a gun-butt down on his head, and he pitched to the deck. Mayhew kicked him in the ribs.

"Lash the fool up!" he said. "Bring that submachine-gun below. If anyone aboard this ship knows where that idol is, I'll have it out of 'em, pronto!"

WHEN Vik opened his eyes it was dark. He was lying outside the door of the chartroom, lashed hand and foot. From the saloon below he could hear voices. Mayhew's, still quiet, as cold as chilled steel. The terrified babel of a lascar deck-hand, "Tuan, Tuan! I know nothing, I swear I know nothing! Tu—"

There was a shot, and the voice broke off in a bubbling scream. Then another. Vik was only half conscious. The sounds merged into a haze of shots, screams, the staccato rattle of a submachine-gun. He wondered if they had found Sylvia, and groaned. Rather than have this massacre go on, he would give up the idol.

He raised his voice, trying to shout, but his voice was only a whisper drowned in the hideous sounds from the saloon below. And then he realized that it was too late, anyway. Once started, Mayhew would have to finish them all. There could be no witnesses left alive. And then he would either take the ship to his secret island headquarters whose whereabouts no one but he knew, and search her, or else sink her. And in either case, Sylvia—

Suddenly his attention was attracted by something toward the horizon, a green, slow-moving light. That meant a ship. If he could only attract their attention in some way—

He thought of a rocket. There were two of them on the bridge, in a rack under the signal locker. There were more in the chartroom. But he would have to get them and set them up, and light a match to touch the fuse off—and he was tied hand and foot.

He stared desperately around. Something—anything—to make a bright light. And then, suddenly, his eyes glittered. On each wing of the bridge there was a flare buoy. They were for emergency night use, in case someone fell overside. They were on a sloping rack, and from each one a lanyard passed to a can of calcium. If you pulled a wood peg out, the heavy ring-buoy slid off the rack, dropping into the sea. Its weight jerked the flare-can away, at the same time pulling out a pin in the can. When the salt water reached the chemical, it burst into a brilliant white flare that could be seen on a clear night for miles. If he could reach that wooden peg—

He rolled over on his face and began dragging himself to the bridge ladder. By getting his feet against the stanchions and his shoulder against the other side of the ladder, he pushed himself, a painful inch at a time, up the ladder. When he got halfway up he slipped and fell down to the bottom. He was afraid that those below would hear him, but the screams and shots continued, drowning out every other noise. On the third try, he reached the bridge.

It had taken him half an hour to climb the ladder. The green light of the distant ship was almost on the bow now. If he didn't hurry, she would be out of sight.

For ten minutes more he shuffled his way along the bridge to the port wing, until the flare-buoy peg was just above his head. Then he pushed himself up. After two useless attempts he got the peg in his mouth and fell backward. He heard the thud and rip as the falling buoy tore the can away, then a splash. Almost instantly

the night was lit up by a brilliant white glare. Almost instantly, too, there were three sharp warning blasts from the yacht's whistle, but Vik didn't hear that. He had fainted.

The Grisly Discovery

CAPTAIN PETER COOPER, owner of the bark *Cigarette*, was a man of confirmed habit, and one who resented any occurrence which interfered with his habits. It was his invariable custom to have dinner alone in the small, walnut panelled saloon of his ship. One of his mates was always on watch at this time, the other asleep, so that Captain Cooper could dine in solemn state, attended by his white-jacketed Malay steward.

Following dinner he lighted a cigar, drank a small whisky-soda, and went on deck for his evening inspection. He nodded to the chief mate.

"Everything all right, Mr. George?"

"Everything's all right, sir."

"I think the wind may come around a little shortly, Mr. George. We must take advantage of every air, you know. Have the watch standing by to trim her the moment that happens. I'm inclined to think that the mainyard could stand a little more on the weather braces."

For a moment he stood, cigar glowing gently, watching the dial of the taffrail log. George, who was ten years older than Cooper and had been in sail all of his life, smiled a little. He looked up at the mizzen truck and winked. The Old Man's habit of treating his officers as though they were children was a well known one. Cooper turned away and inspected the compass card.

"Keep her steady, boy," he admonished the lascar helmsman, and stiffened, listening, while George wondered what was wrong now. Presently Cooper said, "Mr. George, I believe the bower anchor is talking. I think we should have another lashing on it. It would be a very bad thing if we should run into weather and it fetched away."

George listened and presently made out

an intermittent clunking sound. He glanced at the Old Man with frank admiration. How on earth he had so quickly noticed that faint sound among all the noises of a sailing ship under way was more than George could tell. He sighed with relief when Cooper, nodding, went down the poop ladder and began his evening inspection of the ship. Presently he heard his voice from forward.

"Chips! Chips! Will you come here? I told you this morning to replace that screw in this stay plate. Please do it immediately!"

It was half an hour before Cooper, his tour completed, gave a last look at the ship's bellying sails, an instinctive glance to the windward sky, and then went below. White, the second mate, who had come topside for a smoke before taking over the watch, grinned at his superior.

"Old Man been carrying on, sir?"

George laughed. "Same as usual. Better check both anchors as soon as your watch takes over. One of 'em is talking."

They smiled a little a few minutes later when a rhythmic snoring came through the open skylight of the saloon. Both of them had been irritated many times by Cooper's rather old-maidish habits, but they knew that it made for a clean, well run ship, and though he was quick to give either of them a sharp dressing down if they made a mistake, he was never unjust, and was even quicker to praise good work. One could say many things about Captain Cooper, but he was first and last a fine seaman and a first-rate commander.

"What he ought to do," George grumbled good-humoredly, "is get married. When a man makes a wife of his ship, he gets too finicky."

"He's been in love with Sylvia Matson for quite a while, hasn't he?" White asked.

"Yes. But it won't do him any good, I'm afraid. He isn't her speed. She's nuts about Captain Harvey, of the *Island Trader*. He's one of those bucko lads, do-or-die sort. The sort that'd appeal to any girl."

"But the Old Man's a damn sight better sailor," White protested defensively, and George grinned.

"Yes—but a girl doesn't fall in love on account of proficiency in seamanship and navigation, my lad. Remember that when you want to get hitched. Of the two, I'd say the Old Man was the better, but—well, there's eight bells. Guess I'll eat something and turn in for—"

The helmsman broke in softly, "Tuan."

He pointed to starboard, and the two mates saw a brilliant point of light blazing low down on the water. They both grabbed their glasses, inspecting it.

"What do you make of it?" George asked, and White shook his head.

"Can't make anything out, sir. Looks like a flare. It might be a raft or a lifeboat burning a flare. Think we ought to investigate?"

George nodded. "Skip down and wake the Old Man."

RATHER testy at having been awakened, Cooper came onto the poop and demanded, "Well, Mr. George? What's the trouble?"

He inspected the distant light, then shrugged. "We'll have to investigate, of course. There may be human life at stake. Mr. White, it's your watch, I believe. Will you change our course? And, Mr. George, I'll be glad if you will stay on deck. It might be something where we'll need all hands."

The light had gone out before they reached it. But they had marked the position. Only, when they reached it, they could find nothing.

"Perhaps we should fire a rocket, sir," George suggested. "If there are people in an open boat or a raft, it would be hard to see them."

"The moon is coming up," Cooper answered, "and anyone in the vicinity would see our lights. I think we'll stand by for a while until there is a little light."

George was about to answer, when an exclamation from the second mate interrupted him.

"Lord, sir, there's something almost dead ahead of us! Something big! Looks like a steamer without lights!"

Both men turned to peer ahead, and

then Cooper snapped, "Hard aport! Lively there, or we'll be into her!"

The gear rattled and snapped as the ship's head swung. Fortunately they had the wind on the beam, giving her a lively helm, for the slender sailing ship barely slithered by the looming bulk of the *Island Trader* as she wallowed, entirely dark, in the trough of the swell. As they passed, Cooper grabbed a speaking trumpet and roared, "Steamer ahoy!"

There was no answer. The three officers stared at one another. From for'ard came the excited but subdued chattering of the watch.

"That's very odd," Captain Cooper muttered. "What do you make of it, Mr. George?"

"She's abandoned all right, sir. But I can't see why. She didn't seem to be down in the water at all. Her engines may have broken down, of course."

"We'll have to go aboard," Cooper said. "Mr. White, will you put her aback? Mr. George, have the gig made ready. I will go aboard myself. I saw a jacob's ladder hanging overside as we passed."

Somewhat gingerly and with a strangely uneasy feeling tingling in his spine Cooper climbed up the swaying ladder to the ship's deck. When he reached it he paused and called, "Hello! Is there anyone aboard?"

Then he started, noticing for the first time, as he switched a torch on, the ship's name painted on a ring-buoy.

"Lord," he muttered, "it's Vik Harvey's ship! What in the world—?"

He hailed again and, getting no answer, proceeded gingerly forward, noticing as he did that all the ship's lifeboats were still in their davits, and not even swung out, as they would be if the crew had anticipated any danger that would cause them to abandon ship. He entered the port alleyway in the forward deckhouse and found a light switch. The lights were in perfect order. He went forward, passing the cabins of the chief mate and chief engineer, whose doors were open, showing them empty but disordered. There was a queer, cloying smell, an unpleasant one that started the shivers down his spine again.

At the end of the alleyway a door opened into the saloon. Captain Cooper switched on the saloon lights, and for the first time in his life he almost fainted.

THE saloon was a charnel house. The twisted bodies of six white men and at least thirty lascar deckhands were piled against the fore bulkhead, and pools of blood lay on the deck. Everything was scarred and chipped from bullets, and both forward ports were shot out. Drawers, lockers and cabinets had been ripped open and their contents hurled on the deck. Captain Cooper noticed that Harvey's body was not among the heap, and with a green face and bulging eyes he closed the door and went out on deck, gulping lungfuls of fresh air.

"My God!" he muttered. "My God, who could have done a thing like that?"

He was glad that he had left the boat's crew in the gig. Lascars are troublesome when frightened. He went up to the lower bridge. The door of the captain's cabin was open, and the cabin looked as though it had been wrecked by an explosion. As in the saloon, drawers, closets, even the bunk had been torn open. Someone had ripped the pillows apart and gashed the mattress, and the ship's safe door hung ajar; its papers, the captain's log, and the cash box all tossed to the deck. Cooper picked up the cash box. It was locked, and no effort had been made to open it. He stared round him in bewilderment, and then went up on the navigating bridge.

Here nothing appeared to have been disturbed, save the flag locker was open and some of the flags were missing. He glanced up at the halyards and was able to make out some bunting, but what it read he could not tell. He looked at the deck log in the wheelhouse. There were only the usual entries; the noon position and weather, laconic penciled notes of the ship's routine affairs, except the last one, which read "19.33. Stopped engines. Ordered hove-to by armed yacht."

More amazed than ever, Captain Cooper glanced around the wheelhouse. He noticed the light switches, and switched on the

ship's steaming lights. It made him feel better to have lights on her, and it would prevent another ship blundering on her in the dark. It was as he was leaving the bridge that he noticed that the port flare-buoy was missing. Someone, then, had been alive enough within the last hour to slip the buoy, for it was only an hour since they had sighted the flare.

Cooper went back to the main deck. He walked slowly forward and glanced into the fo'c'sle. It was empty, but here at least things were in order. Bewildered and uneasy, Cooper started back. He had concluded that there was nothing to do save hoist a warning signal aboard the steamer and leave her lights burning, so that other vessels could stay clear of her, and then leave her and her ghastly cargo to their own devices until he could either report direct to the authorities, or get in touch with some passing vessel that carried wireless. In the meantime he would leave a note in the wheelhouse, in case some other vessel stopped. He would have liked to salvage the ship himself, but it would be hopeless to attempt it with a sailing ship.

As he was passing the foremast, his foot slipped and he almost tumbled to the deck. He turned his flash on, and jumped when he saw a trail of red seeping from the door of the bo'sun's locker, a large metal cabinet built around the mast from the deck to just under the heel of the derrick booms. For a moment he hesitated to open the door, wondering what fresh horror he would see. Then he shook himself and pulled the door open.

Sylvia Matson lay crumpled inside the locker, a wooden box clutched in her hand. From shoulder to hip her left side was stained red, and a long trail oozed out under the doorway.

Horried, Peter Cooper stood there, unable to move. Then he stooped and touched the red trail, sniffing at his finger. It was paint, not blood. He saw the overturned can behind the girl's body. Quickly he picked her up and carried her out, taking the little box along. She must have fainted, either from fright or from the fumes of paint and oil in the locker, and

overturned the half empty can as she fell. He could see now that she was breathing. He ran aft with her and carried her gently down to the waiting boat.

"Back to the ship—and make it lively!" he said to the startled lascars. And while they rowed he sat in the sternsheets, by the faint light of the boat lantern, staring down into the white face of the only girl that, in all his quiet, methodical life, he had ever loved.

Forerunners of Evil

HER face gray from the strain of her ordeal, Sylvia finished telling Captain Cooper what she knew of the happenings aboard the *Island Trader*. When she stopped, the captain nodded.

"And that small case you had with you—that is the Silver Idol you refer to? I've heard of it."

He picked up the sandalwood case, which still bore the dark stains of blood and sweat, and began to open it. Sylvia cried out, "Peter! No—don't! Throw it overboard! Burn it—anything! But get rid of it somehow!"

Cooper smiled. "Surely you don't believe those silly native superstitions!"

She stared at him, her eyes still dark with horror. "Not believe? What happened to all the men who tried to steal it? What happened to Paul Douglass? What happened to—to the *Island Trader*?"

She pressed her hands over her ears, shuddering violently. "Peter, you didn't hear it—the shots, the ghastly screams of the dying men. I heard it—I heard it all! I begged Vik to get rid of the horrible thing, but—"

Cooper nodded. "Of course I understand. You didn't see what—what happened to Captain Harvey?"

She shook her head, and despite the fact that for the last ten years he and Harvey had been bitter rivals, both for trade and, lately, for Sylvia, he was touched by the expression in her eyes.

"Bull must have been looking for this idol," he said. "When he didn't find it—and our coming probably scared him away,



the sandalwood box, examining it curiously. The intricate designs on the box meant nothing to him. Presently he took out his pocket knife and pried the lid off. Inside was a silver idol about six inches high. Taking it out to inspect it, he saw that in some respects it resembled a Buddha, but, like the Indian Siva, it had six arms. The eyes appeared to be sapphires,

since we might have been a naval vessel, for all he knew—he probably took Harvey with him, hoping to make him tell where the idol is. I wonder what there is about the confounded thing that makes people willing to risk their necks on account of it?”

He saw that Sylvia was exhausted and on the verge of collapse, and took her to the cabin the steward had prepared for her. For a moment he held her hand. “Don’t worry, dear. Things will turn out right.”

“Vik—in that man’s hands—” she whimpered. He patted her hand.

“Harvey can look after himself. Don’t you worry.”

“But we must find him! Save him!”

Cooper nodded. “Yes, of course we must, as soon as we get to Manila.”

Back in the saloon, Cooper picked up

One of them raised his arm for a blow. Before he could deliver it, Cooper grabbed the upraised arm and slammed the native on the jaw.

and a ruby was set in the rotund silver belly. It was a pretty piece of workmanship, but it felt light, and save as a curio Cooper could see nothing about it to excite such interest as might cause a man to risk death or torture. Cooper had heard of the thing before now—the Silver Idol of the Korui, it was known as. Legend said that

at the time of the British conquest of India, the high priest of an obscure Indian tribe had escaped with the idol to New Guinea and, penetrating far into the wild inland of the island, had re-established his religion among one of the native tribes there. And now, without his wishing it, the thing was here in the saloon of the *Cigarette*, and he wondered what to do with it. Native superstitions meant nothing to him, but he did feel that, since it was not his property, he would rather it was somewhere else, and in other hands.

As he sat there looking at it, he had an uneasy feeling. He turned suddenly and saw the Malay steward standing at the door, staring with bulging eyes at the gleaming silver thing.

"What do you want, boy?" he demanded.

The steward hesitated before he said, "You wish for something, Tuan?"

"No. You know damned well I'd ring if I wanted anything!" Cooper answered. "Get about your business!"

The steward bowed and disappeared, but Cooper noticed the queer gleam in his eyes. For a moment more he contemplated the idol, with its vindictive, leering grin. Then he shrugged and took it into his cabin to lock it in the safe. When he reached Manila he would turn it over to the authorities and let them worry about it. In the meantime—

IT WAS about three in the morning that something aroused Cooper from deep sleep. He lay still in his bunk for a moment. His first instinct as a sailor was to listen. There were no unusual sounds. He could tell by the feel of his ship that she was moving easily under a steady beam wind, and he could hear the quiet, unbroken tread of George's pacing, which meant that everything was well on deck. He was about to switch on the light and take a look at the tell-tale compass screwed to the deck above his bunk, when he realized that someone was in his cabin. He could hear quick, uneven breathing.

As silently as possible, he pushed the bedclothes back. He drew his legs up and

crouched. Cooper was a quiet, staid man, but he was powerful, and more than one man had been astonished—and dismayed—by the speed and force with which he could move and act when the need arose. Crouched now in the bunk, he snapped, "Who's there?"

For a moment there was dead silence, and for some reason he was not able to account for, Cooper hunched himself and jerked sideways. He heard a dull thud, and knew that it was a knife buried in the wooden bulkhead behind the bunk. Then he sprang—arms widespread—and caught a thin, wiry arm.

"Got you, by gosh!" he snapped—but he spoke too soon. The arm slipped from his grasp. The door opened and for a moment he caught a glimpse of a figure silhouetted against the alleyway light. Then the door slammed to. He leaped for it, wrenching it open, and ran out. There was no one in sight. He bolted out on deck. There was still no one to be seen. He climbed up on the poop. George stared at the sight of the Old Man clad in pajamas, his hair disheveled and an angry gleam in his eyes.

"Mr. George—did you see someone come out of the alleyway?" he demanded.

"No, sir. Is there something wrong?"

Cooper was about to tell him, but noticed that the native helmsman was listening intently. He shook his head. "No. Just thought I heard someone snooping around. Maybe I was dreaming. How is she sailing, Mr. George?"

"Splendidly, sir. But the glass is dropping a bit."

"Well, maybe it's nothing to worry about. Rouse me if there's any serious change in the weather, Mr. George. Good night."

George said, "Good night, sir. Sorry you were disturbed." When Cooper had padded below in his bare feet and flapping pajamas, George scratched his head, then shrugged. It was none of his business if the Old Man ate too much and had nightmares afterward. But down in his cabin Cooper was inspecting a wicked-looking knife that was embedded an inch in the

wood paneling, just about the spot where his head would have been if he hadn't ducked.

He inspected the cabin and the safe, opening the latter to make sure that nothing had been tampered with. He could see nothing touched. On impulse he took out the Silver Idol and examined it again. Its malignant leer seemed to have increased. It seemed to be mocking him. Cooper, an uneasy feeling down his spine, said, "Hmph! The electric light plays tricks. Damn the confounded, pagan thing, anyway!" He locked it up again, made sure his door was bolted, and went back to sleep.

FOR three days the barometer had been steadily dropping. Usually, in the waters of the Banda Sea, that meant a sudden, savage storm, but no storm appeared. Instead the sky seemed to grow hotter, the wind thicker. George said to the second mate, "You'd think the sun had melted and run all over the sky. It's like living under a heated brass bowl."

"And breathing pea soup," White added. "I never breathed such heavy air as this."

Cooper came on deck. Sweat was rolling down his face, staining his collar, although he had put a clean shirt on thirty minutes earlier. He glanced uneasily to windward. The sky was copper-colored, and seemed to quiver. He had seen similar skies in the Indian Ocean before a typhoon, but the general conditions now did not indicate a typhoon, and this was not the Indian Ocean. He almost wished it was. A good sailor with a well-found ship under him does not really fear a storm so long as he has plenty of deep water around him. It is neither sea nor wind he fears, but land. And there was land all around the *Cigarette*; reefs, islands, shoals. No sailor, especially in a sailing vessel, will willingly put his ship near a lee shore when heavy weather threatens; but whichever way the *Cigarette* might turn in these waters, there would be a lee shore under her.

"The barometer has fallen another six points, gentlemen," Cooper announced to his officers. "Mr. George, I think we will

snug the ship down. I do not like the looks of the sky. We'll have her down to jib, upper topsails and to'gansls. It is better to lose a few miles than to lose your masts. If anything further develops, we'll have both watches standing by. And I'll be glad if you will have the gig and the dinghy swung inboard and lashed fast."

His orders were carried out. The ship, in a light air and a heavy, oily swell, had been moving uneasily. She rode more easily now, but made little way. The mate and the second mate stood together near the binnacle, while Cooper, who made it a principle neither to sit down nor to lean against anything while he was on deck, stood bolt upright by the taffrail, his eyes traveling constantly over the rigging. Once he said quietly, "Mr. George, I think the fore tops'l braces could be taken in a little."

And while George was attending to it, Cooper said severely to the second mate, "Always remember that the more taut you hold your running gear when heavy weather is coming the better off you are, my boy."

"Yes, sir, I'll remember it," White said respectfully, though that was a principle he had learned during his first year of apprenticeship. He added, "Do you think we'll have a blow, sir?"

"You never know what you'll have when you're at sea, Mr. White," Cooper answered. "Your only safeguard is to be prepared for everything. Then you will never be taken aback."

White turned away to hide a little smile. He couldn't remember how many times he had heard that remark. Presently George walked over to Cooper. He said, "Sir, have you noticed that for the last few days there seems to be something about the deckhands? They seem restless and uneasy. They've been pretty willing most of the voyage, but now they don't seem to obey orders the way they should."

"I have noticed it," Cooper answered. "You should always remember, however—"

He broke off. Sylvia was coming on the poop.

FOR the past three days, Sylvia had remained almost constantly in her cabin. Cooper had heard her sometimes, usually at night, sobbing, but he had felt it better to leave her alone. He knew that she was in a state of anxiety over the fate of Vik, and also suffering from shock because of her terrible experience aboard the *Island Trader*. She looked very pale, but well under control, as she walked slowly across the poop toward him.

"Peter," she said, "I have a feeling that something dreadful is going to happen."

Cooper shook his head, frowning.

"Nonsense! What could happen?"

"I—I don't know," she admitted, "only—oh, Peter, I wish you'd get rid of that terrible idol!"

The passion of her voice was so great that it startled him. He said quickly, "Hush! I don't wish the native crew to know anything about—"

She smiled bitterly. "Don't fool yourself, Peter. They know already. I've been in my cabin these last days and I suppose they've forgot about me. I heard the cook and the steward talking about it outside my cabin. They said that it is death to all of us to have the idol aboard. They know all about it."

Cooper frowned. "You mustn't listen to native chatter. They're merely superstitious savages—"

Sylvia broke in passionately, "I don't care! There's something about that thing—it's brought nothing but death and misery to everyone who's touched it!"

She hesitated, breathing hard, her eyes intense. Suddenly she grabbed his arm. "Peter—you love me, don't you? Oh, you don't have to deny it, I know you do. I'm—I'm sorry it couldn't be different—but if you really do love me, Peter, get rid of that idol. Throw it overboard, or take it back to New Guinea—do anything, but get rid of it!"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry. It isn't my property, and I have no right to dispose of it. I'll have to turn it over to the authorities in Manila."

She stared at him helplessly. Then she laughed almost hysterically. "All right!

But you'll wish you had, before you're through with it!"

THE storm hit them that evening. It was like no storm Peter Cooper had ever seen before. It seemed to hit two ways at once. It came screeching out of the east, shifted to south and then veered with almost breathless speed back to northeast. At the first wild blow the jib carried away, and two men were lost overboard trying to set a storm jib. They got in the fore and main to'gallants and the main topsails, but the fore topsail carried away like a woman's handkerchief. An hour later the spanker braces parted, although the gear was almost new. The spanker boom swung wildly, smashing against the mizzen backstays. The jar caused the topping lift to part and the heavy boom swung down, smashing the wheel, the binnacle, and the head of the helmsman. With the wheel gone, the ship yawed wildly and fell off in the trough of the sea, rolling so badly the officers feared she would snap her masts off.

Cooper yelled, "Mr. George, get a lash- ing on that boom before it wrecks the ship!" But that was easier said than done, for the boom, jammed for a moment against the steering gear casing, broke adrift again and thumped around like a live thing gone wild.

While they fought with it, trying to get lines around it and make it fast to the deck, a sea pooped the ship and carried another lascar and the third officer away. At eight bells of the middle watch the carpenter fought his way to the poop. Throwing his arms around Cooper to keep his balance, he yelled, "Sir, the fore-hold shows two feet of water!"

Cooper nodded and yelled, "Thank you, Chips! Keep a check on the well and let me know if the water gains!" He knew that there was nothing to do, in the present state of things. It would be useless to try to work the pumps.

At five bells in the graveyard watch, the storm died as sharply as it had started, leaving the battered ship plunging wildly in a sullen swell.

A Ship Comes to Grief

WITH the abrupt passing of the storm, the wind died out completely and the sun rose on an oily sea that heaved in sullen, mountainous swells. The sky was cloudless, the sun more hot than ever, and the ship, rudderless, rolled with a wild, reeling motion that set her standing gear to snatching and made a constant chattering rattle in her running gear.

As Cooper and George stood on the poop surveying the damage, a heavy sheave block hurtled down and crashed into the deck a scant foot from where Cooper stood. They both looked upward. There was no one up there. The block had just parted and fallen. White-faced, Mr. George cleared his throat and said, "Sir, there is a feeling aboard ship about that idol Miss Sylvia brought over from the *Trader*. The natives believe that its possession means certain disaster. They are all jittery and sullen."

Cooper snorted. "Rot! Don't tell me you subscribe to those stupid superstitions, Mr. George!"

George glanced at the sheave block, which had splintered a teak deckplank as though it was matchwood. He licked his lips and said, "No, sir. Of course not. Only—"

"Bunk, Mr. George!" Cooper said emphatically. "We have work to do. Now that poor Mr. White is—is not with us, I shall take over his watch. We will first get the spanker boom in order. Have both watches out to clear up, rig another topping lift and get braces on the boom. After that we'll see what can be done with the steering gear."

Despite his brusque dismissal of "native superstitions," Cooper had noted the change in the lascar deckhands. Usually a cheerful lot, as happy-go-lucky as children, they went around sullenly now, gathering in little groups to mutter among themselves, often glancing aft at their officers with a strange expression—whether fear or hate Cooper could not tell. But he was too busy to worry about such things. When they had the spanker boom rigged,

they turned their attention to the steering gear. It was hopelessly wrecked.

"I see nothing for it," Cooper said, "but to rig a jury rudder of some sort."

The storm had started some seams forward, and she was still taking water in number one and two holds, though not so fast that the pumps could not keep it down. But the violent motions she made, helpless and rudderless in the extraordinary swells, were working the seams more and more, and the whole vessel groaned and creaked under the strain. Cooper expected every minute to hear some of the overstrained back-stays part, and if those went, the masts would go and the ship would be a helpless hulk.

With four men working in relays on the pump, others doing what they could to tauten the rigging, and the rest working on a makeshift rudder, the day and the night passed. A blazing, savage sun made them feel they were in an oven, but night brought no relief. A light mist obscured the stars and seemed to keep the heat down close to the water. Even the lascars, accustomed to heat, began to feel it, and two of them dropped at the pump.

The swells died away on the second day after the storm. They left the sea as smooth as a mirror, simmering under the torrents of heat from a glassy sky. Now the ship lay utterly motionless, save for a slight and invisible drift on some current. They had got a clumsy jury rudder rigged, but it was no use, because the ship did not have steerage way. Not so much as a capful of wind could be felt, nor the slightest catspaw seen on the glossy surface of the sea.

When the cook dumped his swillpail upside, the garbage floated alongside the ship, and presently sharks' fins began to slide through the water around them, snatching at the refuse. When there was none, they waited patiently, their fins slowly cutting the water, their bodies ominous, wicked shadows below the surface. Their presence made the lascars even more afraid, because they thought the sharks were spirits of ill-omen.

The crew was all on edge.

ON THE fifth day of calm, Cooper came topside, drenched with sweat, as were all of them, and saw the watch idling in the waist. There was a feeling of tension over the whole ship. George was leaning disconsolately against the rail, staring gloomily toward the horizon. His eyes ached, and his tongue felt thick in his mouth. No matter how much lime-flavored water he drank, it didn't seem to quench his thirst. The water was warm, and tasted like old brass screws. He felt weak and feverish, and his head throbbed. He started when Cooper called sharply, "Mr. George, this is no time for the men to be idling. There is nothing worse than idleness under such conditions as these. Turn them to!"

"Doing what, sir?" George inquired, with the nearest approach to sarcasm he had ever employed with his superior.

"Anything. Set them to painting. Have them check all the gear. Have one of the anchor cables snaked out and let them chip the rust off. The main thing, Mr. George, is to keep them busy. If we don't, we'll have trouble with them."

He had barely finished speaking when the murmur of voices from forward was broken by an angry cry. The officers saw the group of lascars separate, leaving two of them glaring at each other. They were snarling in Malayan, and suddenly one of them snatched out a knife. Instantly the other followed, and the two crouched, facing each other, watching for an opening.

"Watch the poop, Mr. George!" Cooper snapped. He bolted down the ladder and sprinted forward. As he did, one of the two men leaped. His blade flashed. The other man ducked, lunged, missed. Again they sparred, and again one of them raised his arm for a blow. Before he could deliver it, Cooper reached them, grabbed the upraised arm and slammed the native on the jaw. The other screamed and leaped at him. Cooper saw the knife flicker. He dodged and felt a sting on his right shoulder before he caught the man about the waist, jerked him off the deck and hurled him against the bulwark. The knife clattered to the deck, and the man went limp.

The others were muttering again, glar-

ing at Cooper, several of them handling their knives. Pretending not to see that, Cooper said curtly, "Take these two below and duck their heads in a bucket. Then get busy snaking the anchor chain. Look lively!"

He faced them all, calmly contemptuous. For a moment he thought the whole gang would fly at him. Then some of them picked up the unconscious men and shuffled forward, and the others went sullenly to work. With a sigh of relief Cooper walked aft again.

Sylvia had come up. She was very pale. There were dark rings under her eyes, for, like the others, the oppressive heat prevented her from sleeping much. She said, "Peter, if this lasts any longer I—I'll go crazy. I can't stand it! I'll—I'll start screaming, or something!"

Her voice broke a little. She glared around, clenching her fists, and panted, "Never moving an inch! Nothing but sea and heat and glare all day long! We—we'll never escape! We'll all die!"

"Sylvia dear!" Cooper said quietly. "You're upset, that's all. You had better—"

She leaped at him then and started beating at him with clenched fists. "Upset! You fool! I tell you it's that idol! You don't believe me! You know so much, you think you're so smart, and you won't believe 'silly native superstitions!' Don't you understand? There's a curse on us! There's a curse on us, I tell you! We're all going to die!"

Her voice rose and then she began to laugh. Cooper realized that she was hysterical—that the strain of her experience, her worry over Harvey's fate, added to the maddening stillness and heat of their present situation, had unnerved her. And he knew of only one way to stop her. He caught her wrist and slapped her cheek sharply, three times. She gasped, choking, and her knees buckled. Cooper lifted her up and carried her below.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I had to do that to make you stop your hysteria. That will only exhaust you more. Try to rest now."

She began to sob quietly, like a child. 'Oh, Peter, what'll happen to us? What's happened to Vik? I'm afraid. *Afraid!*'

She—and even Cooper—might have been yet more afraid if they had known that, barely over the horizon, a slim white yacht streamed restlessly, quartering the ocean in her search for the *Cigarette*—and the idol.

ON THE sixth day the serang came to Cooper and said, "Tuan, many in the foc'sle are sick," so Cooper hurried forward.

In the foc'sle, five men lay in their berths, eyes glittering with fever, lips swollen, skin strangely splotched. Cooper's heart sank. He recognized the symptoms. Others of the watch below were sitting listlessly around. He went aft again and spoke to George.

"Four of the men in my watch are down with cholera, Mr. George. Have you had any experience in handling that disease?"

George went a shade paler. "No, sir. All I know is that it is highly infectious and invariably fatal. One of the worst there is."

"Chips tells me that the water has gone bad. I can't understand why. I have ordered the cook to boil every drop of water before it is used. We'll isolate the sick men in the foc'sle. The rest will have to sleep on deck. It will be no hardship under present conditions. I'm afraid the men in the foc'sle won't live long. If we can isolate the disease—"

In the morning three more men showed symptoms of cholera and were sent to the foc'sle. During the noon watch, one man dropped in his tracks, and another went berserk and tried to knife George, who was forced in self-defense to shoot the man. And still the ship drifted aimlessly, imperceptibly, on a torturing, unbroken expanse of sea that now resembled molten lead rather than water.

Shortly before noon George rubbed his aching eyes, picked up his glasses, and inspected a distant mark on the northwesterly horizon. He called to Cooper through the open skylight, "Sir, there's an island ahead of us."

"How does it bear, Mr. George?"

"On the port bow, sir."

Though the log showed a zero reading, and there was not so much as a ripple on the sea, the ship had been making a northwesterly drift of about two knots an hour while she lay becalmed. Cooper believed the island to be one of the smaller ones that fringe the Molucca group. For hours the two officers watched the nearing island.

"If we are able to get close enough," Cooper said, "we'll anchor, clean our tanks, obtain fresh water and see what we can do for any of the men in the foc'sle who are still alive."

As the ship approached the thickly wooded island, however, it was apparent that she would be carried past well to the east of it. They could clearly see a sandy beach enclosing a small bay, and what appeared to be the outlet of a stream. The mere sight of it almost drove George mad.

Sylvia, coming topside for the first time that day, knelt with her hands on the rail and wept. Cool forests, fresh cold water, perhaps ripe fruit—a change from the ghastly monotony of the ship with her hot pitch and spar varnish—the mere thought of them made the girl want to leap overboard and swim toward the tempting shore.

Presently Cooper said, "The current will carry us at least two miles east of the island."

George nodded. "Yes, sir. I've been afraid of that."

And a few minutes later Cooper said, "There is nothing for it but to have the boats out and tow her inshore. You take one boat, Mr. George. I'll have Chips take the other. Will you assemble both watches and have the boats and towing lines made ready?"

FOR more than two hours the sweating, almost naked crews of the two lifeboats labored at the oars. It was cruel work, even for natives, under that wickedly blazing sun, but there was nothing else to do. For all their efforts, the ship barely moved athwart the current, and for a while

Cooper thought she would not make it. Then he saw that she was free, and slowly drawing toward the island. He sent the serang up to the foretop to watch for possible reefs, and the man had barely reached the top when he cried out sharply, "Tuan—the boats!"

Cooper seized his glasses and focussed them on the boats. He saw that the lascars had dropped their oars. George was standing up in the stern sheets. He had unshipped the tiller handle and was holding it up like a club. He appeared to be shouting something. Suddenly Cooper saw a momentary glint, like sunlight reflecting on bright steel. George threw up his arms and toppled upside. At the same moment there was a shout from the other boat. Chips was putting up a fight, but in a moment he had gone overboard too, a knife in his heart. And before Cooper could do anything, the lascars had cut the towropes and were rowing frantically for the island.

For the first time during all the anxiety and tortures of the last week, Captain Cooper felt like giving up. The loss of his chief mate, following that of the second, stunned him. George had served with him for seven years, and in his own way, Cooper had been fond of him.

As he saw the two lifeboats rowing toward the island, the oars lashing under the drive of the terrified, superstition-ridden lascars who believed the *Cigarette* accursed, he turned and walked slowly aft to the taffrail. For at least ten minutes he stood there, stiffly erect, staring with unseeing eyes at the unbroken wastes of water, and for the first time in his life he almost hated the sea.

He was interrupted by a hand on his arm. Sylvia stood beside him, and as he looked at her he realized that she was close to breaking. Her eyes burned and her lips twisted queerly. When she spoke her voice was low, but thin and cracked.

"Now will you listen to me?" she said. "Now will you get rid of that horrible thing before we all die? We're all going, one by one. That's true, Peter. It'll be you or me next!"

Cooper shook his head. His jaw set stubbornly. "No, I won't get rid of it," he said. "I won't give in to crazy superstitions. What's happened to us could have happened to any ship. We'll pull out of it, if we keep our heads. We'll see Manila Bay yet, but we have to keep our bearings. Now you lie down and rest—"

For a moment she glared at him like a wild animal, then she turned and walked away, her feet dragging. Cooper stared at the island. The boats had been beached now, and their crews had disappeared. He knew he would never see them again. They would prefer to die of starvation rather than set foot aboard the *Cigarette* again.

Cooper noticed, however, that what towing they had done had served its purpose. Swung toward the island, and clear of the current that would have carried her east of it, the *Cigarette* was slowly setting in toward the sandy beach.

Half an hour later Cooper went up on the foc'sle head and let go the anchor in four fathoms of water so still and clear that, when the clouds of sand and streaming bubbles had gone, he could see the anchor as it lay half buried in the white sand of the bottom.

He called the serang, and between them they swung out the dinghy and lowered it. He went to where Sylvia sat, listless now, her eyes glazed, and took her hand.

"Come," he said gently. "We'll go ashore for the night."

Without looking at him she got up and walked as though in a trance to the dinghy. Before he got in, Cooper stood motionless, looking his ship over. She was like a dead thing, who had once been so gallant. And of all her complement of forty-seven, only four remained: himself, the serang, the Filipino cook, and the Malay steward.

Bull Mayhew Strikes

CAPTAIN COOPER returned to the *Cigarette* with the serang in the morning, having spent the night ashore, and leaving Sylvia in charge of the steward and the cook. With cloths around their faces, wet down with a carbolic solution,

they opened up the foc'sle. The seven ill men were all dead. Having instructed the steward to keep Sylvia away, they spent the morning taking the bodies ashore, then built a huge pyre and burned them. In the afternoon they drained the water tanks, set sulphur and phosphorus candles in the foc'sle and—as a precaution—in the saloon, sealed them up and left her overnight.

"I think," Cooper said, "that we'll have wind by morning."

"Four men and a girl can't manage a big ship like that," Sylvia said.

"Four men can do anything, if they set their hand to it," Cooper retorted grimly. "Tomorrow morning we'll fill the tanks, and as soon as we get the wind we'll kedge her out and set as much sail as we can."

Unfortunately, Cooper had not figured on a number of things. Asleep on blankets beside the stream, none of the four noticed the lights of a ship stealing cautiously shoreward, nor heard the roar as her anchor was let go. Nor did they hear the creak of boat tackles as a lifeboat was lowered. When Cooper, stirring restlessly on his blanket, suddenly opened his eyes, the first thing he saw in the brilliant moonlight was the bulky figure of Bull Mayhew, and behind him a dozen heavily armed men.

"Captain Cooper?" Mayhew said. "I've been looking for you—and for that girl."

Cooper scrambled to his feet. He glanced out to sea and saw the lights of the yacht riding at anchor a hundred yards beyond the *Cigarette*.

"Looking for me?" he repeated, bewildered, and Mayhew nodded grimly.

"We returned to the *Trader* after you had been aboard her," he said. "I found the note you very kindly left in the wheelhouse, saying that you had boarded the ship, taken off a girl, and that you were going to notify the authorities."

His thin lips twitched into the nearest approach to a smile he ever permitted himself. Cooper, who was a brave man, still felt a little shiver of horror when he realized that this was Bull Mayhew, who had been responsible for the massacre of the entire crew of the *Trader*.

"As it turns out," Mayhew added drily, "it won't be necessary to notify the authorities. I'm afraid the *Island Trader* will be listed at Lloyd's as missing, from now on."

"You mean you sank her?" Cooper demanded.

"We put a charge of gun cotton in her midship tanks. It was so effective that she sank within ten minutes after the explosion."

He poked the sleeping serang and the others with his foot. As they awoke, staring in frightened astonishment, Mayhew's men put lashings on their wrists and led them off.

They had just gone when Sylvia awoke. She screamed and sprang to her feet, but Mayhew grabbed her wrist, grinning again.

"Take it easy, young woman!"

"You—you're Bull Mayhew—"

He bowed. "The same, ma'am. I've a friend of yours aboard my ship. He'll be glad to see you."

Cooper didn't like the dry way he said it, but Sylvia's face lighted, and she gasped, "Vik! Alive! Oh, take me to him! Please!"

"Don't worry," Mayhew answered. "I have every intention of doing that. Captain, I won't tie you up. You've enough sense not to try to run away."

"What are you going to do with us?" Cooper demanded, and Mayhew, turning away, shrugged.

"That depends entirely on circumstances," he said.

WHEN they reached the yacht, Cooper and Sylvia were taken to Mayhew's cabin under the bridge, while the three natives were sent forward. When Mayhew joined them, he brought Vik Harvey with him—but few people would have recognized Vik. He looked gaunt and haggard. He was naked to the waist, and his back was scarred with livid weals. His hair was wild, and a week's growth of beard partly covered more welts on his face. But his jaw was doggedly outthrust, and his eyes glared.

"Vik!" Sylvia cried, and ran to him.

Mayhew watched with sardonic amusement, his eyes appraising the girl's slim figure. He could get a nice price for her far enough up the Yangtze River to be safe from prying British gunboats.

"So they got you, too!" Vik muttered bitterly. "And you, Cooper! How the devil did *you* get mixed up in this?"

"Not through any desire of mine, I assure you," Cooper said heatedly. He turned to Mayhew. "How did you find us?"

"You shouldn't light bonfires if you don't want to be seen," Mayhew answered, chuckling. "We could see the smoke from twenty miles away. If it hadn't been for that, I'd still be looking for you."

"And if it hadn't been for you, you blasted, murdering pirate," Cooper said, "I'd be in Manila discharging cargo now! What do you want? What do you intend to do? How long do you think you can get away with this sort of thing?"

"Long enough, I guess," Mayhew said indifferently. "As for what I want—you know. I want the Silver Idol. It's no use telling me you haven't got it. The girl must have had it when she was hidden in the bosun's locker."

"She didn't have it!" Vik snarled. "I've told you that! We never found it! Douglass never got it, I tell—"

Suddenly Sylvia broke in sharply, "I did! I—it's on the *Cigarette* now. I—"

Vik had stepped forward, as though to stop her. She turned on him and cried passionately, "I'm tired of it! It's brought nothing but horror and misery and death to everyone that had anything to do with it!" Her voice broke. She swung and cried, "It's in the safe in Captain Cooper's cabin! Take it—and I hope it brings you the same misery it's brought everyone else!"

Mayhew grinned. "Thanks, ma'am. You've saved me a bit of trouble, and your friends a lot of pain. I'll reward you for it."

"Reward me?" Sylvia gasped. "I don't want any reward from you—"

"But you will," Mayhew said drily. "I'll reward you by selling you to Fong Wu instead of Ling Po. They tell me that Fong is a much kinder master. As for your

friends, they can take their choice of being shot or put to work on my plantation. You can understand that I couldn't allow any of you to return to civilization, of course."

He grinned at them, then glanced out of the port. "It's dark still. Be dawn in about two hours. Captain Cooper, we'll go aboard your ship and get the idol. Then we'll tow the *Cigarette* out to sea and sink her. You won't be needing her any more."

He started for the door, then paused, looking at Sylvia and Vik, his lips twisted in a thin smile. "There's a guard outside the door. He has a pistol and a sub-machine-gun. If you try to escape, you'll only be saving me trouble. Come with me, Captain Cooper."

A DINGHY was moored at the companionway ladder. With two armed guards, Cooper and Mayhew were ferried across to the *Cigarette*. As they went Mayhew asked what had become of Cooper's crew. Cooper smiled wryly.

"You know what native crews are. They were tired of being afloat. We came ashore here for water, and they deserted."

Mayhew snorted. "You don't know how to treat 'em. There isn't a man of my crew would dare to desert. I have ways of handling them. Sure ways."

"So I should imagine, from what I've seen of your methods," Cooper retorted.

They climbed the jacob's ladder, followed by the two guards, and leaving the oarsman in the dinghy.

"The safe's in my cabin," Cooper said, and led the way aft. At the entrance to the alleyway, Mayhew ordered his guards to wait. He knew the feeling of many of the lascars concerning any fetish of religious significance, and did not wish them to know about the idol. As they walked down the pitch-dark alleyway, Mayhew holding a pistol ready, he sniffed. "There's a queer smell in here. What is it?"

"We had a touch of fever among the after-guard," Cooper answered indifferently. "We disinfected the cabins afterward, as a precaution. The smell hangs on. Here's my cabin."

He went in, followed by Mayhew, who kept his gun ready, saying, "No monkey tricks now!"

"Don't worry," Cooper retorted bitterly. "I know when I'm licked. The lights aren't working. Will you strike a match?"

Mayhew lit one, holding it up while Cooper unlocked the safe and took the sandalwood box out. When he handed it to Mayhew he was grinning.

"What the hell are you grinning about?" Mayhew snarled suspiciously.

Cooper shrugged. "You've all been fooled about that damned thing. It's nothing but an empty box. As far as I know, the idol was never in it. At least, I never saw it. I kept the box because it wasn't mine, intending to return it to Sylvia when we got to Manila."

The match had gone out. Mayhew was fumbling and cursing at the lid of the box.

"You'll have to pry it off," Cooper said, "and much good it'll do you. Take it in the saloon—there's light there."

"By hell," Mayhew snarled, "if you're trying to pull a fast one, Cooper, I'll make you sweat blood for it!"

"See for yourself," Cooper answered carelessly. "It means nothing to me. I never wanted to have anything to do with the confounded thing, anyway. The saloon's at the end of the alley. The door on your right."

"Go ahead of me—and remember I've got you covered!"

WHEN Cooper reached the door of the saloon he paused, closed his eyes and drew a deep breath, holding it. Then he opened the door and stepped in. As he did, he jumped sideways, grabbed Mayhew's pistol hand and jerked him inside. The gun snapped twice, blindly. It was pitch-dark in the saloon and in the alley. Cooper heard Mayhew trip and fall to his knees. He thrust himself through the door, slammed and bolted it. He leaned against it, pressing a hand to his left side, where one of Mayhew's bullets had caught him. Inside the saloon he could hear muffled sounds, as though someone was crawling blindly around inside. His mouth twisted.

He felt his way back to his cabin. In a locker drawer there were two automatic pistols and a long-bladed knife. He took them, inspecting the pistols and slipping some shells into his pocket. He took his shoes off, slipped across the alley and entered the steward's pantry.

In the corner was a small hatchway leading to the lazarette. He opened it, lowering himself down into the darkness and putting the hatch back in place. In the forward bulkhead of the lazarette there was a door leading into the number four hold. He unlocked the door and went into the spice-smelling blackness of the hold. He kept working his way forward from one hold to the next, until he reached the collision bulkhead. Here there were iron rungs leading up to another hatchway. Cooper climbed up, cautiously raised the hatch cover, and peered out.

The moon had set, and save for the faint gleam of starlight on the still sea, the night was very dark. Looking aft, Cooper could not make out the figures of the two guards, though he could hear the low murmuring of their voices. In the dinghy below, the oarsman was whistling between his teeth.

With an effort, because of the pain in his side, Cooper heaved himself onto the deck. As he worked his way cautiously up the ladder to the foc'sle, he heard the yacht's bell strike seven. It would be growing light within an hour. His jaw set grimly. He suspected that he had a good deal to do in that time.

On hands and knees he made his way to the anchor cable. He got a hold on the starboard bitts and lowered himself over-side until his feet touched the heavy links, then dropped and caught the chain with his hands. He followed the cable down hand over hand until he was in the water up to his neck. Then he swam silently to the ship's hull and followed it down toward the dinghy. He had to go slowly. His skin prickled when he thought of sharks and other unpleasant inhabitants of these waters. Once he struck out too sharply. His right knee grazed the ship's side and razor-sharp barnacles gashed his leg, mak-

ing him gasp with pain. The boatman's whistling stopped abruptly.

Cooper held his breath, clinging as well as he could to the ship's side, his head all but submerged. Something brushed softly against his leg. He jerked it up, and sweat broke out on his forehead. Then the boatman yawned and started whistling again. He was sitting facing the stern, one leg resting on the gunwale.

Cooper worked his way an inch at a time up to the boat. He held his knife by the blade. When he reached the midship row-lock he suddenly grabbed the gunwale, heaved himself up, and as the startled boatman turned toward him, he brought the handle of the knife smashing up to the man's temple.

Climbing into the dinghy, Cooper pushed the unconscious man aside, cast off the painter and let the dinghy drift until he was fifty yards from the ship. Then, kneeling in the sternsheet, he stern-sculled the dinghy as close as he dared to the yacht and once again slipped overside.

The Idol's End

IN BULL MAYHEW'S cabin Sylvia knelt beside the settee doing her best to bathe Vik's innumerable wounds. For a week Vik had been lashed, beaten, starved and tortured, in an effort to force him to disclose the whereabouts of the idol. He had held up by sheer dogged will power, but when Mayhew left the cabin with Cooper to fetch the idol, he collapsed. Sylvia found a bottle of brandy and revived him.

On the deck outside they could hear the pacing of their guard. Once or twice his face appeared at the port, peering in at them.

"Was—was he just trying to scare us?" Sylvia asked presently, low voiced. "About the shooting, and the Chinaman?"

Vik shook his head grimly. "He meant it. He's been so successful in getting away with things that there's nothing he'll stop at now. The British and Dutch authorities have been after him time and again, but he always covers his tracks so well they

never get anything on him. When the *Trader* and Cooper's ship don't come in, they'll be listed as missing with all hands, that's all. The authorities'll figure we both foundered in that storm. And there won't be anyone to tell different."

Sylvia shuddered. She lighted a cigarette and handed it to Vik. Her hand shook a little. Suddenly she stiffened. The pacing of the guard had stopped. There was a rustling sound and a muttering. She turned to stare at Vik.

"He—he's coming back!"

Vik struggled up off the couch. He didn't intend to let Mayhew see him weakened. Instinctively he put his arm around Sylvia's shoulder. There was a rattle of the door handle. It opened slowly. The two gasped.

Cooper stood there. His clothing dripped water. Blood stained his right leg and the left side of his singlet, and his face was bruised. He swayed a little as he stood there, then came in and closed the door. He saw the brandy bottle and gulped some of it. Then he said thickly, "Mayhew's still on my ship. I got away. I got aboard this ship without being seen and knocked the guard cold."

"Then we can escape?" Sylvia exclaimed. "Get back to the *Cigarette* and escape?"

Cooper shook his head. "No. We would not get a mile before they rammed us or shot us up with their machine-guns. Anyway, with her jury rudder and no crew, we couldn't handle the *Cigarette*. We'll have to take this ship over."

Vik and Sylvia stared at him incredulously. "Only three of us?"

"The crew is mostly lascars," Cooper answered. He was sitting on the settee, sipping more brandy. His side hurt devilishly, and his leg throbbed. "I looked in the saloon as I came up. As far as I can tell, all the deck officers are there—three of them. One is sleeping, the other two eating. There's a white man in the engine-room, of course, but the rest are lascars, and once we get their officers, I think we'll be able to handle them."

"What's your plan?" Vik said.

"I've got two pistols, and the guard had a pistol and a submachine-gun. We'll round up the officers, then we'll try for the bridge. You'll have noticed that the bridge and the wheelhouse are armored. Once we get up there, we can control the ship. Are you game?"

"We'll leave Sylvia here," Vik said, picking up two of the pistols.

Cooper shook his head. "No. She's in it with us. If we don't succeed, she'd be better off dead, and so would we."

THERE was a man on the bridge—a lascar. Under the deck lights they could see three others lounging abaft the funnel, but apart from those, the yacht appeared deserted. No doubt most of the crew was getting a little sleep before the ship got under way in the morning, leaving only a skeleton harbor watch on deck.

The saloon was forward in the main deckhouse. A door on each side opened onto the deck. Cooper had noticed this before and prepared his plan. He crouched outside the starboard door with the machine-gun until he had counted fifty. Then, leaving Sylvia on watch outside, he opened the door. At the same instant Vik opened the port door and stepped in with his two pistols.

"Hold it!" Cooper snapped. "Put your hands up and keep quiet, or we'll do to you what you did to the crew of the *Trader*!"

The two men paled, and their hands grabbed upwards. Cooper said to Vik, "I'll cover them. Wake that fellow and lash them all—just their hands. Then gag them and rope them together."

When that was done, Cooper backed to the door and called softly, "Sylvia?"

"All clear," she answered.

The strange procession emerged from the saloon, Vik leading, the three roped, gagged men following convict style, Sylvia and Cooper bringing up the rear.

When they reached the foot of the bridge ladder, Cooper went up, leaving the others below. The watchman was leaning over the dodger, yawning, his eyes half closed. Cooper had taken a uniform cap from one

of the officers. He put it on, stuck his head over the doorway and called curtly, "Boy! Rouse up, there!"

The lascar stiffened, muttered nervously, "Yes, Tuan!" Cooper had roughened his voice, and it was too dark for the man to see his face.

"Come over here!" he snapped.

The boy padded over on bare feet, and as he did, Cooper stepped up on the bridge and brought the butt of a pistol down on the lascar's head. He turned and signalled. The three officers and their guard mounted to the bridge. Cooper led them into the wheelhouse, made them lie down, and lashed their ankles. Just as he finished, he heard a sharp cry from somewhere outside.

Vik called, "Cooper! Someone's found the guard you knocked out!"

Cooper ran out. They could see a lascar running aft. Vik raised his pistol to fire, but Cooper stopped him.

"Let him rouse the crew out. I have an idea we can handle them. I'd rather have them all together, anyway. Without their leaders they won't know what to do."

To help the rousing process, he went to the bridge bell and rang it sharply a number of times. In a moment they heard a confused babbling from aft. As on many yachts, the crew's quarters and those of the petty officers were aft, instead of forward, and now they could see a number of sleepy, bewildered lascars emerging from the companionway aft. They watched silently while the men gathered, jabbering excitedly. They couldn't find their officers. One of them ran forward towards the bridge, calling, "Tuan Schwartz! Tuan Carlos! Tuan Smith!"

Cooper smiled a little. He guessed that Messrs. Schwartz, Carlos and Smith were the men he had trussed up in the wheelhouse. When the lascar reached the lower bridge, his voice growing increasingly alarmed, Cooper called curtly, "Boy! Come up here on the bridge!"

The lascar gave a frightened yelp and turned to run.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" Cooper snapped.

The boy stopped dead, turned uncertainly, and came slowly toward the ladder,

then up it. His knees were knocking together.

"Your officers have been captured," Cooper said, "and Captain Mayhew is also a prisoner. We have machine-guns and arms up here. Tell your crew that they are now to take orders from us, and that when we get to Manila all of you will be released. Tell them that if they do not do that, we shall shoot them all and sink the ship. Go and tell them that, and bring me the answer."

Cooper turned to Vik, smiling grimly. "I think we'll make our point," he said.

It seemed they would. From the looks of things, the lascars were willing enough to accept their new masters without trouble. Some of them began to move forward, holding up their hands to show that they were unarmed.

"It may be a trick," Vik warned, handling his guns tensely.

"I don't think so," Cooper answered, "but if—"

He broke off. From somewhere amidships came a roaring voice. "What the hell's going on here? What're you damn fools walking around with your hands in the air for? Get along aft and stay there, blast you!"

AN ENORMOUS, shaggy-headed man in dirty pants and a singlet appeared on deck. What his rank was they couldn't tell, but he obviously held terror for the lascars. They stopped, staring from him to the bridge. The white man snatched up a length of tarred rope and lashed at the nearest men with it.

"Get aft, blast you!" he bellowed. "What is this? A mutiny? I'll lick the dirty hides off'n you—"

Another babble of lascar voices broke out. Some of them pointed excitedly at the bridge. As they did, two more whites came out on deck, demanding angrily to know what the fuss was. Cooper and Vik glanced at each other, dismayed. Then, seeing that his first plan had failed, Cooper showed himself, training the machine-gun, and roared, "Raise your hands, gentlemen! We've got you covered!"

The three turned, gaping in bewilderment. Then, before Cooper could move, one of them ducked back through the door he had emerged from.

Cooper snapped, "Harvey, get over to the port wing! He'll get a gun and try to sneak up. Sylvia, keep a watch for'ard." To the remaining whites he called, "You two stand where you are. The next move, and I'll let you have it!"

Almost as he spoke, there was a burst of shots from behind one of the engine-room ventilators, forward of the funnel. Bullets slammed against the steel bulwarks of the bridge. Cooper ducked hastily. There were gun slots in the bulwarks. He opened one of them and fired a burst toward the ventilator.

For minutes the duel kept up. Absorbed, Cooper failed to see that the other two whites had disappeared, until two more machine-guns opened up, spraying the whole bridge with whining bullets.

"What's wrong, Cooper?" Vik shouted. "Why don't you answer them?"

"Can't," Cooper retorted. "I'm out of ammunition. I had only one magazine for this gun."

The men below sensed the position. The bearded man yelled from safe cover, "You up there! Want to surrender?"

"No!" Vik roared. "Come and get us—if you dare!"

A voice yelled, "On the bridge! This is your last chance. We're coming up there and wipe you out!"

"Come on and try it!" Cooper retorted coolly. The three tensed. Now the machine-gun fire was stopped. In the sudden silence the tension was almost unbearable. And then, shrill and startling, there was a hideous scream. A swarm of lascars sprang out from hiding places, rushing forward.

"The whole pack's on us now," Cooper muttered grimly, and then gasped. Sylvia shuddered and hid her face against Vik's shoulder, pressing her hands over her ears as thin, bubbling screams came from behind the life-rafts. A lascar stood up and waved a bloody knife.

"Tuan!" he called triumphantly. "We help you. White men give you no more

trouble. We take new Tuan, return to Manila!"

HALF an hour later, having released Cooper's serang, the cook and the steward, leaving the serang in temporary charge of the yacht, the three were rowed across to the *Cigarette*.

Vik said, puzzled, "You say Mayhew's locked up? He didn't seem to me like the sort who would stay locked up very long, especially with two armed men to help him escape."

"Generally speaking," Cooper answered, "I would agree with you. But in this case I suspect that Captain Mayhew will stay there as long as we wish him to. And I saw the two guards jump overboard and swim ashore when those three men were killed."

"Where did you lock him?" Sylvia said.

"In the saloon."

"But—the saloon was—"

Cooper nodded grimly. "Exactly, my dear. The saloon is full of sulphur and phosphorus fumes. They were so thick that, though I was in there only a few seconds, holding my breath and keeping my eyes closed, they almost got me. An unprepared man would be blinded and suffocated."

When they went aboard, Cooper and Vik opened up the sealed ventilators and both doors of the saloon. Thick white fumes drifted slowly out, dissipating on the clear air of the morning. After an hour Cooper judged it safe to go in.

Mayhew was crumpled against the forward bulkhead. He had evidently died in appalling agony. He had ripped his jacket

and shirt to the waist, and his frantic nails had scored livid welts in his chest and throat, in his desperate efforts to get air.

They called two lascars from the boat and had them take Mayhew out and carry him ashore for burial. Then they took the idol into Cooper's cabin. When Sylvia saw it she said, "If that thing comes with us, I—I'm going to stay on the island!"

Cooper handed it to Vik. "It's your concern," he said, and felt distinct relief. "I wash my hands of it. Regardless of anything else, it has cost far too many lives."

"It's going to be burned as soon as possible," Vik answered. "But first—Douglass let me in on the secret of it. Look."

He worked the jeweled eyes, twisting them, then pressed the ruby set in its belly. The bottom flew open and a stone fell out. It was a blood ruby, big as a pigeon's egg. Vik picked it up, holding it so that the sun shone on it.

"You've heard of star sapphires," he said. "They're worth plenty. Well, this is the only known stone of its kind in the world, and precious few people know of it. It's a star ruby. It's worth a fortune."

He glanced at the other two, and added, "Douglass learned the secret while he was in India. We had agreed to split two ways after deducting expenses. After what we three have been through, I think we've a right to split it three ways. What do you say?"

Cooper looked at Sylvia, and then at Vik. Then he smiled a little quizzically and shook his head. "Not for me. I'll give you my share—as a wedding present."



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"Get back, get back!" Maynard shouted. "Get back or I'll bump you!"

Misfortune Rides a Black Horse

"SO you think you can ride, eh?" The question was growled by the heavy, florid-faced master of Marlo Farms. Owning the greatest stable of show horses, flat runners and steeplechasers in the state, Mark Luden growled at all beneath him. And this was an unknown youth who had

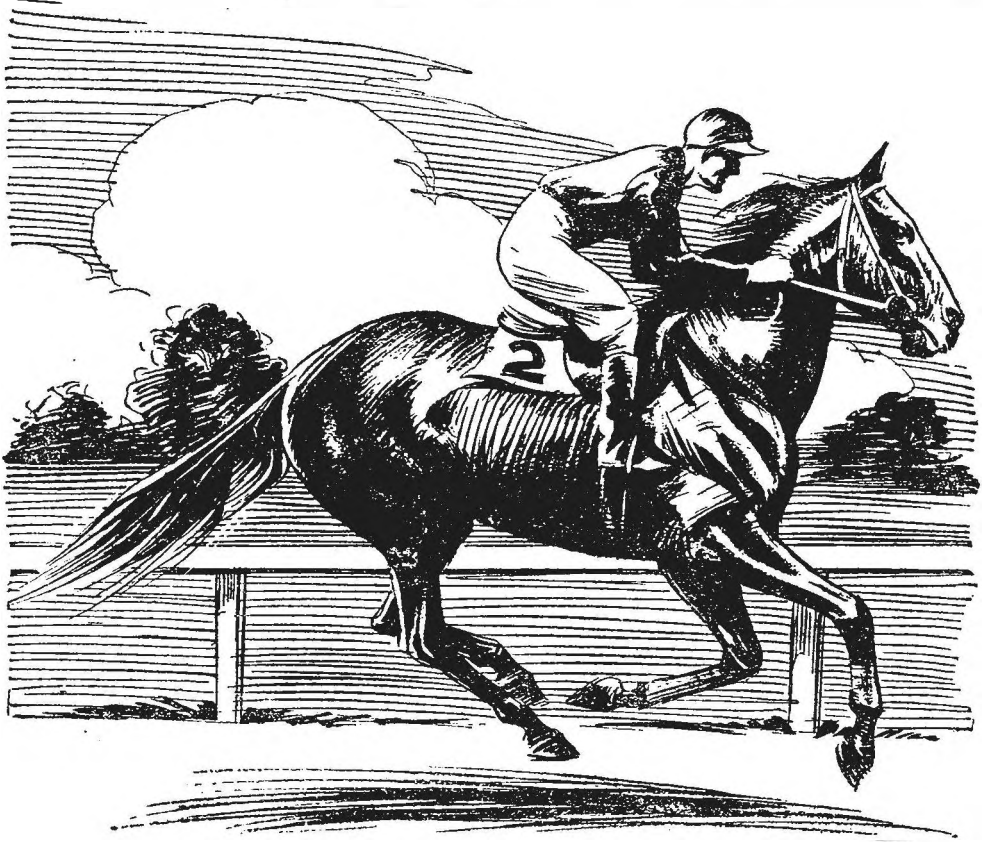
wandered into the Farms' paddock after breakfast, asking for work.

The fellow flushed, and looking at Luden fearlessly. "I don't think, sir," the *sir* was spoken with a touch of arrogance; "I know. If I couldn't ride, I wouldn't ask for a job."

A girl standing with Luden threw back her brunette head and laughed. "Score one against you, Uncle!"

PETER

CHARLES B.
PARMER



She was a willowy young thing, with high cheekbones that gave her a look of exotic beauty. She was wearing jodhpurs, riding breeches and blouse, and there was the light of the devil in her dark eyes.

"Hmm." The uncle ignored the friendly taunt, swished a riding crop against his highly polished boots, and said as if to the girl alone, "Got plenty of cheek."

The stranger flushed. "And ability—sir," he volunteered.

"Score two!" the girl exulted. "I think you'd better give him a chance, even though he says he's never applied for a riding license—"

"I've never applied because I intend to own and ride horses, not merely boot 'em under the wire," the stranger interrupted.

"Oh!" The girl's brows raised. "So that's it! A young man with ambition. Willing to start at the bottom, of course?"

The stranger didn't answer, but colored again.

Her face sobered; she looked at him keenly. "Name please."

"Maynard—Breckenridge Maynard."

"Too swank a name for a stable hand," she commented brusquely. "Guess it'll be Maynard with us—Breck to the girls you know."

"But I tell you, Linda," the uncle said, "we don't need another boy. We've got a passel of exercise boys for the flat runners, and the finest jumping jock this side of England for the *leppers*. He says he knows jumpers, but we don't need a second-string boy."

"And I won't *be* a second-string rider," Maynard spoke up. "It'll be first, or—"

"Good!" Linda broke in. "He has spunk—I like it in man or beast. Let's see." Her eyes narrowed, as she appraised his appearance, listing his points as she would those of a thoroughbred: "Small hands, small feet; a sign he won't grow and put on much more flesh at his age. Tips the scale at one hundred and fifteen, I'd say—"

"Sorry, it's a hundred and twenty," he corrected her.

"Too bad. You can't gallop the flat runners then. But you should be ideal for the *leppers*. I like the cut of your jib, m'lad—especially that jutting jaw. Think you'd hold your own with the other steeplechase riders. Your eyes are rather far apart: sign you are straightforward. I like the blue in them—"

"Linda!" The word came with a snort from her scandalized uncle. "I tell you—"

"And I'm telling you, Uncle!" she parried. "Now I've an idea. Holy Jim is getting a bit too old to handle the show horses. And he and Magnificent Peter don't care for each other—and the other boys won't touch Peter with a ten-foot pole. Let's give Maynard a workout on Peter. If he shows he can handle him—well, why not make him Peter's groom, exercise boy, and rider for the Horse Show as well?"

Without waiting for an answer from her uncle, she turned and called toward the stables:

"Oh, Jim—Jim! Holy Jim!"

AT the third call, a wizened Negro poked a head out of the stable door. "Yassum, I'm a-comin'," he answered in a shrill falsetto. As he shambled toward the group, he began, "I wuz a-thinkin' of the time when 'Lijah in de fiery chariot—"

"Never mind the fiery chariot—bring out that fiery Peter, and make it snappy."

"Huh? You ain't a-gwine to ride him agin, is you, Miss Linda? He's de bitingest haws evah ah see—he just done try to chaw mah shoulder—"

"Never mind. Bring him out."

"Yassum. He's done saddled—jes' waitin' till I say a leetle prayer befo' I takes him out for a gallop."

The girl turned to Maynard, said in businesslike tones, "Peter is a four-year-old that has never raced. Too mean and sulky. Holy Jim has trained him as a saddle mount; we're going to send him on the horse show circuit next season. If you can handle him—"

"I can," he said.

"Don't speak too quick, m'lad," she warned. "Better men than you have pulled leather trying to ride him. But if you can handle him—well, we'll see."

The groom was bringing the saddle horse toward them.

Old Mark Luden glared down at the stranger. "Now listen, you Maywood—"

"Maynard," the rider corrected with a smile.

"Well, Maynard then. Handle this horse with a loose rein, understand? If you hold him tight he'll set you on the grass. Go out through the paddock gate and take him around the field. On a slow gallop. Understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, Maynard," Linda added, "keep your eyes on your job—not the next field."

"I don't understand you," he said.

"You will, m'lad, if you stay around here long. You are not to pay any attention to anything that happens in that far field." She pointed with a riding crop to a distant field at the left, separated from the Luden property by a low rail fence. "And if you see a girl there—but your business is not to see her. Now put the leg up on Peter."

Magnificent Peter was the blackest black horse Breck Maynard had ever seen: a horse so black that he seemed blue; with a black coat unrelieved by a single white hair, save on the forehead, where a white star gleamed. And he was a big horse, almost seventeen hands high.

As Maynard looked at him, the animal's

eyes showed white; then he snorted and started to rear. Holy Jim merely grunted and jerked him down, then said in a singsong: "De Lord done say you got to wuk today. Come, Peter, and—"

"Shut up, Jim!" Luden commanded. "Here, I'll hold him, while you give Maynard the leg up." The gruff oldster took the reins, commanding, "Easy, Peter, easy!" The horse quieted. Maynard went to the left side, grasped the reins, put hands on pommel of the training saddle, and raised his left foot for the groom to lift him up.

"White boy, I sho' gwine to pray for you. I asks de Lord to watch over—"

"Come on, give me the leg!" Maynard snapped.

"Yassuh!"

The groom stooped, seized Maynard's left ankle and tossed him upward. Maynard threw his right leg over the saddle. Instantly the horse began to plunge.

"Whoa—whoa, you devil!" Luden shouted. The horse quieted again.

Maynard quickly thrust his feet into the irons, grasped reins, and said quietly, "Now, boy, take it easy!" And to the owner, "It's all right, sir, you can let go."

Luden stepped back. As he did so, the girl took the field-glasses which always hung from Mark Luden's neck when he was out in the open. She called to Maynard, "I shall keep an eye on you. Remember what I said about keeping *your* eye on the horse, not on the next field."

"I'll remember," he answered, and tightening the reins slightly, clucked.

PETER reared once, came down with a clump of hoofs, then braced himself with outspread legs and tossed his head angrily.

"Loosen that rein!" Luden commanded.

"I'm handling him, sir!" Maynard retorted.

"And I'm telling you—"

"Hush, Uncle!" the girl cautioned, smiling. "Let's see the fun."

But there was no fun. The horse was immobile. The rider was still as a statue. He didn't urge or coax or cluck or press

knees in, or jab the heel of his boot into the animal's flanks. He merely sat as immobile as the animal stood. It fooled the beast, who was accustomed to rough tactics. He didn't understand. At last he took one step forward, gingerly. Then he stopped. With arms pulled in, Maynard still sat motionless as a statue. Then the animal gave a toss of his head, and feeling the rein not too tight, broke into a sudden gallop.

Maynard smiled back at the pair on the ground, then gave attention to his mount.

"Damn! But he does know how to sit a horse!" Mark Luden growled.

"Of course he does," Linda said, as she raised the field-glasses toward horse and rider. "Didn't you note that his riding clothes were well worn, though clean, Uncle? You have no detective sense at all. I'd say that Breckenridge Maynard comes of a horse family that went broke— But look at him!"

A hundred yards away, in the field, Magnificent Peter had suddenly come to a halt and was buck jumping. The girl shouted with glee:

"Ride him, boy—ride him! I'm watching you through glasses—don't pull leather!"

Maynard didn't, either. Not once did he grasp his saddle, but with sure hands pulled the animal down, and once again put him into a slow gallop.

"Be gad, he's even better than Holy Jim!" Luden said grudgingly. "Maybe we could use him. Good boys are scarce."

The girl was adjusting her glasses as a huge police dog came loping into the paddock, stopped and sniffed at his master's heels. "Get away, Hugo!" Luden commanded. The dog backed off, then seeing the horse and rider in the field, started after them.

"Come back here, Hugo! Come back!" Linda Barton called, lowering her glasses an instant. But the dog did not heed her. He kept loping straight ahead. "If he runs after Peter—" She didn't finish her sentence, for, with a quick dart to the left, the dog turned and made straight for the distant fence.

"What does he mean by doing that?" Linda asked herself, leveling her glasses after him. She saw what he meant: on the other side of the fence, on a little knoll bare of trees, stood a girl in a sports dress, playing with a lively ball of black fur—a Scottish terrier.

Linda made a wry face. The girl was Bette Mason. Years ago Mark Luden and Bette's father, Whitney Mason, had quarreled over a horse race. Whitney Mason had died while the quarrel was at full blast. Since then, there had been no speaking across the fence line. Once Bette had written to her, complaining that the police dog annoyed her little Scottie; now the big brute was heading that way again. There'd be trouble.

"I wish you would train Hugo to stay at home—he's after the Masons' Scottie again," she commented.

"Wish he'd eat him alive," Luden answered shortly. Then, "What the thunder!"

Linda turned at his exclamation.

"Look! Look what that fool is doing!"

LUDEN was pointing, not at the dog, but at the horse and rider. In a flash Linda leveled her glasses again. Yes, that man Maynard had turned his mount toward the dividing fence—which the police dog had just hurdled—and was making toward the fence at full gallop—

"Damn!" Mark Luden exploded. "He's going to take the fence, and Peter's no *lepper*. He'll kill the horse, the fool!"

To their ears came the same wail Breck Maynard had heard: the wail of a little Scottie in the fangs of a powerful police dog. It was that piteous wailing that had caused the rider to turn toward the fence. Maynard saw the big dog grappling with the little fellow—saw a girl in sport clothes helplessly shouting to the police dog—

"Come on, boy!" He raised his reins, clucked, dug his heels in Peter's flanks, and made straight for the three-foot fence. Just as they came to it, Maynard raised his reins, leaned forward. "Come on! Make it, boy!"

The horse shot up and over. As they came down, Maynard gathered him in, then

urged him up the knoll. At the top he reined in, leaped to the ground and ran to the struggling dogs.

"Get away!" he shouted to the girl, who was vainly trying to seize the collar of Hugo. He pushed her aside, and with one well aimed kick drove the toe of his riding-shoe with a smashing blow into the animal's midriff.

The big dog was kicked loose from the little black Scottie, lying on his back with four feet vainly pawing the air. Then Hugo raised his muzzle to heaven in a ferocious howl, wheeled, and started to jump on Maynard. At that instant the untethered Peter stepped forward nervously, in front of Breck Maynard—and in the same instant Hugo, the dog, was in midair.

With a dull *thump!* the dog smashed against the right withers of the horse, his fangs sinking into Peter's flesh. Magnificent Peter stamped, reared with fright, neighed, and dashed down the little knoll with the police dog hanging to the flesh and bone of his shoulder.

At the bottom of the hill the horse stumbled, crashed into and through the rail fence, shook the dog off, fell to his knees, straightened up, and began lamely trotting back toward the paddock, where his master stood horrified.

It all happened in a few seconds' time.

"Oh, Lord!" Maynard exclaimed to himself, seeing Peter hobbling off while the dog, Hugo, skulked along the fence. "I guess that finishes me!"

"I'm so—so awfully sorry!" Someone was standing beside him; a girl in a blue sport suit with a black tam thrown back from her face: a face that was white. For the first time Maynard saw her clearly; a girl with eyes that were gray and strikingly honest. She was not just pretty, but fresh and appealing.

"You saved my puppy, but I'm afraid—" she paused, and a trace of a smile swept over her features—"I'm afraid your chivalry is going to cost you your job. That horse is a show horse, and the police dog has torn him up a bit. He'll probably have a big scar that'll ruin him for the show ring. I'm awfully sorry."

"Damn!" Mark Luden exploded. "He's going to take the fence, and Peter's no lepper. He'll kill the horse, the fool!"



Maynard looked at her. She had spoken to him as one person to another, not as a proud young woman to a hireling. He liked her. So he smiled, reassured her:

"Don't worry. I didn't have a job, I was just giving Luden's horse a gallop—"

"You mean you were trying to get a job," she said. "I'm on to Luden's methods. He tries all new riders out on that ugly beast. No one but Holy Jim—and Linda Barton—have ever been able to handle him—that is, until you came. You were doing it superbly. And now—" she shrugged her shoulders helplessly—"this unfortunate accident, and you've got to face old Luden and his nasty temper."

"Don't worry. I've faced bigger men than he'll ever be. And there are other jobs in the world. I'm just glad I could stop that police dog. You see," he added with a smile, "I once had a Scottie. I love the little fellows."

He stooped and patted the head of the little chap, now cuddling around his mistress' ankles. Then, straightening up, he smiled. "Everything's all right," he said, and started to go.

"But wait! What's your name?" she said.

"Maynard—Breck Maynard."

"I'm Bette Mason—and I know where a certain Breck Maynard can get an awfully good job handling horses. Want the job?"

"Oh—er—thank you, but I've got to talk to Mr. Luden—or at least I expect he wants to talk to me. Goodby."

He turned from her, went rapidly down the knoll, pushed through the tangled fence and started toward the paddock, where the most irate horseman in ten States was inspecting the hurts on a great black horse.

A Rider Gets a Horse

NO one paid attention to Maynard when he entered the paddock; all eyes were on Magnificent Peter, a horse with a great gash on his right withers and knees torn and bleeding. Mark Luden was cursing loudly, and a little group from the stables and the house were "yessing" him.

"Hang it all, this was the best show horse in America, and now he's ruined for life! It's appearance that counts in the show ring, and I can't send him in looking like a battle-scarred bum! If I could

get my hands on the fool who rode him—" He broke off, looked up and glared as Breck Maynard broke in.

"I'm the man who rode him."

"I'm damned! You disobey orders, you ruin my horse—why, I ought to throw you in jail for life!"

"Surely," Maynard said calmly, "but I think it was humane to do what I did, don't you?"

Luden gasped. A burly fellow with a livid scar across his left cheek and beetling black eyes pushed to the front of the stable men.

"You ought to be ruled off for life, and confound you, you need a horsewhipping and—" he advanced, shaking his fist in Maynard's face—"Punch Doyle's the man to give it to you!"

"Who, you?" Maynard said.

An English voice drawled, "I say, the chap merits a—"

"You keep out of this, Maurice, it's Uncle's row!" Linda Barton was pushing through the crowd. "I'll handle this. Step back, Punch. What did I tell you, Maynard, about looking over in that other field?"

Maynard turned to her. "Wouldn't you have done the same?"

Someone in the crowd cried, "Listen to him! He ruins a million-dollar horse to save a ten-cent cur!"

"Million-dollar horse?" said Luden. "He's not worth twenty-five dollars now. If he was a mare or a stallion I could use him for breeding purposes, but he's a gelding. I tell you he's ruined!"

"And I tell you he's not, sir," said Maynard.

"Shut your trap, kid!" growled Punch Doyle, the trainer for the Marlo Farm stables, and the command was followed by a sharp slap of the hand across Maynard's mouth. The rider's head flew back. "Now will you shut up?" Doyle said.

Maynard took a handkerchief from his pocket and slowly sopped up the blood that began trickling from his lips, then he replaced the handkerchief, took one step forward.

"Why don't you use your fist? That's

what I'm going to do," and he fainted with his left to the trainer's middle.

Instinctively Doyle's hands dropped. It was a beautiful right uppercut that Maynard sent crashing against the scarred jaw of Punch Doyle. The blow staggered him for an instant, then he rushed forward with a roar of curses—curses that were stopped by another smash, this time on the mouth. Someone leaped forward and grasped Maynard, pinioning his arms. In that instant Doyle recovered, stepped forward and cracked Maynard squarely on the nose.

"Stop it! Stop it, I say!" And Linda Barton pushed forward between the enraged Doyle and the pinioned Maynard. Then she pulled at the arms that were holding the rider—the arms of Maurice Hull.

"Of all the dirty tricks!" she exclaimed. "Holding a man so another fellow can smash him—!"

Maurice Hull—he was in riding clothes—released his hold on Maynard.

"Oh, I say, Linda, the fellow deserves a thrashing!"

"Maybe he does," she retorted, "but let it be fair, man to man. I am disgusted with you," and turning to her Uncle's trainer: "I think you are a rotter, Doyle. Somebody else holds them and you hit them, eh?"

Doyle was rubbing his chin, muttering to himself. He stepped back, still muttering, to the rear of the crowd.

"All of you are making jackasses of yourselves and I am the only one hurt," Luden said. "My horse is ruined. He's not worth twenty-five dollars—"

"Oh, yes he is."

"Who said that?" Luden demanded, looking around.

"I did," said Maynard. "I say he's worth many times twenty-five dollars."

Luden glared at him. "That'll be enough from you, young man. I know what I am talking about, and if you know so much, you can *have* him for twenty-five dollars!"

"Sold!"

"Give me the money—if you have that much."

"I think I have, sir." Swabbing his face once more, Maynard replaced his handkerchief and, taking a small roll of bills from a breeches pocket, he counted out five fives and gave them to Luden. "And you might make out the bill of sale in my correct name, Breckenridge Maynard," he said.

"By gad, I will! Give me your pen, Maurice, I'll get what salvage I can out of this kid!"

Maurice Hull gave his pen to the master of Marlo Farms. Quickly Luden scrawled the bill of sale and thrust it at Maynard.

"Now get off the place!"

LINDA had said nothing since she had turned on Punch Doyle and Hull. Now she said in low tones to her uncle, "You are making an awful mistake."

"How's that?" he demanded. "You know Peter's not worth five cents in the show ring now!"

"I wasn't thinking of the show ring. I mean this chap Maynard—he's a fighter. You need that kind of rider in your stable."

"He's a fool," Luden snapped, "and I don't need any more of that kind around me. Anyway, it was your fault, insisting that I give him a chance. You've cost me a million dollars!"

"Don't be silly!" she said. "Peter would only have been worth a few hundred as a show horse, anyway."

"I'd like to ask a question, sir." The request came from Maynard.

"Well, what is it?" Luden growled.

"You say this horse has never been run on the flat, or over timber?"

"That's what I said."

"Wait a minute!" the girl said to Maynard. "I'd like to buy the horse back from you. I'll give you double what you paid."

"Sorry, he's not for sale."

"I'll make it a hundred," she offered, when Hull broke in.

"Don't be silly, Linda—the horse is done for!"

"Oh, hush up, Maurice! You are as dumb as the rest of them here. Look here, Maynard, I believe I know what you are up to. I think in all fairness you should sell that horse back to us."

"Sorry," Maynard said. "A sale is a sale. Anyway, you say he's only good for the show ring. I have got to patch him up and see what I can do with him."

The girl stepped closer to him. "Be reasonable, Maynard. I understand your game—"

"I don't like that, Miss—"

"The name is Linda Barton."

"I don't like your accusing me of playing a game, Miss Barton."

"Maybe I shouldn't have put it that way, but come now, sell me half of Magnificent Peter—we'll go shares together."

"Now what's this nonsense?" Luden demanded.

"I'm surprised that you can't guess what he's going to do," the girl said. "You sold too fast this time, Uncle."

"Well, what *is* he going to do?" Luden snapped.

Linda Barton shook her head at his blindness and said, "This Maynard is no fool as a horseman. He knows the bargain he got in Peter, don't you?" She asked the question with a smile.

"Of course," Maynard said, and he smiled too. Then he spoke to Luden.

"You told me this horse was not a jumper—had never been trained to take fences. Didn't you see him take that rail fence? Not one horse in a thousand is a natural jumper, but this one is. He made as beautiful a leap as I have ever known, and as for his being sulky—well, he didn't sulk with me, and he won't sulk with me when I take him to the races. That's all."

Mark Luden glared at him. All he could say was "I'm damned!" Then, to the others, "Come on, let's go!"

The crowd moved off—all save Holy Jim, the groom, whose attitude toward Maynard had changed.

"I seen what you done, boss, and I'd 'a' done de same. Dat ole police dog is de debbil hisself. And as for dat ornery pore white trash, Mister Punch Doyle, neither de Lawd nor me loves him. I got some liniment in de stable—" He broke off as Mark Luden turned and shouted:

"You, Jim! Come away from that man! Come attend to your business!"

"Yassuh, Mister Mark, but I got to get de liniment—"

"Never mind liniment! You come here!"

Holy Jim's head lifted. For long months he had stood abuse from Punch Doyle and sharp words from Big Boss Man, and he was tired—tired of working for one of the hardest stables on the turf.

"Listen here, Boss Man," he replied, "de Lawd say I got to help this here horse—"

"Never mind—I'm tired of your foolishness. Pack your tack and get off the place. I don't owe you a cent, you drew a week's wages in advance yesterday, so get off!"

A big grin rippled over the Negro's face. He threw his head back, his hand up, and shouted, "Glory Hallelujah, I'se fired! Glory Hallelujah—"

Mark Luden turned his back and walked away.

Holy Jim looked at Maynard.

"Boss, I guess you got to give me a job yourself. I'se done fired, and that liniment I done bought all by myself—it's mine—I'll git it. We'll fix old Peter up in no time. He just got a scratch or so. I'se got a way wid hosses."

"You're on, Jim—on the payroll, when and if it's ever made out. Go get your liniment and let's move!"

Ten minutes later they were moving along the left side of the highway between the concrete and the rail fence: a young rider in faded but clean clothes, with a nose that was beginning to swell; a little gray-thatched and bow-legged Negro; and behind him, led by the halter rein, a big black horse on whose wounds liniment had been heavily applied. They were walking toward a bend in the road over which the sun was shining brightly.

A Fifty-Fifty Pact

THE one-horse cavalcade ambled around the bend at last. Behind them was the pillared mansion of Marlo Farms. Ahead stood a small Colonial cottage set back among trees.

"Dat's where Miss Bette lives," Holy Jim volunteered. "She be Miss Bette Mason, and it's her little pup you done

saved from that big dog. There she be, comin' to us."

Bette Mason met the cavalcade as they drew to a halt at her gateway. Maynard saw a pair of field-glasses in her hands.

"I saw most of what happened through these glasses," she said, after greeting him. "You know, the Masons and the Ludens don't speak—haven't spoken since I was a little girl—so we use field-glasses to keep an eye on each other. But tell me, what have you done—bought Magnificent Peter?"

"Bought him for twenty-five dollars."

She drew in a little breath. "You caught Mark Luden while he was mad. I know he once refused five hundred for him, though Peter was only a show horse."

Maynard smiled. "He's going to be something else now. He's going to be a jumper—and a good one, too."

"De Lawd say, Miss Bette, that chariots wid hosses of gold—"

"Let me do some of the saying, Jim," the girl interrupted, and then to Maynard: "I'd like to talk business with you." Her tone was brisk, though friendly.

"I'll listen," he said.

"You say you are going to make a jumper out of Peter. That's going to take time, and it's going to cost money. Mind if I ask if you are a man of millions? Steeplechasing is a millionaire's game."

Again Maynard pulled the little roll of bills from his pocket.

"I've got less than fifty dollars here," he said. "It's all that's left after—well, why go into bygoness? What's the business you wanted to talk?"

"Just this. I know Magnificent Peter's pedigree. His dam was Night Mammy, a good distance racer, by Black Hornet—and he was a router, too. And Peter's sire was Old Majesty, once a pretty good timber topper. I saw the horse make that jump when you cleared the fence. He's a natural *lepper*. Want to go shares with me?" The question was asked with the friendliest of smiles.

Maynard smiled back. "You know nothing of me. I may be a bum who swindles widows—"

"And saves little puppy dogs from big brutes," she countered. "We won't worry about that. I've got a house here. I live alone, except for an old cousin—Cousin Sol Vandercook. He's a retired politician and an ex-prohibitionist who takes his liquor straight, wears a go-to-meeting collar and a swallow-tail coat. You'll get on fine with him if you let him do the talking, and as I pay the bills here, he can't object to what I do. I have a little office behind the house where you can sleep, and there's an old steeplechase course beyond the hill. You can stay here, put Peter in training. I'll pay all the bills if you'll give me—" she hesitated, smiled "—if you'll give me one-fourth of him. Is it a go?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Then you make a suggestion," she countered.

"I'll do it if you'll take half of Peter."

"Not fair—you're offering too much."

"No, I am not," he answered. "It's a go—fifty-fifty. Where's the stable? I'm throwing Holy Jim into the bargain."

The Negro grinned, spoke up: "I'd sho' like to beat that there Punch Doyle. He's a-trainin' Mr. Mark's stallion—that there Red Cavalier—for de Jackson Steeplechase two months off, and Red Cavalier ain't got—"

"You talk too much, Jim," the girl said, but smiled. "Take Peter on back to the barn. Swab him down, and then we'll patch him up. There may be a few scars left on him, but that won't hurt his speed."

The Negro moved off with the horse. The girl's face sobered.

"Oh, I forgot to mention one thing we should put into our agreement."

"What's that?" Maynard asked, puzzled by her sudden change of manner.

"It's that I don't especially like men. This is purely a business deal. Understand?"

Maynard nodded, and said with a grim note in his voice, "I'm glad to hear you say it, because I don't like women. That's why I'm a—a bum on the highway. A woman made a fool of me."

"Oh!" was all she could say.

He spoke again. "So I want you to un-

derstand this is strictly business, and there won't be any moonlight and roses in it. Now lead me to your Uncle Sol—I want him to show me where I bed down for the night."

They had reached the steps of the cottage when a horseman drew up at the front gate. He called out:

"I say there, Bette, may I come in?"

The girl turned.

"Of all the nerve!" she exclaimed. "It's Maurice Hull. Maybe you'll remember him, Breck Maynard. He's the man who held you while Punch Doyle hit you."

"Yes, I believe I do remember him," Maynard said, tenderly touching his nose. "Suppose you tell him to come in."

Offer Plus Answer Equals Trouble

BETTE called out, "Come on in, Maurice, no one's going to hurt you," and to Maynard: "You may not know it, but he's that British gentleman rider who came over especially to ride Red Cavalier for Mark Luden in the Jackson Steeplechase. The fortune-hunter type—you know them I guess."

"I've seen a few," Maynard said.

Hull trotted up the drive, dismounted and approached with a disarming smile. With hand outstretched to Maynard, he said in drawling tones, "Sorry, old chap. My apologies. Got a bit excited and all that. Sorry."

Maynard ignored the outstretched hand. "That doesn't settle it," he said, looking into Hull's eyes.

"No? Well, what more can I say? I'm sorry—all that. You understand."

"I understand you now," Maynard said coldly, "but I have never understood a chap holding one man while another smashes him. Is that all you wanted, to come over and say, 'Sorry, and all that?'"

Hull tried to bluff it out. He smiled engagingly.

"You see, I got a bit excited. I really feared you might kill Punch Doyle. Doing you a service and all that—keep you from being charged with homicide, murder maybe."

Maynard smiled contemptuously. "Thoughtful of you, I must say!"

Bette Mason said, "You didn't come over merely to tender an apology, Maurice. I guess you and Linda watched Breck Maynard through your glasses and saw him come in. What do you want, Maurice Hull?"

He stepped back a foot. "I—ah—I say—a fellow always wants to make amends, you know."

The girl said sharply, "I know you are up to some devilment. What is it? Speak out!"

"Why, there was a little matter of business." Hull's tone became patronizing. "I thought I might throw a few acorns in Maynard's path. We can always use them, you know, eh?" turning toward Maynard. "Maybe you will accept my cash. How's that?"

"How's what?" Maynard said.

"A bit of silver for the palm. Silver makes most of us forget things, you know, but we'll call it a business transaction. I've got a cool five hundred dollars—not pounds—" he hastened to add, "that I'll swap you for that old broken-down nag. You make four hundred and seventy-five dollars profit. What say, is it a go?"

Maynard turned his back on the man.

"You couldn't have him for five thousand," he said over his shoulder.

"What's that?" Hull said. He started to follow Maynard, but the girl lifted a restraining hand.

"If I were you, Maurice, I'd retire as gracefully as I could."

The man stopped, curled his lips. "Now, say, this is no business of yours!"

"I don't like your attitude, and I don't like your manner. Suppose you go."

"Now say!" He straightened up, tossed his head knowingly to one side and grinned at her. "If I were you, I don't think I'd throw a chap out. Especially one who knows—"

"Who knows what?" The question was shot at him by Maynard, who had turned around to face him.

"Any business of yours?" Hull demanded.

"Plenty," Maynard told him. "Miss Mason is my business partner, and what she says goes. Get out!"

"Business partner! My word!" Hull laughed contemptuously. "If you knew what I know—"

He never finished the sentence. A fist that had been aching to connect with that

men," she said shortly. She volunteered nothing more. He asked nothing, but turned thoughts to business.

"I think we had better telephone for the horse doctor. I want to be sure Peter is patched up right."

"I'll do it," she said. Her face was serious. "Something tells me we had better



Maynard's mount was favorite, but thousands of voices were shouting at him, calling to him, cursing him because he was not out in front.

contemptuous face struck its mark. Hull stood his ground, shook his head savagely, then straightened.

"I don't fight with my inferiors!" he exclaimed.

"No?" Maynard drawled. "I do. That's why I gave you one. Now get out and keep your mouth shut!"

With an exaggerated air of courtesy Hull bowed to the girl.

"Be seeing you—you understand?" He lifted the reins of his horse, got in the saddle and trotted off.

The girl looked squarely at Maynard. "That's one of the reasons I don't like

keep a watch on this horse—that five-hundred-dollar offer wasn't made to soothe your feelings. Mark Luden wants his horse back."

"Well, he's not going to get him," Maynard said as he started toward the barn.

The front door of the cottage opened. A huge man, with a face as round as a watermelon and a head as smooth, came out. A mass of chins began to ripple as he spoke in a rumbling voice.

"My child, why didn't you call me? I saw it all from the window. I'd have larned that hellion to Jericho for you!"

Bette sighed wearily. "Since you saw

it all, Cousin Sol, why didn't you come out and do the larruping?"

"That was just what I was going to do," he explained, "when I saw this young knight of fisticuffs give a most marvelous exhibition of—"

"So you saw you were not needed, didn't you? Just stow all that, Cousin Sol. This is my partner—my racing partner—Breck Maynard."

The old fellow straightened his bow tie, buttoned his swallow-tail, made a profound bow.

"You are welcome, sir," he said. "Welcome to our humble cot, such as it is, and if ever you need my good right arm—"

"Stow it, Cousin Sol, stow it!" the girl said. "I've got to call the vet. You might show Breck where he's going to sleep. In the office, you know."

As she went into the house she heard Cousin Sol's voice booming out his words to Maynard.

"Yes, sir, you and I will get along right smart together. That name Breckenridge—it recalls memories. There was a time at the battle of Shiloh—no, my boy, I wasn't quite old enough to be there—"

Bette entered the house. Breck Maynard, as her partner, would have to endure Cousin Sol's ravings. She'd have a few minutes to herself.

Maurice Hull's visit—yes, Luden did want his horse back, wanted it badly—and Luden was a man who would stop at nothing to gain his ends. If he couldn't get Magnificent Peter back in his stables, he might—

Bette shook her head. They would set a guard tonight, keep a guard there every night. Uncle Sol was the man. Time he earned his keep. He loved to sit up most of the night reading, anyway. Let him sit in the groom's room. He was so timid that if he heard a mouse he'd come shouting. Yes, Cousin Sol could earn his keep now.

THE vet came, looked Peter over critically, hummed to himself as he bandaged the horse up. He stepped back, nodded approvingly at his handiwork.

"Yes, sir, that's a good job. Give him

five or six days and he'll be the same mean old Peter again."

"Nothing serious?" Bette asked.

The doctor laughed. "Well, if you call a little scar on the withers, maybe a scar on the knee that it takes a microscope to see—if you call that serious—" He laughed again and added, "If Peter has any speed, this little scrape ought to increase it a bit. He will be a little quicker to answer whip and spur." Turning to Maynard, he asked suddenly, "You any kin to Sam Maynard?"

"He was my father. Died two years ago. We were in the Caribbean."

"Sorry to hear it. I didn't know that. I didn't know him, but I knew his reputation. A great horseman. Well, call me when you need me."

When he had gone the girl said, "Under our agreement, I don't think we ought to ask each other questions about the past, but I have heard the name Maynard before—in racing circles. Just who—"

"Just who am I?"

"Yes—if you don't mind."

"I am the son of a man who raced horses under five different flags. That sufficient?"

She nodded. There were other questions she did want answered, but his manner stopped her.

Bette insisted that he eat with them—said that was in the contract too—and at the dinner table that night they made their campaign plans.

"Can you get Peter in shape to run three miles in two months' training?"

He thought a moment. "Believe I can. He hasn't an ounce of surplus flesh on him now. It will be a matter of training him to take the high jumps, giving him long workouts so he will be able to run all day. Yes, it can be done."

"Then we enter him in the Jackson Steeplechase down State. That will be twelve thousand dollars to the winner. Can you ride him then?"

He nodded. "I'll apply to the steeplechase association for my papers tomorrow."

Cousin Sol had been silent. Now he lifted

an eyelid, shook loose a reef of double chins and spoke.

"Now, folks, if you will be so kind as to defer to my judgment, I would ask that you permit me to be of assistance—"

"Very nice of you, Cousin Sol," the girl broke in quickly. "Now there's something you can do for us."

"Any time that I can tender a bit of my humble advice," he began, but she stopped him again.

"It's not advice, Cousin Sol, it's a bit of genuine service. Now I know that you're afraid of nothing under the sun—"

"Nor the moon, nor the heavenly constellations," he said.

"You know that a valuable horse in training—well, there's always danger that someone will try to tamper with him—"

"Right, my child. We should summon the best detectives—"

The girl shook her head. "We may be hard-pressed even for feed. We can't afford detectives, so I'm going to ask you, as a great favor, if you won't sleep in the groom's stall—"

"Eh? What's this?" The big fellow struggled up in his chair, his flock of chins quivered in surprise. "Me? Sleep in the groom's stall? Why, I once addressed the governor myself—"

"Yes, yes, I understand, Cousin Sol, but this is different. Now come, I've already had the groom's stall fixed up for you. There's a nice cot there with clean sheets on it, and there's a lantern, and you can take out your latest detective story. If anything should disturb Peter, I know you will give the alarm. Now don't be afraid, Cousin Sol," she added. "I'll put the Scottie back in the stable with you. Come, let's go. It's time."

She touched his shoulder. Maynard smiled to himself, seeing the look of surprise on Cousin Sol's many-chinned face.

"Well, uh—as long as the Scottie is with me—and as a special favor to you, my child—yes, I shall go, and gladly."

With effort he got to his feet, extended his hand to Maynard, saying, "Breckenridge, my lad, may you have dreams pleasant and fair."

He waddled out behind his niece. He knew well who buttered his bread.

"Well," the girl said when she returned, "that's that!"

"I guess it's bedtime for me too," Maynard said. "I'll be up at four-thirty, see that Holy Jim feeds Peter and gives him a good rub-down. We'll let him graze in the pasture three or four days, until those gashes heal, then we'll go into active training. Good night."

"Good night," she answered.

He went out of the room. Neither looked at the other. Their agreement was purely a business one; each was determined to keep it so.

MAYNARD went straight to the little office, a one-room structure in the rear where all business of the farm had once been transacted. A bed, a chair, a table, a lamp, a shelf with a score of books on it—these were his furnishings.

He lit the lamp, sat down, and relaxed for the first time that day. "Odd," he mused, "the queer turns of fate."

A month ago he had come to New York from the Caribbean, bringing with him a few hundred dollars, all that was left after a certain woman in Havana had made a fool of him. Well, he'd learned that lesson. There would never be another woman in his life.

He'd found New York none too eager to give work to a man who knew only how to play. He was not needed, he was not wanted in the commercial world. He knew nothing but horses, so he had started toward the Blue Grass, where horse is king.

Two months ago he was sitting at a sidewalk café facing the Prado in Havana, and *she* was sitting beside him, a teasing smile flashing from black eyes under drooping lashes. He remembered how swiftly the smile had vanished when he told her that he was nearly broke. He recalled—"Confound it," he muttered to himself, "I've got to forget all that!" He straightened up, stretched. He would go out, take a look in the stables, see how Peter and the Scottie and Cousin Sol were.

He found the stable doors padlocked.

Inside he could hear the nervous clump as Peter tramped in his stall. Then he heard another sound. He leaned closer to the door to hear better. It was a scraping sound. Now it stopped. He stood motionless. All was moonlight around him, moonlight with great blotches of black where the linden trees cast their gloom. He heard the tinkle of a sheep bell, far over the hillside, as some old ram shifted his bed in a meadow. From a far valley came a rumble of a freight train, then the whistle of its engine. And once again came that scraping sound against the door.

Old Holy Jim was bedded down behind the stables. Cousin Sol was on the far side of the stable, in the groom's room. Maynard could see a ray of light cast from the window there. Cousin Sol was busy reading his detective thrillers. Again came that insistent, weird scraping on the floor. Suddenly a catch came into Maynard's throat. He was going to cough. Now he could not, must not cough. That would give him away. Somebody—something—was on the other side of that door where his horse was. He wanted to know who and what. He put his hand over his mouth and tried to muffle the cough—and he coughed all the more loudly.

Instantly there was another sound inside that door. A joyous yip, the yip of Jock the Scottie. Maynard laughed out loud. The pup!

"Hello, Jock," he called through the cracks in the door. "How did you get in there? Thought you were with Cousin Sol." In reply came the thump, thump of the dog's tail on the earthen floor of the stable. "Good night, old fellow," he called softly.

Maynard walked away, feeling relieved. Seeing the patch of light, he went to the window. It was a shameless thing to do, but he felt himself drawn to that window. He had to look in. He did—and smiled at what he saw. The stable lantern with its wick high, hanging from a center boom, revealed the corpulent figure of Cousin Sol lying fully clothed on the cot. Maynard knew he was still dressed, for his shoes and his trousered legs stuck out from beneath the blanket—the blanket was pulled high over the old fellow's head. Cousin Sol

was resolved to see no evil that night. Maynard chuckled to himself.

"Well, fifteen pounds of this Scottie awake is worth two hundred and fifty pounds of Cousin Sol under the blanket," he said to himself, and returning to the office, went to bed.

And a Barton Apologizes

MAGNIFICENT PETER was nominated for the Jackson Steeplechase, Maynard's riding papers were granted, and in a week's time the horse's wounds were sufficiently healed for him to be placed in training.

Maynard found his judgment correct. The horse was a natural jumper. He took to timber-topping like steel to a magnet. The first week he was jumped over two-foot obstacles. Within a fortnight he was clearing them at three and a half with ease. The highest jump on the Jackson was four feet. And Peter made that too.

Not once was the horse disturbed at night. Cousin Sol, philosophically, had grown accustomed to sleeping in the groom's quarters—so much so that he disrobed each night and no longer covered his head with the blankets. He took to his duties as Peter's guardian with gusto, and soon felt that the fate of the horse rested solely upon his shoulders. Both Maynard and Bette let him think so.

At the beginning of the third week, as Maynard was taking Peter over the training course, he saw a limousine stop by the roadside. Two men got out, climbed the fence and sat on the topmost rail. Maynard frowned. He knew their mission. They were true railbirds—clockers sent out by racetrack bookmakers—seeking to time the candidates for the Jackson and judge their respective chances.

Purposely Maynard held the horse in. Peter, whose sullen ways had changed to willingness under the magic of Maynard's hands, was more speedy than they could guess. They could see, of course, that he was a good jumper, but as they got down from the fence and drove off, he could imagine them saying, "Nothing but a long

shot, and no chance at all." Maynard grinned, patted Peter on the shoulder as he drew him in to a walk.

"Well, we fooled them, Pete . . ." he said.

Another morning he saw a rider coming over the hill on Bette Mason's land. As the rider drew near, he saw it was a girl—Linda Barton.

"Oh, hello," she called, drawing rein under a high-limbed apple tree.

"Hello," he answered, and walked Peter up to her. She smiled, not the patronizing smile she had given him once, but a smile of friendliness.

"I hear you are doing pretty well with old Peter," she said.

He looked at her searchingly, and a slow smile spread over his face. "You mean you've been seeing that we've been doing nicely, don't you?"

"I what?" she said, puzzled.

"This is field-glass valley, isn't it?"

"Oh!" She colored furiously, and then laughed. "I guess I have the field-glass habit, but you don't mind, do you?"

He shrugged. "Why should I?"

"Listen, Breck." She drew her mount closer to his. "I owe you a fistful of apologies—apologies for what happened over at my place."

"No, you don't owe me anything."

"But I do. I'd like to give you my hand. Will you shake?"

She extended her hand to him.

Maynard made no move to take it, but said, "If I won't shake, you won't offer to buy Peter will you?"

"I don't understand."

"No? That's what Maurice Hull tried to do."

The girl colored again. "I didn't know he did that."

"But you did send him over to me, didn't you?"

"Yes, to apologize, but nothing more. I'm awfully sorry. Truly I am." Once more she extended her hand. "Shake?"

He took it. She clasped his hand firmly, looked into his eyes.

"I think you're an awfully swell sort. Goodby, good luck—may the best horse

win!" she said, and with a gay little wave of the hand, she rode off, disappeared over the hills. Maynard shook his head. After all, she seemed an awfully nice, decent sort.

WHEN he went in for noon-time dinner, as they called it in the Blue Grass, Maynard sensed a coldness on the part of Bette Mason.

Cousin Sol, aware that something was wrong, tried to enliven the meal. "And in 1915," he was saying, between huge mouthfuls of fried chicken, "I myself wrote to my old friend Woodrow Wilson and told him just how he could stop the war without our going into it or losing a single man. And—"

Bette broke in. "What did Mr. Wilson say when he answered your letter?"

"What—what did he say? Well, now, come to think of it, one of those scamps in his executive office—yes, ma'am, he did—it never even got to Woodrow, and Woodrow put us into the war all because he didn't know my plan. Later, when I heard he was going to Europe, I went to Colonel House—"

"And what did House say to you?"

"Well, now, come to think of it," he raised his napkin, swabbed off his chin, "there was a rascal who lied to me and said the colonel would be mighty glad to see me another time, but I know he never took my message in. Of course, when Harding became President—"

Crash! Bette slammed her coffee cup on its saucer, and it broke into a score of pieces. The coffee spilled all over the tablecloth.

"Oh, I—I—" She got up and ran out of the room, sobbing. Cousin Sol followed her with his gaze, open-eyed.

"Now what inarnation got into her?"

"Oh, thunder!" Maynard exclaimed, getting up and slamming his chair back. "You'd never understand!" he added under his breath.

He went out into the paddock. The rest of the afternoon he spent around the stables. When suppertime came, Bette excused herself, said she had a violent headache. For three quarters of an hour May-

nard listened to Cousin Sol's boresome ramblings, and finally, when he could stand it no longer, he said, "I think we'd better turn in. We're getting up very early in the morning."

"Yes, yes, quite right, my lad," and Cousin Sol waddled out to his groom's quarters.

Maynard went to his own quarters. He tried to read, but could not. He tried to nap in his chair and couldn't. He was too wide awake to go to bed. Finally he opened the door and walked out into the spring night.

There was no moon, but the night was filled with stars. Slowly he went toward the stables. Under a sycamore he thought he saw someone move. Yes, it was a figure. He crouched, peered intently ahead. Someone creeping toward the padlocked stable door! Someone was going to try to enter that stable to harm his horse, someone who would want Peter out of the way.

Stealthily Maynard crept forward. Now the intruder had reached the door. Maynard heard the snap of steel as the man fumbled with the padlock. Maynard straightened up, then leaped, throwing himself on the man's back. They fell to the ground together. From inside the barn came an excited bark. Then came a little gasp and a sob of fright. It was not a man, it was a girl—Bette Mason, in riding garb.

"Good Lord!" he said, pulling himself up.

"That you, Breck?" she gasped.

He lifted her to her feet.

"I'm awfully sorry. I thought it was someone trying to hurt Peter. What are you doing out here? You're supposed to be sick."

"I—I—" She started to speak, then shrugged. He had been holding her by the hands, and now he placed his arms around her shoulders.

"What were you doing here, Bette?"

"Don't you think it's time I looked after the horse?" she asked.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Don't you suppose I still use my field-glasses? I saw you and Linda Barton on the course this morning. I don't know how

many times you've been meeting that way. I guess it's been every morning. Maybe every hour."

"Why, you—why, that's the first time I've seen her or spoken with her since I've been here. She came over this morning—"

"And brought honey on her tongue, didn't she?" Bette asked. "Don't deny it. You all were close together. I saw you looking into her eyes, smiling at her. You held her hand for a long time, too. I saw it."

"I couldn't help myself," he protested.

"Oh, don't tell me that! Really, I'm not a ten-year-old, you know."

"Honestly, I swear it, she came over to apologize for what happened at her place. She did apologize. She asked me to shake hands. That was when I was holding her hand. Won't you believe me? I swear this is the truth."

Bette was silent. Suddenly Maynard took her in his arms and kissed her. He felt the warm response of her lips, and with sudden fierceness she wrenched herself free.

"I'm surprised at you!" she said sharply. "I thought we agreed that there was to be none of this love nonsense."

"You call love nonsense?"

"Well, what do you call it?" she said. "You, who talked about hating all women! I think there has been enough of this for one night, don't you, Breck? Let's forget it."

"All right, if you say so," he said.

The girl went back to the house and he to the office, but it was near daybreak before he fell asleep.

Long Odds Bring Trouble

BETTE MASON came to the breakfast table with a gleam of excitement in her eyes. "Seen the paper, either of you? I might read you something from the sporting pages, if you would like to hear it." She opened the paper, turned to the racing page.

"There's a future book being made on the Jackson Steeplechase. You know what

"that means, Cousin Sol?" she questioned.

For once the old man had to shake his head.

"It means that odds are already being laid against the entries for the Steeplechase, but they are 'play or pay.' That means if you bet on a horse now, and he does not start—if he is scratched, for any reason—the bet still stands and, of course, you lose. That's why the odds are much larger than at the tracks, where they are laid against the actual starters."

Cousin Sol cleared his throat. "Gambling is pernicious. Still, in this case—"

"In this case you are willing to bet your collar button." The girl smiled over the paper at him. "Well, you can win a lot of collar buttons, Cousin Sol, if you bet just one against Peter's chances. The odds in the future book are seventy-five to one."

Maynard leaned across the table. "And what are the odds against Red Cavalier?"

"Red Cavalier is favorite. Odds of only two to one, and he will be odds on at post time."

"I thought so. I have been hearing reports from Marlo Farms on that nag."

"Anything special?" the girl asked.

"Nothing but that he seems to be a bit overtrained. Chances are he will leave his race in the paddock."

Bette tossed the paper aside; looked across at Maynard.

"Pardner—" she smiled as she used the word—"how much loose cash have you, if any?"

Maynard drew the dwindling supply of bills from his pocket, counted them on the table. "Less than fifty dollars, and I will have at least twenty dollars' expenses on race day. So I have twenty-five to spare."

"I'll match you," Bette said. "That makes fifty. I'm going to ride into town, put it up. That's three thousand seven hundred and fifty against fifty, and twelve thousand if and when Peter wins."

Cousin Sol boomed, "If I may be permitted to join you with a shinplaster or so—" He reached into a capacious vest pocket, placed two quarters on the table, Maynard and Bette smiled.

"I'll add a quarter to that," Maynard said.

"I'll do the same," Bette added.

"And it will be all yours, Cousin Sol," Maynard said. It was the first time he had called the old boy by the family name. "You will have seventy-five extra berries to splurge with after I win."

"Yes, sir—and I can use it, too," Cousin Sol answered.

Bette arose. "Give me the money, both of you—I'm off to town."

WITH Holy Jim's aid, Maynard had constructed not one, but three fences, each four feet high, on the training course. There were five others, ranging from three to three and three quarters feet. This morning he decided to give Peter a fast workout over the full three miles.

The horse was brought out by the old Negro. Dexterously he tossed Maynard into the saddle. Peter curveted, plunged once, then settled down.

"You're all right, boy," Maynard crooned to him. "Just showing a bit of spirit, are you?"

He raised the reins and they rode out onto the course.

It was a beautiful workout. Peter never touched timber once. Every take-off was good, every landing perfect. At the end of the three miles, the horse, though tired, of course, was not breathing heavily, and Maynard noticed that he took the last hurdle with the same gusto as the first. The horse had wind and heart. Barring any unforeseen accident, Peter would give Red Cavalier the race of his life.

That afternoon, before Bette returned from the city, a smart limousine drove up. A chauffeur opened the door, and a gentleman with a cane—a gentleman a little too well dressed—stepped out with mincing steps. Seeing Maynard, he called, "Will you take my card in to Miss Mason?"

"Miss Mason is not here," Maynard answered coldly.

"Then to Mr. Maynard, if you will be good enough."

"I am Mr. Maynard. What do you want?"

The man's manner changed instantly. "Oh, sorry! I didn't expect—"

"Didn't expect to see me looking like a real horseman, did you? Well, what do you have?"

"Why, if we could have a little moment's conversation—a bit of personal business—"

Instantly Maynard was all suspicion. "I don't know you, can't see any reason to have any business with you." He turned, started to walk away.

"But, Mr. Maynard, please—if you please!" The stranger minced up to Maynard. "Really, I am sorry. I had heard so much about you that I frankly didn't know—didn't know you were the type of man who—ah—would have the guts to be—"

"To look like a stable hand?"

"Well, sir, you are a gentleman rider, and so many of them swank around—"

"What is it you want?" Maynard asked again, impatient.

"Well, Mr. Maynard, just laying the plain cards on the table, I am out here to give you some money—a lot of money—exactly five thousand dollars. A personal present. Now that's man to man."

Maynard shrugged. "Don't tell me a fairy tale. Now what's the game? Speak up, before I have you thrown off the place!"

"Now, Mr. Maynard, you misunderstand. I am not out here asking you to pull a horse—"

"I know darn well you are not, but what's the game?"

"Well, if you want to know it"—the man's mask of suavity dropped away—"I am here representing a certain syndicate that is making a future book on this Steeplechase, and we are already top-heavy with bets on your black Peter. We have received some secret reports showing the horse is much better than he is supposed to be. Frankly, we made a mistake laying such long odds. Still, we can't blame ourselves. The horse had never started in a race. It looks now as though he stands a fair chance of being in the money."

"A fair chance!" Maynard snorted. "A very good chance, I'd say!"

"All right, a very good chance. How is

five thousand to you and your partner just to scratch the horse—not start him? There is no guarantee you will even be in the money."

Maynard's face colored slowly, then he took one step forward. "I think you had better get out of here!" he said.

The stranger raised a hand. "Just a minute, please. We are not trying to bribe you to pull a race. We are just asking you not to run your horse, and we are willing to pay you five thousand for it."

"You want me to beat a lot of poor devils out of having a run for their money," Maynard retorted. "Suppose you beat it!"

"Seven thousand five hundred."

"No!" Maynard's eyes were gleaming dangerously. "Get out!"

THE man with the clothes that were too well cut stepped closer. "Of course, you are my kind, you are a good business man. You do stand a chance of winning, but just a chance. I will make it a sure thing—twelve thousand to you not to start. That is all you will make even if you start and win against a field of ten or twelve horses."

Maynard turned a full, hard stare on the man. "You are a gambler, aren't you?"

The man nodded. "So am I," Maynard said, "but you sit safely in the club house and bet on sure things, while I go over the sticks, risking my fool neck, betting on my own ability. There's quite a difference. Now suppose you clear out!"

For a moment the stranger just looked at Maynard. Then he shrugged, turned and walked back toward his car, muttering something about the stupidity of gentlemen riders. As the car drove off, Holy Jim came around the side of the house.

"I've been a-listenin' to all that, Mr. Breck," he said. "Mr. Breck," the old Negro drew closer, and whispered, "I bet you don't know who that gent is."

It flashed over Maynard that he had turned the gambler down without knowing his name or, better still, taking the man's car number.

"No, Jim, I don't. Who is he?"

Holy Jim edged closer and whispered the name of the most notorious crooked gambler on Broadway.

"They calls him the Black Heart, Mr. Breck, and they speaks of his gang as the Black Heart gang. If I wuz you, Mr. Breck, I would put a whole lot of detectatives around that barn tonight, because somebody's done bet a powerful lot of money on our haws, and dey'se going to try to do away wid him."

"Thanks, Jim."

Yes, they would have to keep a close watch on the house from now on. But there was no money for detectives. Cousin Sol and Jock, the Scottie, would have to serve.

When Bette returned from town, exulting over having put up all their money—at seventy-five to one—Maynard told her of the visitor.

"Offered us twelve thousand, eh, and both of us broke! What did you do?" she said.

"Turned him down, of course."

"I like you for that, Breck." That was all she said, but as she went up the stairs, she smiled back at him.

Like a Thunderbolt

FIVE-THIRTY in the afternoon the telephone rang; a call for Maynard, a woman's voice speaking. Holy Jim brought the word to him out in the office and added, "Miss Bette, she didn't seem so happy over it either."

"Thanks, Jim, I'll go."

When he went into the living room, Bette rose from a chair and walked out, saying, "I think you'll want to talk privately."

Maynard lifted the receiver, called "Hello." In answer came the warm contralto voice of the girl who had once appraised his points as she would those of a horse.

"Breck, I've a big favor to ask you, and I have no right to ask it, either. I want to see you tonight, see you alone."

"What do you mean? Can't you tell me over the telephone?"

"No, Breck, I can't, but it's something—

well, it concerns the safety of your horse. I am sorry for what happened here, and I'm trying to make good. I repeat, it concerns the safety of Magnificent Peter. I've heard a few things. Won't you see me privately?"

His body grew tense for an instant. Someone no doubt was out to injure his horse. Linda Barton must know about it. Much as he disliked seeing her again, he couldn't say no.

"Why, yes—yes, I'll see you."

"Where? It's not wise for me to come over there, and it might not be safe for you to come over here in the dark. Punch Doyle is still bitter, and one or two others. There's a place where we can meet. Half a mile beyond Bette's house, on the other side of the hill with the tall cedar on it, there's a little meeting house. I'm going down there in my roadster alone. You be at the front gate. I'll pick you up, we'll go and talk, and I'll bring you back in half an hour."

"All right, Linda. What time?"

Her answer came softly. "There's a moon out tonight. It rises about eight o'clock. I'll be by at eight-thirty. Be waiting for me. Goodby." The phone clicked off.

Maynard called Bette. She had gone out of the house. He found her at Peter's stall, stroking the animal's muzzle.

"I have something to tell you, Bette."

She glanced over her shoulder. "Well, what is it?"

"It's about Linda Barton. She telephoned—"

"I know that," the girl said, giving her attention to the horse, "and I am not interested."

Deliberately she turned around, faced him and smiled coldly. "Understand, Breck? I am not interested."

"But—"

"Did you hear me? I am thinking of getting Peter ready to be vanned down to the track. You seem to forget this race will be run next Saturday."

"No, I am remembering it."

"You and Linda," she said with a hint of scorn, "have an engagement. You'd better keep it."

She brushed by him and went into the house.

Again at supper time she pleaded a headache and stayed in her room. Angered, Maynard wrote a brief note, sent it in by the old Negro cook. His words were:

Dear Bette:

You misunderstand everything. Linda, out of sheer decency, has warned me that our horse is in danger. She can't tell me about it over the telephone, so she is going to pick me up at the gate and we are going to the meeting house over the hill for a talk. I'll come back and tell you everything. I am as much interested in Peter's safety as you are.

Five minutes later, back came her answer, written on the edge of the note: "And one Linda Barton is quite interested in you, if you are not in her!"

"The devil!" he said, wadding up the note and throwing it across the room. There was no accounting for a woman's way of thinking.

AFTER supper, a dismal supper during which he listened to Uncle Sol telling how he advised President Roosevelt, Maynard went down the driveway, waited at the gate.

Promptly at eight-thirty a little roadster slowed up and stopped. A voice called, "Here I am, Breck. Let's go!"

He stepped forward, put one foot on the running board, but hesitated an instant. What if she was trying to lure him off? Suppose a group of her henchmen were to kidnap him? He was the only man who could handle Magnificent Peter. The horse sulked with other riders. But only for an instant did he hesitate. She extended her hand, and in the moon's rays he saw her looking squarely at him. He could see no guile in that face.

"Are you coming, Breck?" she asked.

He took her hand an instant. "Of course."

He got in and sat beside her. She said nothing during their short ride over the

hill. When they came to the meeting house, an old oblong brick structure which had been standing since before the Civil War, she drove through the yard, came to a stop under a sycamore tree and switched off the lights. There were no shadows, but beyond the trees all was bright moonlight. No one could approach them without being seen. He had been a fool to think she was laying a trap for him.

"You can tell me what all this is about," he said brusquely.

She removed her gloves, turned to face him.

"Breck, I have just heard a hint or two. The truth is Punch Doyle has been to town. He came back drunk and he said a lot of things he never would have when sober."

"For instance?"

"Well, he said that the Black Heart gang—I guess you've heard of them—are out to injure your horse. He didn't say how or when, but it seems that there's been a lot of money bet in the Future Books on Peter. He's a better horse than people think, and the gamblers are afraid they'll lose their shirts, so they would rather make you lose your horse instead."

"Nice of you, Linda, telling me all this, but I already knew it. Anything else?"

"No, that's all. Of course, it's to our advantage for your horse to be out of the way, but we don't want to win the Jackson that way. Say what you want about Uncle, but you must admit he races fair and square. He's just hot-tempered. It's to his loss, too. Look how he got mad and sold Peter for twenty-five dollars! He'll regret that the rest of his life. You see, Breck, he has won the Jackson twice. He's crazy to win the third time. When the word gets around—as it will—that his Red Cavalier was beaten by a cast-off that he sold for twenty-five dollars—well, he'll be ashamed to show his face."

"Nothing I can do about it," Maynard said.

"I know, Breck. It's too bad everything turned out the way it did."

He smiled to himself, but said, "Not too bad for me, Linda."

"Yes, it is. If you were there now—

well, you would be chief trainer, and part-owner of our stables before you knew it."

"Already I am chief trainer and part-owner of a stable, even though a one-horse affair. I'm satisfied."

"You forget, Breck," she said. Now he felt her warm hands on his. She was leaning close to him. "Breck, can't you understand? Don't you?" He felt her breath on his cheek.

"Look here!" he said. "I don't want to make love to you!"

"You fool!" she cried, drawing away quickly. "I was never so insulted in my life!"

"Nor was I," he countered. "Come on, take me home—or are you one of the girls who makes the boys walk back?"

"You are insulting!"

"You asked for it. Come on, let's drive back."

He could tell by her quick movements as she jerked on her gloves that she was very angry, could tell it by the way she jammed her foot on the starter and the way she meshed the gears.

They rode back in silence. Linda stopped abruptly at the Mason gate and said, "Here's your shack. Now jump out, Maynard—or whatever your name is!"

He yawned, calmly lifted his hat and slowly stepped to the ground.

"Want me to say thanks for the buggy ride?"

She was too angry to retort. Again she clashed the gears as she drove away.

As Maynard walked up the driveway, Holy Jim came running down to him, wringing his hands, and called:

"Oh, Mr. Breck! They done come and kilt Mister Sol and took our haws!"

WITH difficulty, Maynard got Holy Jim to tell his tale. Shortly after Maynard had gone down to meet Linda Barton, Cousin Sol dutifully had gone out to keep his vigil. Ten minutes, maybe twelve later, those in the house heard a furious barking by little Jock. Then they heard shouts from Cousin Sol. The cook, Holy Jim and Bette had run out to the stable. The padlock had been pried off, the

double doors thrown back and the horse had been taken from his stall. In the moonlight the three of them, cook, groom, and owner, saw a little group of men tugging with a horse way down in a meadow; heard behind them the barks of the Scottie. Lying on his back by the stable door, a stick in one hand and his face to the skies, was Cousin Sol. It had transpired just a moment or so before Maynard returned home. Quickly he ran to the stable, where Bette, crying, was leaning over the silent figure. She glanced up at Maynard.

"I'm afraid he's dead," she said.

Maynard stooped, ripped the old fellow's shirt open, felt of his heart. There was a slight beat.

"No, he's still alive," he said, "and my guess is concussion of the brain. Go call the doctor, Bette. We won't try to move him; if any bones are broken we might puncture some vital part."

She rose, ran into the house. Now Cousin Sol's fingers were twitching. A foot moved spasmodically. Maynard cursed himself for ever having doubted the old man's bravery.

Through the night came the sound of three sharp pistol cracks—one, a pause, and then two others. Holy Jim moaned; "They be a-killin' somebody else now!"

"They are probably killing my horse," Maynard said grimly. There was nothing he could do now except keep vigil until the doctor came. He did loosen Cousin Sol's neck band so he could breathe easier. He had just finished doing that when he heard a clump of hoofs from the meadow, a clumping that grew louder until around the stable came Magnificent Peter, a broken halter rein dangling down.

"I catches him, Mr. Maynard," Jim called. And stepping forward, he began to sing-song to the animal. "Good old boy! You done come home—you done come home! Come back to old Holy Jim!"

The horse, trembling violently, permitted Jim to grasp the halter. The man led him back into the stall. Now Maynard understood those shots. Whoever had taken the horse out meant to steal him outright to kill two birds with one stone—to eliminate him from the Jackson Steeplechase and

then, no doubt, to ship him to some far western track where he could race and win for some clique of gamblers. But Peter had changed all that. Somehow, down in the meadow, Peter had jerked loose and then, in desperation, the shots had been fired.

It was hard to understand how any man could miss a horse at close range, but no doubt the thieves were as excited as the animal.

"Jim," Maynard called, "you take a lantern and look that horse over from head to tail to see if he's hurt."

Jim did so. He reported: "Nary a touch on him, Mr. Breck, and he's quieting down now, too. But I sure wish that there doctor'd come for Mr. Sol."

At last the doctor did come. After a searching examination he stood up, announced no bones broken. "Concussion of the brain, but I don't think his skull was fractured. Somebody hit him a glancing blow with a blunt instrument on the forehead. Two or three days rest and he'll be all right."

At that moment Cousin Sol half raised on his elbow.

"Come," the doctor said, "we can all get around him and lift him. He's coming to."

They lifted Cousin Sol to his feet. A deep gasp, then a moan came from his lips. With one arm around the country doctor, another around Maynard, and Holy Jim supporting him by the arm-pit, the old man was carried into the house. As they laid him on a couch in the living room he murmured, "And I wrote to President Wilson, and told Woodrow—"

The doctor nodded. "It's just concussion. Maybe he'll be all right by race day."

Taking the Hurdles

DID Linda Barton deliberately trick Maynard? Did she lure him to the meeting house so that unknown thugs could try to steal his horse in his absence? Breck was asking himself those questions as the telephone rang again. This time it was Mark Luden, speaking in an agitated voice.

"I have just called the doctor's house. They tell me he's over there. Quick! Put him on the phone!"

The doctor took the receiver. Breck heard him say, "Yes, yes, I'll be there as quickly as possible. No, it seems there's nothing you can do, but I'll come."

He placed the receiver back on the hook gently, faced the little group standing by the couch, and said:

"Mark Luden says he thinks his niece Linda is dead."

"Dead!" The exclamation came from all.

Maynard said, "Why, I saw her fifteen minutes ago—"

"Luden says she started up the steps of the house and somebody down in the hollow fired three shots; one of those bullets struck her in the heart. She fell dead."

"I wonder—" Maynard started, but didn't finish the sentence. He wondered if Linda Barton had been innocent in arranging that meeting; or if she had she deliberately led him there so that unknown thugs could steal Peter. It was a question better left unspoken, for now it could never be answered. The doctor left, after giving directions for Cousin Sol's care and promising to return on the morrow.

An hour later, papers from the city were putting in long distance calls to get the details of the shooting of Linda Barton and of the attempted theft of Magnificent Peter. Maynard told of the unknown gambler who had tried to buy his horse out of the race. As a result, the next day two track detectives appeared with instructions to watch over Peter until the moment the race started.

The best news was that Cousin Sol was returning to consciousness. He had only a slight concussion, after all. He remembered little of the attack. Answering the dog's furious barking—a dog that now cuddled on his feet—he had run around to the doorway. He saw several men, "Well, maybe there were fifteen or twenty, all a-draggin' Peter out, and before I could say Jack Robinson, a big star out of the sky hit me plump on the head and that's all I know."

At last, and this didn't take place for more than twenty-four more hours, May-

nard persuaded Bette to hear his story of that night. She listened, but made no comment.

EARLY the next morning a horse van drew up at the stables. Peter was led inside; the doors were closed. Holy Jim rode on top with the buckets and a couple of bales of hay. Maynard sat with the driver. One of the detectives rode with them. Bette was driving down to the track with friends. Her only farewell was, "Well, I'll see you in the paddock at the track."

After reporting at the track—they reached the receiving shed in mid-afternoon—a messenger handed a note to Maynard. It was from the track secretary: "I have some news you may be interested in. Please see me at your earliest convenience."

After stabling the horse, seeing that he was bedded down and properly guarded, Maynard reported to the secretary, a smiling little Scotchman.

"I knew your father, lad," he said. "That was years ago. He was my friend. I'm glad to see his son on the turf, but here's something you want to hear. It will be in the papers soon, so I'll tell you first." The little man leaned forward a trifle in his chair. "Remember we sent two detectives to guard your horse?"

"Yes, I do," Maynard said, "and it was splendid of you."

"You knew about them, but you didn't know that we sent half a dozen more up there. Well, guess what they found. They found out who tried to steal your horse, and they caught 'em—all three—or at least two living, and one now getting ready to kick up daisies."

Maynard whistled. "Lord, but that was quick work! Who were they?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," the secretary answered obliquely, "that Maurice Hull won't ride Red Cavalier tomorrow either."

"What's this?"

The secretary let one eyelid droop for a moment. "Hull is the one who is getting ready to kick up the daisies—a rotter if ever there was one. The Black Heart Gang bought him off; paid him to do away with your horse. He hired Mark Luden's trainer,

Punch Doyle. Mind ye, we lay nothing against Luden but his gentleman rider, that Hull, and Punch Doyle and a fellow we ruled off the tracks, name of Spain. They went out to get your horse. Hull stayed back in the shadows. The other two broke into the stable, pulled the horse out."

"Wait a minute," Maynard said. "How did you learn of this?"

"Easy, lad, easy!" the Scot answered. "The third man, Spain, got drunk. Seems that, because the horse broke away from 'em, Hull wouldn't pay the money that was given him to pay 'em, so Spain talked. We got him, we got Punch Doyle, and they were just going to get Hull when—"

"You mean he resisted arrest?"

"Nothing so thrilling. He turned the gun on himself. Now, I know you will be busy until tomorrow. I'll be seeing you then. Maybe seeing you in front—who knows?"

BETTE MASON was standing in the paddock beside Magnificent Peter as the riders for the Jackson Steeplechase came out of the jockey room. Ignoring the shouts of the crowd, "There he is! There's Maynard! Bought Magnificent Peter for twenty-five dollars—now he's worth ten thousand, if he's worth a nickel. He's a riding fool—" ignoring all that, Maynard walked straight up to Bette Mason, saluted her with his bat.

"You are boss here," he said. "Any last minute riding instructions?"

For an instant she bit her lip, then she smiled. "I wouldn't dare give you instructions. Go out and ride to win—and remember old Sol is listening by the radio. He has a dollar in the future books at seventy-five to one on you, Breck."

"And I'd rather win for him than for myself, the spunky old gas bag!" said Maynard. Then, as an after-thought, "What are the odds on us now?"

Bette grinned. "We are favorite, Breck—favorite at even money. Can you believe it? On a horse that has never started before!" Her face sobered. "If you win—if you even come in the money, Breck—you'll be famous; not only as a rider but also as a trainer. Your fortune is made."

"You mean our fortune. We're still partners, you know."

The notes of the bugle sounded, calling the horses to post. Bette stood at Magnificent Peter's head, holding him. Holy Jim, resplendent in an old derby hat and his Sunday-go-to-meeting coat, stooped to seize Maynard's leg.

"Mr. Breck, I pray las' night, and de Lawd's going to answer my prayer in about six minutes and ten seconds. Take you jest about that long to win, won't it?"

"Just about, Jim. Give me the leg up."

As the horses filed onto the track, the buzzing of twenty thousand voices came to Maynard's ears, like the droning of a mighty beehive. Overnight scratches had reduced the field to seven, and Maynard had drawn Number Five. If all went well, there was only one horse in the race to fear. That was Red Cavalier. Mark Luden, of course, was not at the track, but a shrewd trainer had engaged a star professional rider, a chap named Swan.

Already Maynard had mapped out his plan of battle. They went into the infield, each horse being walked up to the first barrier, there to sniff it, to be made to realize that this was the moment to jump, not merely to play. Now they were lining up in front of the club house. The starter bellowed.

"Come up to the line now. Easy! Give me a chance, and I'll give you a fair start. . . . Go on! Go on! Go on!"

The field was off. Deliberately, for the first few strides, Maynard pulled his horse back and over against the rail, behind the riders. He let them fight it out for the first two miles. He would avoid the chance of bumping while taking a hurdle.

He was six lengths behind as the field took the first jump. He heard the crack of hoofs as one horse bobbed over, striking the top rail. Maynard smiled to himself. As they swept around the near turn, he was still in last position, ten lengths behind. At the second jump, one horse pitched his rider, then cut into the infield, with bridle swinging and stirrups dangling. Maynard saw the jockey roll out of his way as Peter took the obstacle.

PETER was fencing superbly, like a veteran. Going down the backstretch, Maynard saw the scarlet and purple colors of Luden's mount leading the procession. A procession it was, for they were almost in Indian file. They swept around the far turn in the same position. As they came by the stands the first time, Maynard could distinguish his name in the roar. His mount was favorite, but thousands of voices were shouting at him, calling to him, cursing him because he was not out in front. Fools! Didn't they know he was conserving his mount's strength for that last mile?

Halfway down the back stretch for the second time, two mounts bumped in mid-air, taking a fence, and crashed to the earth beyond. Maynard swerved Peter to the right, lost half a dozen lengths going safely around them. Both boys were scrambling to their feet. Now there were only three horses in front of him, Red Cavalier still leading. The second time around, the roar from the stands was louder, more strident. Still he set his lips, holding Peter down to a steady pace. As they neared the far turn, the mount in front of him swerved. Just as well gain a few lengths here. Maynard lifted his reins, clucked. As he swept alongside, the jockey on the other horse yanked out his left rein.

"Keep off, you fool!" Maynard shouted. The jockey was trying to ride him off the course. Now he was safely past them. Again he steadied Peter down. Only two horses ahead, only a few lengths to the front, but Red Cavalier was one-sixteenth of a mile ahead. Now it was time to go to work in earnest.

Again Maynard lifted the reins, and again Peter responded. Going down the backstretch, they gained, but he saw the boy on Red Cavalier lift his rein at the three-eighths pole. He was beginning to make his run with Red Cavalier.

"Come on, Peter, come on!" Maynard crouched over the horse's withers, dug his heels into his flanks. "Pick up a bit!"

Peter picked up. Now they were coming up to the entry immediately ahead. The boy looked back, snarling at Maynard. He knew he was beaten. Now he was trying to

impede Peter. He was pulling over in front of him.

"Get back, get back!" shouted Maynard. "Get back, or I'll bump you!" Deliberately, Maynard drove Peter to the left, taking the chance of being ridden off the course. The boy ahead, frightened by the threat, fearing that he would be bumped off his mount, jerked over to the right. Maynard swept past him, calling, "Keep out of my way!" But ahead was Red Cavalier, running strong. They were coming toward the turn. Maynard saw Swan go to the bat, his arm flailing the air as he drove Luden's horse onward.

"Come on, Peter, come on!" Maynard urged. He raised his crop once, cracked it smartly across Peter's flanks. Stung, the horse leaped forward, then settled into his old stride again.

"Quit loafing!" he shouted into the animal's ear, and Peter seemed to understand. He surged forward with renewed vigor, but as they entered the home stretch, Red Cavalier was still lengths ahead and going strong. Sudden frenzy swept over Maynard. Had he waited too long to make his run? Then reason came to him. He had timed his pace well. No horse could keep up the pace Red Cavalier had set. Red Cavalier would crack, must crack, in the furlong.

"Come on, boy, come on!" he coaxed. Again Peter answered.

Next to the last jump! Red Cavalier was safely over. Peter made for it—took it beautifully.

"One more jump, fellow, just one more!"

Ahead he saw Red Cavalier weave slightly. The leader was weakening.

"Come on, you running fool!" Maynard called to Peter. "Come on now, we've got the race! We've got it! Just one more jump now—take it!"

Red Cavalier was over only five lengths ahead. Now Peter rose, but as he went over his hoofs struck the top timber. For a split second Maynard was unbalanced, felt himself hurtling earthward; then, by a miracle of riding, he caught himself, and as they came down to earth he steadied his mount.

He was creeping up on Red Cavalier.

Now he was at Red Cavalier's haunches.

Once more Maynard brought his bat down on Peter's barrels. The horse leapt forward with one despairing surge. Now Peter was at Red Cavalier's neck, now at his throat-latch, looking him eye to eye. They went under the wire together.

"All right, boy, it's all over," Maynard whispered to his horse, and eased him down, into a gallop, into a trot, and then a walk. He didn't know whether it was win, lose, or draw. He let Peter heave for a minute, then turned, started back to the judges' stand.

As he drew near the stand, a mighty roar went up. He glanced up at the board. The number five was going up. Number Five—Magnificent Peter—the winner! Maynard saluted the judges and slipped off his horse.

AS he unsaddled to go in and weigh out, Holy Jim held the horse, chuckled and said, "There sho' is a lot in prayer. This old man been praying for full six minutes, and de Lawd done answer!"

"You might give me a little credit too, Jim," Maynard laughed, as he took the saddle off. "I rode the horse."

The shouts of the applauding crowd fell upon his ears, confirming his victory. Now he was in the judges' stand, and beside him stood a girl, Bette Mason. As joint owners, they were receiving congratulations, and a gold cup was being thrust into their hands. Maynard insisted that Bette take it.

At last they went down the steps together.

"Breck—" She was close to him as they stepped onto the track. He could hardly hear her above the din. "Breck, I think you are magnificent!"

"Yes?" He put it as a question. Then suddenly he clasped her arm very tightly.

"You know we decided never to talk anything but business. Don't you think we might break that?"

"Oh!" Her face lighted, and she smiled, knowing the reason behind his question.

"Yes, Breck, we might talk—other things. But let's wait till tonight. There'll be a moon—a bright, full moon—coming up at eight."

The End

So Murder



A modern Robin Hood, Gregg Braden barges into politics and murder, risking everything to clear his city of corruption

The Buccaneer Meets a Corpse

GREGG said to Furman, "You're pretty well gagged now. The wire is tight, but you should be able to wriggle your wrists out of it inside of a half hour. I ought to kill you, but I guess I'm too soft. I'm letting you live to take more money from innocent suckers with your crooked roulette wheels and your doped faro layouts!"

Furman was helplessly bound, on the floor, and he didn't struggle. He just lay there, staring up with his venomous black eyes. Gregg wondered whether he had pierced the protection of his mask. Gregg had disguised his voice by talking huskily, deep in his throat, and he wore gloves to conceal his hands, which Furman would be sure to recognize.

But Furman had seen him open the safe in the corner, watched him work the

Talks Politics

by
**EMILE
C.
TEPPERMAN**

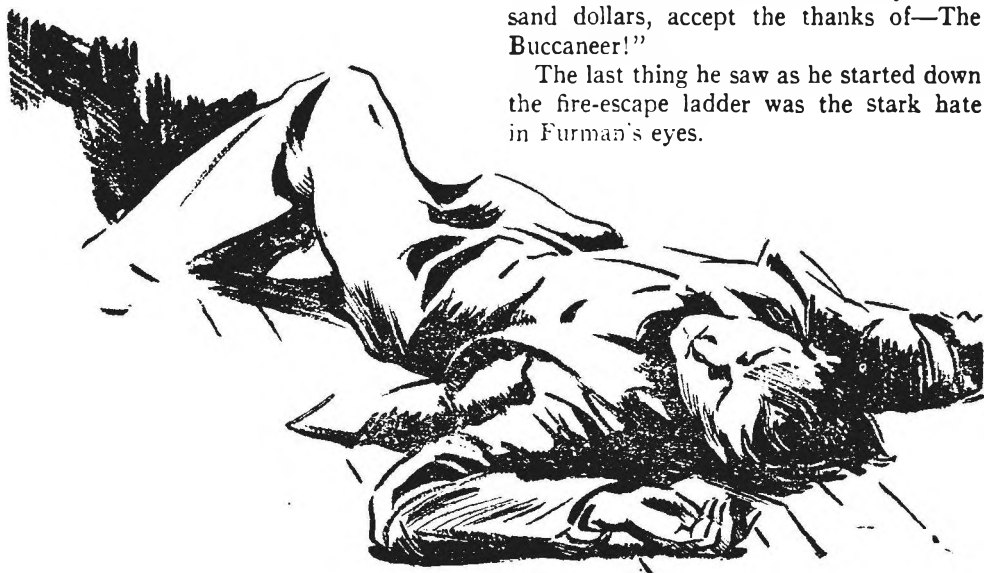
*She stammered, "Please! I didn't do it!"
Gregg said gruffly, "Who did, then?"*

tumblers. If he knew Gregg's identity, then Gregg could be sure of a swift death within twenty-four hours; yet he could not bring himself to kill Furman.

Furman's small eyes followed him as he crossed the little office on the third floor of the Montevideo Club building, watched him as he climbed through the window with the small Boston bag crammed full of tens, twenties, fifties and hundreds from the safe.

Halfway over the window-sill, Gregg bowed to him, said: "I'll be back again, Furman, when I think you can afford another contribution. For this thirty thousand dollars, accept the thanks of—The Buccaneer!"

The last thing he saw as he started down the fire-escape ladder was the stark hate in Furman's eyes.



On the second floor fire-escape, Gregg stopped, removed the mask and the gloves, crammed them into the bag with the money. Then he made his way down to the next floor. The swinging ladder that would take him to the cement floor of the alley below was up. Drawn close to the curb at the mouth of the alley, he could see his limousine, with Kuralenko, his White Russian chauffeur, at the wheel. Kuralenko was sitting stiffly, staring straight ahead, his huge hands gripping the wheel tight.

Gregg knew there was trouble around, for their standing arrangement was that Kuralenko should keep a cigarette in his mouth as long as the coast was clear. The moment danger threatened, he discarded the cigarette.

Gregg crouched in the darkness on the fire-escape landing, debating what to do. The nature of the danger he could only guess at. His eyes searched the shadows below in the alley, and he thought he discerned a dark shape almost merged with the wall, beneath—and a little to the left of—the fire-escape upon which he crouched.

Whoever it was, the chances were even that the fellow hadn't seen Gregg descending, for the roof of the alley was not open; there was a connecting passage at the top floor between the Montevideo Club and the Montevideo Hotel next door, which was also owned by Furman. Hence Gregg's figure would not show up to a watcher below, and it was mainly because of that that he had chosen this method of egress.

He had to think quickly, for at any moment someone might come to Furman's office, find him trussed up and raise an alarm; or Furman might struggle free of his bonds before the half hour was up. In either case, Gregg would be neatly trapped.

He swung cautiously to the window beside him. Working swiftly yet silently, he donned the linen gloves once more, and put on the mask again. He knew that the window was unlocked, for he had left it so. It was through this window that he had come out to climb to Furman's office. Behind it was a small waiter's pantry, which the waiters

used for dressing, and for hanging their street clothes. The dining room and floor show were on this floor. The pantry had a light in it, and Gregg was reasonably sure that there was nobody inside. Yet he couldn't open that window without making enough noise to attract the watcher below. The glass itself was leaded, as were all the windows of the Montevideo Club, and he couldn't see inside.

Kuralenko was still sitting stiffly erect. Gregg glanced below, but could not find the shadow. Then he saw it. Whoever it was had moved across the alley and was now directly below the fire-escape emergency ladder. Gregg detected the glint of metal, knew that a gun was out. Well, there were many men in the city who would be glad to shoot the Buccaneer without warning.

At that moment Kuralenko came to his aid. Suddenly from the direction of the limousine there came the raucous, high-pitched tooting of the horn. Kuralenko was leaning his elbow on the button!

The shape beneath moved, swung toward the sound. Low-voiced curses came. A second figure darted alongside the limousine, reached in and shook Kuralenko until he took his elbow from the horn button.

But the few moments' distraction had been enough for Gregg. He raised the window quickly. For a second, light flooded the alley, showed him a stocky form down below that he recognized. Then he was inside, and the window was closed.

IN his hurry, Gregg had gone in backward, clutching the Boston bag. He swung about instantly in the little lighted room, his hand gripping the automatic he had taken from the clip under his left arm. Then he stopped short.

He had left the pantry empty; now there was somebody in it. She stood there, near the door, pale, her lips trembling. She was dressed in a green evening gown, and her hair was black, bobbed short. She was no more than twenty.

He said through his mask, "Don't be alarmed, miss—" And he stopped. His eyes followed hers over to the corner near the window he had just entered. There,

crumpled on the floor beside a serving table, lay the body of a man. He was bald, with a thick neck and huge hands. He was lying on his right side, facing into the room, and his eyes were wide open, staring in death. Under him there was a pool of blood that came from a wound in the small of his back.

The knife was still in him, and the narrow steel handle protruded at a sharp angle upward. Whoever had driven it into him knew exactly at what angle to strike in order to reach a vital spot.

Gregg knew the dead man. He was Sam Martinson, a private detective with a not-too-good reputation. His agency barely kept its license by the skin of its teeth and a little shady pull. Gregg swiveled his eyes back to the girl. Her slight body was trembling. She stammered, "Please! I—d-didn't do it!"

Gregg said gruffly, "Who did, then?"

"A man—with a crooked nose."

Whatever further he could have asked her remained unasked. For from out in the alley came hoarse shouts, the voice of the stocky man whose shadow he had seen:

"He's got away, Kelly! Spread out your men. No one leaves this place. Come on—we're going in!"

The girl stared at Gregg with frightened eyes. "You're the Buccaneer," she whispered.

He stepped swiftly over to the door, pulled it open an inch and stared into the corridor. There was no one in sight, and he motioned to the girl.

"Get out!" he ordered. "Go over to the bar and order a drink. Try to act natural, as if nothing had happened. And the first chance you get, go home."

She obeyed him as in a daze, started out.

"Wait," he said.

She stopped obediently.

"Have you any money?"

She shook her head. "No. Mr. Martinson brought me. I—I didn't expect to need money."

Gregg took several bills from his pocket, thrust them into her hand. "Did you have a wrap?"

"Yes."

"Martinson have the check?"

"Yes."

Grimacing with disgust, Gregg knelt beside Martinson's body, fingered through his pockets till he found two small cardboard checks from the coatroom. In the Montevideo they give you a red check for women's garments, and a blue one for men's clothes. This facilitates getting the things when you claim them, and it was a great help to Gregg. He gave her the red check, dropped the blue one on the floor beside the body.

Then he said, "Go ahead. Don't waste any more time. The police will be all over the place soon."

There were tears in her eyes as she said, "How can I thank you? You never saw me before, yet you help me this way—"

"Never mind about that. Just get out. I have work to do."

"I'll go," she said humbly. "B-but I want to tell you I know you. You're the Buccaneer. The police are after you—they'll catch you. And this body—they'll say you did it. They'll send you to the chair!"

"Don't worry about me!" He gave her a little push through the door. "I can take care of myself—but you seem to need a nurse!"

"All right," she said. "But if you should get in trouble, I'll be glad to help. So will father, when I tell him about this. And Dad is very powerful. He is George Rodney."

And she was off down the corridor.

Gregg knew who she was without her telling him. George Rodney was the conservative congressman from the silk stocking, sixth district. His party had drafted him to run for mayor on a reform ticket, in a desperate effort to oust Dan Kruger's corrupt City Party from power.

And Gregg was his opponent. Gregg, the Buccaneer, was a respectable citizen in the daytime—so respectable that the corrupt City Party had chosen him as the only candidate to meet the threat of such an outstanding personality as George Rodney. And here was Rodney's daughter—in a waiters' pantry, with a murdered man.

Gregg recalled a bit of history about the Rodney family. Rodney's first wife, this girl's mother, had run off years ago and been killed in an auto crash, so they said. He had married again, but the second Mrs. Rodney had died two years ago. He lived in a tall, stately house on Madison Street, and his daughter did the managing. How she'd got into this mess, Gregg couldn't understand.

Well, there was no time to speculate now. He had plenty to do—and he had to do it fast, if he was to escape the police dragnet around the Montevideo Club.

The Police Cast Their Net

GREGG opened the Boston bag, crammed the bills indiscriminately into his pockets. There was also a packet of papers, tied with rubber bands, which he had taken from the safe. That Furman and the City Hall crowd that gave him protection indulged in blackmail was no secret to Gregg. And he had felt that he might be doing someone a favor in removing those papers as well as the money.

He put the small package away with the money, and placed the empty bag on a shelf in the closet. Then he took from his pocket a pearl-studded pin, which he had removed from his shirt-front before entering Furman's office. He now replaced it, straightened his clothes, and stepped out into the corridor, throwing a last look back at the rapidly stiffening body of Martinson.

He took the opposite direction from that taken by the girl, skirted the dining room, and came out behind the stage. Through the drapes, he could see that the dining floor was crowded. The floor show was in full swing; the chorus was strutting its stuff, while a noted torch singer was giving it to the patrons hot and stormy.

Frank Lasker, Furman's manager, saw Gregg and came over, pushing through a group of performers who were awaiting their turn. He was a short, stubby, powerful man, and he frowned at Gregg, saying:

"No one is allowed behind here, Profes-

sor Braden. You know that. If Mr. Furman saw—"

"All right," Gregg said. "I won't get you in trouble, Lasker. I'm getting right out."

Gregg made his way out to the bar. The girl in the green dress was there, sipping a cocktail nervously. She looked at him curiously as he entered. Gregg could guess what was in her mind. She was inspecting every man who came in, wondering which one was the Buccaneer. He passed right by her, nodded to the two men who were standing in the entrance of the bar.

Gregg knew one of them—Inspector Logan, of headquarters. Logan was a lean man, tall and gray-haired, in his middle fifties, with a shrewd head on his shoulders. The other man—Gregg was pretty certain that he, too, was of the police.

This was confirmed when he approached them, and Logan said:

"Hello, Professor. Meet Detective Sergeant Kelly. Kelly, this is our next mayor—Professor Braden; and he's the man who can teach us all how to catch crooks. He's professor of the department of—" he turned to Gregg. "What's that fancy name you have for your department over at the University, Prof?"

Gregg smiled. "The Department of Criminal Psychology, Inspector. But you flatter me when you say I can teach you how to catch criminals. I'm sure nobody can teach you your business."

Logan grinned. He said to the sergeant: "The Prof isn't like most of these theorists, Kelly. He'll make a swell mayor. Every once in a while he pitches in and breaks a case for us—and we get the credit."

"Fine!" said the sergeant. Kelly was a big man, towering over both Logan and Gregg. He was chewing tobacco. He crammed the wad into his left cheek, and said, "Maybe you'll tell us how to catch the Buccaneer, Professor?"

"Is that what you're after in *this* place?"

Logan said glumly, "Right. And I could cheerfully choke that Russky chauffeur of yours. You'd think he was in league with the Buccaneer!"

"Really?" Gregg said. "How is that?"

"You know the Buccaneer sent Furman a note promising to be here tonight and collect ten per cent of what Furman had in the safe?"

Gregg nodded, smiling. "You mentioned that at the lecture you gave before my class yesterday."

"Well," Logan went on, "we had this place surrounded. I was out in the alley and, sure enough, I spotted the Buccaneer—at least, I'd swear it was he—on the first-floor fire-escape landing. And just as I was about to call out to him to give up, what does that Kuralenko of yours do but start honking his horn for all he's worth. I turned away for a minute, and that was all the Buccaneer needed to make his getaway. He disappeared into thin air!"

"Really!" Gregg exclaimed.

"Yeah. And the only place he could have gone is right back in here. Believe me, Professor, this joint is going to be combed—"

Just then a panting plainclothes man came into the bar, spied them and hurried over.

"Come upstairs, Inspector," he said urgently. "I found Furman in his office, all trussed up. The Buccaneer was in there, and he got a hundred thousand bucks out of the safe!"

Gregg had difficulty repressing a grin, it was so like Furman to exaggerate thirty thousand into a hundred thousand.

Logan said coolly, "I knew it. The Buccaneer was all through with the job when I spotted him. What do you think, Professor?" There was a note of patronizing levity in his voice. "Where do you think the Buccaneer is now? And how should we go about catching him?"

Gregg said stiffly, "I am sorry, Inspector, but I can give you no assistance in tracking the Buccaneer. I am more or less in sympathy with him, for he always robs people of Furman's ilk, who deserve much worse at his hands. Furman runs a crooked gambling den upstairs, yet he goes on with impunity. No need to deny it, Inspector. If, by some fluke, I should be elected, this is the first place that I would order you to close. It's indecent—"

The inspector stopped him. "Sorry, Professor, there's no time for argument now. Stick around till I get back—I'll show you the Buccaneer!" He went out hastily with the plainclothesman, leaving Kelly in the bar.

THE floor show was still going on. By looking out, Gregg could see plainclothesmen circulating among the diners, looking them over.

Kelly said, "We've got fifty men here, Professor. Nobody leaves till Logan gives the word. I bet Mr. Buccaneer is plenty worried this minute!"

"I bet he is," Gregg said. "Will you have a drink?"

Kelly shook his head, mournfully. "Can't drink while on duty—and you know it, too."

"Sorry," Gregg said. "I need one. You can watch me."

He left Kelly, sauntered over to the bar. Mike already had his drink going in the shaker. He poured the sidecar, pushed it over.

"What's all the activity, Professor Braden?" he asked. "What's the police doing here?"

"I can't tell you, Mike. But I hope Furman got his tables covered up upstairs."

Mike grinned. "Leave it to Furman! I bet you there wasn't a trace of a wheel up there by the time the cops got in the front door."

Two men nearby laughed. The whole town knew that Furman ran a fast gambling establishment upstairs—the whole town, that is, except the police. And that was funny, too, because several high officials had been seen many times at the roulette wheel. They were suckers as well as the rest, because you couldn't win at Furman's wheels. No one could.

Gregg had barely got the sidecar to his lips when he became aware that someone had edged in beside him. He glanced down to see the slim girl in the green dress—George Rodney's daughter.

The drink had flushed her cheeks, removed some of her nervousness. There was

a keen light in her dark eyes as she looked at him closely.

"Aren't you Professor Braden, the candidate for mayor?" she asked.

He nodded.

"I heard those men mention your name. I'm Patricia Rodney. Father is your opponent in the election."

"Glad to know you," he said.

She was looking at his shirt-front. "That pearl stud," she murmured. "You must have put it on in a hurry. There's a little hole in your shirt-front just below it, where it should have been put. It looks as if you'd taken it out some time this evening, and then put it back again."

Gregg said, "Really? You're very observant, Miss Rodney." He put the drink down, lifted his shirt-front so he could see. Sure enough, there was the little pin-prick, quite evident on the starched white linen.

She raised her cocktail glass, but kept her eyes on Gregg's. "I'd move the pin down if I were you, Professor Braden. Somebody else might notice it."

He shrugged, trying to appear careless. "What if they do?" But he knew very well what if they did. For instance, if Furman had noticed the little pin-prick, he'd be looking for it.

"If it will make you happier, Miss Rodney," he said, and unfastened the clasp, took out the pin.

She took it out of his hand. "Let me do it for you." She set her glass down, raised herself on tiptoe in order to reach. While she was doing it, she whispered, "Your left trouser leg has rust on it. You've been very careless tonight, haven't you—Mr. Buccaneer?"

Her face was close to his, and Gregg saw, out of the corner of his eye, that several men at the bar were looking at him enviously. They wouldn't have been so envious if they had known what she was saying.

Gregg tried to appear indignant, but kept his voice low. "Miss Rodney! Do you know what you're saying?"

She finished with the pin. "I know quite well. You can deny it, of course, and I'll

never say a word. You can be sure that your secret is perfectly safe with me—after what you did"—she shuddered—"in there!"

Gregg said nothing, but motioned to the bartender. "Double them up, Mike."

He nodded, set up two shakers.

Patricia Rodney whispered, "Better wipe that rust off your trouser leg. The pin is fixed—it covers the top hole. But I saw that detective looking at your trousers just before."

Gregg glanced down, and saw that she was right. There was a long streak of rust diagonally across his right leg. He reached down, brushed at it. Part of it came off, the rest stuck.

"Excuse me," said the girl. She took a handkerchief from her purse, wet it with her lips, and, stooping, rubbed at the streak. It disappeared under her treatment, but left a little smudge of wetness.

He said, "Thank you," and handed her the cocktail Mike had just placed before her. She had done it so deftly, so naturally, that it had hardly attracted any attention. Kelly had wandered down to the other end of the bar, inspecting the people lined up along it, and he had not seen her wiping the smudge off. Gregg doubted if he had really been looking at that smudge. Probably the girl's nervous imagination had made her think so.

He said, "You were going to tell me who did that—in there."

ABRUPTLY she closed her eyes, and swayed. He put out a hand to support her, gripped her arm. She steadied, forced herself to talk.

"I—I don't know his name. But he came over to our table, whispered something to Martinson, and Martinson got up and walked down into that corridor with him. I had come here with Martinson to find out things about this place—you know, Dad is running for mayor, and I was looking for campaign material to help him. So I hired Martinson to escort—"

"You *what*?" he exclaimed. "Does your father know what you're doing?"

She shook her head. "Of course not.

He'd never allow me to—but let me tell you. After Martinson left the table, I waited about five minutes, and then a waiter came over and said I was wanted on the phone. He brought me as far as the corridor and told me to go through to the stairs. As I started down, I saw that man with the crooked nose, who had spoken to Martinson, come out of the waiters' pantry and hurry away. I was curious, so I opened the door and looked in. You—know what I found."

"Swell!" Gregg said bitterly. "Don't you know that Furman's crowd controls the political clique in this town? They spotted you right away and went to work on Martinson. Do you know what it would mean for your father if you were involved in a murder scandal at this time?"

She lowered her eyes. "I'm sorry. I didn't think they'd go that far. Now we must get out of here—"

Gregg shook his head. "There's a police cordon around the place," he said. "The Buccaneer held up Furman in his office upstairs, and took some papers and cash out of the safe. No one leaves here till they've caught the Buccaneer."

The girl forgot about her own plight. "How—how do they expect to catch him?"

"They'll search every man in the place. No doubt Furman can supply some of the serial numbers—"

She looked down at his pockets. He had distributed the money pretty well, but evening clothes can't stand any bulges.

"You'll be caught!" she breathed. "How will you get rid of—?"

"Get rid of it!" he said harshly. "Do you think I'm going to give it up, after risking—"

He clamped his mouth shut, glared at her, and finished his cocktail. For the last five minutes he had been virtually admitting to her what he had never admitted to a living soul—the fact that he, Gregory Braden, Ph.D., LL.D., head of the chair of criminal psychology at Hughes University, was the criminal known as the Buccaneer.

She understood, and smiled. "Thank you," she said, "for your confidence—"

That was as far as she got, because just then he saw Kelly hurrying past them toward the door, where one of the plainclothesmen was gesticulating to him. Gregg motioned to the girl to be silent, and watched as the plainclothesman talked earnestly to the sergeant, who gave him instructions. The man left, and Kelly turned back into the bar, looking somber. As he came back, he saw Gregg looking at him and said triumphantly:

"Maybe you'll change your mind about your pet, the Buccaneer, Professor. Now he's added murder to his list! There's a dead man in the waiters' pantry. Some private dick, I suppose, that got on his trail."

Gregg looked incredulous. "You don't think—"

Kelly laughed. "All these crooks are the same. This Buccaneer may be a gentleman and everything, but when his hide is in danger, he'll kill like the next one. Now we'll get him on a murder rap!"

Patricia Rodney's face was white as Kelly went out. "I'm going to tell them what happened," she said decisively. "I can't let you—"

The man next to her at the bar turned to glance at her, and Gregg covered up by calling loudly to Mike for two more drinks. The man turned back to the bar.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Gregg told her firmly. "Logan would never believe you, anyway. He'd hold *you* for the murder. You know how these cops are—they have to make a pinch, and they don't care who it is. In this case it would be just swell—the daughter of the opposition candidate for mayor arrested as a murder suspect! They'd keep it in the headlines till after election, and then you'd be lucky if they ever dropped it!"

Seeing Logan coming back into the bar, Gregg tossed off his drink, put a bill on the bar for Mike.

Logan's face was glum as he came straight over to Gregg.

"Come upstairs, Professor," he said. "I want to talk to you—and to the young lady!"

Gregg said, "But Miss Smith—" and

Logan gave him a grim, sardonic look. "Miss Smith, huh?" he said. And then: "How do you do, Miss Rodney? Right this way, please."

That was all he said, but it was a slap in the face for Gregory Braden.

As he and the girl followed Logan out of the bar and into the elevator, he could see that she was panic-stricken. He didn't wonder. He himself felt pretty sick. Hadn't he dragged her into this?

The Trappings of Murder

ON the third floor, they passed through what had been a superbly furnished gambling room only a few minutes ago. Now there was no sign of roulette, faro, or dice tables. Men and women sat around at small tables—which had been brought in for the emergency—sipping drinks. They looked nervous enough, but they were safe. At the first intimation of a police raid, Furman's efficient aides had worked a miracle, converted a gambling room into a cocktail lounge.

The inspector led his charges down the long hall to Furman's office.

Furman was sitting at his desk, glowering. The safe was open, just as Gregg had left it. The window, too, was open.

Two plainclothesmen were going over the room, dusting it for fingerprints. Beside Furman's desk there stood a tall man with a narrow face and a twisted nose that must have been badly broken at some time. Gregg had his hand on Patricia's arm, and he felt her start as she saw him. The fellow was Siever, assistant manager of the Montevideo Club. It must have been he who had called Martinson away from the table and to his death.

There was a strange tenseness in the room, and Gregg waited, taut, his eyes on Furman, while Logan closed the door. Furman showed no sign of recognizing Gregg as the Buccaneer. In fact, he allowed his surly look to disappear, and twisted his lips into a smile. After all, Gregg was the candidate selected by the party that was giving him protection, the man they wanted for mayor. But Furman had no

smile for the girl standing at Gregg's side.

Inspector Logan walked around the desk, stood close to Furman.

"We came here to catch the Buccaneer, Professor," he said, "and we've run into a murder. There's a dead man in the waiters' pantry on the first floor. He's Sam Martinson, the private detective."

Abruptly, he faced Patricia. "Martinson came here with you, Miss Rodney!"

Patricia's face was white. Gregg could feel her tremble.

Had he been the ordinary, opportunist type of politician, he would have welcomed this opportunity to see the daughter of his political opponent grilled as a murder suspect on the eve of election. Instead, he felt sharp pity for the girl. And his deepest instinct was to protect her.

"That's crazy," he said coldly. "Miss Rodney came here with me. Where did you get your information?"

Logan looked incredulous. "You mean to say that *you* brought Miss Rodney here?"

"Right. And I've been with her all evening."

Logan glanced uncertainly at Furman, who lowered his eyes, then raised them to Gregg's.

"Look here, Professor. You're shielding the girl, and it won't help her any. Siever here—" he jerked his head toward the man with the crooked nose, who stood at his left—"saw her and Martinson come in. He—"

"Hold it, Furman!" Gregg rapped. "Are you trying to rig something on Miss Rodney? I tell you *I* came here with her. She couldn't have killed any man in any waiters' pantry." He glared at Siever and said, "Whoever says otherwise is a damned liar!"

Siever's crooked nose twitched, and he snarled, "Hell—" but he stopped at a sharp word from Furman, who said gently:

"No one wants to fight with you, Professor. We're all your friends here. This girl is the daughter of your opponent. Why should you go out of the way to protect her? If she killed Martinson, she should pay the penalty. You know it's a crime to compound a murder—"

"You don't have to tell me the law, Furman," Gregg snapped. "I teach it!"

Inspector Logan eyed him queerly. "This girl may be an accomplice of the Buccaneer, Professor. I don't understand your attitude. I'm quite sure that you never

Suddenly Patricia pulled away from him and broke into crisp, decisive speech.

"You're right, Inspector. Professor Braden was shielding me. I *did* come here with Martinson!"

SHE had courage, and she looked very sweet and helpless as she stood there, and Gregg cursed under his breath. Furman sneered triumphantly, and Logan let out a deep sigh.

"Well!" said the inspector. "Now we're



"Martinson's murder," Gregg said. "We need a fall guy for that—someone to feed to the wolves!"

met Miss Rodney until tonight, and yet here you are, claiming that you brought her here—"

Gregg felt Patricia's arm stiffen, and he knew why. She was thinking of the thirty thousand dollars in currency in his pockets. If Logan became suspicious of him, and ordered him searched—

getting somewhere!" He came out from around Furman's desk, stood over the girl. "Did you kill Martinson?" he said.

"No," she said in a small voice.

"Why did you come here with Martinson?" Logan demanded.

She raised her eyes to his. "I—we came here to get material to use in my father's campaign."

Logan laughed shortly. "That doesn't sound so good, Miss Rodney. You couldn't get anything here that the public doesn't know all about. Why—" he gestured toward Gregg—"even the City Party candidate himself comes here. You'll have to do better than that. Now"—he towered over her—"why did you come here with Martinson?"

Suddenly Patricia Rodney looked beaten. Her eyes dropped before Logan's inquisitorial glare. "I—I can't tell you!"

Furman got up from his desk, winked at Siever, and spoke to Gregg.

"You see, Professor Braden? There's something fishy about the whole thing. She and Martinson are tied up with the Buccaneer! She knows who killed him, all right—if she didn't do it herself!"

Gregg didn't get a chance to answer him, because there was an imperious knock at the door, and Dan Kruger stormed in.

Dan Kruger was the "power behind the throne" of the City Party. It was he who had chosen Gregg to be the candidate against Rodney. The police department, the mayor—in fact, everybody in town—took orders from Dan Kruger. He was big, florid-faced, gray-haired. His eyes always twinkled with good humor, but his mouth was straight, firm, unyielding. He had a tremendous amount of vitality, of driving energy; and it was this that had brought him his power—when his opponents were all tired out and ready to quit, Dan Kruger was usually just getting his second wind.

Kruger glanced around the room after shutting the door behind him, and in that single glance he took in the entire situation.

"Well, well!" he said, with a superficial air of geniality. "So this is Miss Rodney! Involved in a murder, eh?" He clucked his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "Too bad! Too bad! Comes at a poor time!" His small eyes swung to Gregg. "Hello, Professor! How's our next mayor?"

"Pretty rotten, Dan. I hate to see a girl framed," Gregg retorted.

Kruger raised his eyebrows. "Framed? That's a harsh word, Professor!" He went

over to Gregg, brushing right past Patricia Rodney, and took his elbow familiarly.

"Look, Professor," he said confidentially. "You don't want to mix up in this end of the business. I'm running you for mayor, and I'll get you elected. All you have to do is make a few speeches and let the voters see you. Now let me handle this, and you forget the whole thing."

He patted Gregg on the back and turned to Logan. "The boys phoned me about this, so I came over. Now I'm not the police commissioner, of course, so you don't have to take orders from me—"

Logan interrupted him, smiling. "That's all right, Dan."

Furman laughed, Siever grinned thinly.

Kruger frowned at them and said to Logan, "You better take Miss Rodney down to headquarters. But don't book her or anything. Just give her a comfortable room, and some magazines to read. I'll call up her father in the meantime." He laid his heavy arm across her shoulders. "There, Miss Rodney, there's nothing to worry about. I'm sure your dad will be able to straighten everything out for you. A fine man, your father, even if he is on the wrong side of the fence."

He swung on Furman. "Those other papers—you have them all right?"

Furman squirmed under his gaze. "I got them tonight, Dan, but the Buccaneer took them away."

Kruger's eyes blazed. "Damn it, Logan, you've got to find the Buccaneer! The boys downstairs tell me no one has left this place, so the Buccaneer is somewhere in the club. Search every man and woman. Get the matrons in from headquarters. We must have those papers back unopened. Understand?"

Logan nodded. "I've given orders about that already, Dan. The men are being searched. Kelly has sent downtown for matrons to search the women."

Kruger mumbled, "So the Buccaneer's got the papers! That bird is pretty smart. If I guess right, you won't find him. Well, that changes the whole situation. You'd better book Miss Rodney, then—suspicion of murder. Take her away, Logan."

"Wait!" Gregg snapped. "This girl is being framed. Martinson was killed by someone belonging to the Montevideo Club, either because he knew too much about the inside racket, or else for the express purpose of placing Miss Rodney in this position. Now you're going to demand that Rodney withdraw from the mayoralty race in return for squashing the charge. Am I right?"

KRUGER looked at him queerly, shrugged. "Why bother about this stuff, Professor? Politics is a dirty business, no matter how you figure it. After you're elected you can be as straight as you want. Right now, we have to use whatever comes up. Just let me handle everything. If Rodney withdraws, you've got clear sailing—"

Gregg nodded bitterly. "Just a minute, Dan!" he said.

He strode to Furman's desk, tore a sheet from his calendar pad, and took out his fountain pen. On the blank side of the sheet, he wrote:

In the best interests of the City of Newcastle, I hereby withdraw my candidacy for the office of Mayor.

And he signed it with a flourish, *Gregory Braden*.

He capped the pen, handed the sheet of paper to Dan Kruger. "I'm through, Dan," he said. "As Professor of the Chair of Criminal Psychology at Hughes University, I can't possibly countenance such methods on the part of my sponsors. I never wanted to run for mayor in the first place—"

"Hold it, Professor!" Kruger snapped. "Don't get excited! We'll thresh this out some other way."

Gregg allowed himself to be calmed down. Kruger's face had gone a deep red. He was badly worried. Without Gregg, his whole ticket would fall through, and he would lose control of every city department. He said:

"Just reconsider this, Professor, and I'll fall in line with any suggestion you make about Miss Rodney."

Gregg glared at him, then glanced at the girl. Patricia was looking at him with grateful, glowing eyes.

He said to Kruger, "It's absurd to charge Miss Rodney with murder. At the most, she may be able to supply information that will help us catch Martinson's murderer. Very well, then let her go in my custody. You can always get her if you want her. And I will undertake to help you in any way I can to find the murderer of Sam Martinson—if only to clear Miss Rodney's name."

Kruger turned an inquiring glance at Logan, who cleared his throat and said:

"We're not saying, Professor, that Miss Rodney killed Martinson. We know that the Buccaneer did that—he came down the fire-escape and entered through the window of that waiters' pantry. Martinson must have been in there for some reason, and the Buccaneer killed him. Now we'd like to know *why* Martinson went in there, but Miss Rodney won't tell us."

Patricia suddenly raised her head. "I didn't say that. I can tell you why Martinson went in the pantry!" She pointed her finger at Siever. "That man—"

Kruger coughed loudly. "I think perhaps the professor is right. There is no use subjecting Miss Rodney to further humiliation. If she will just submit to being searched by the matrons, I think we can let her go—provided she promises to come down to headquarters whenever she's sent for."

Patricia murmured, "I will."

Gregg pressed the advantage quickly. "I'll have my chauffeur take her home. I'll remain here while you search for the Buccaneer—though I'm quite sure you'll find he's not the murderer of Martinson."

While Patricia was being searched by one of the matrons who had arrived from downtown, Kruger paced up and down the small office, watching Logan give orders for the apprehension of the Buccaneer. It seemed, from what Kruger said from time to time, that he attached great importance to the papers which the Buccaneer had taken from Furman's safe—and which Gregg now had in his pocket.

Both Siever and Furman shrank under his fury as he lashed them for their carelessness in leaving those papers in the safe on the very night the Buccaneer had sworn to visit the club. What their nature was, Gregg couldn't guess, except that they had something to do with Patricia Rodney.

When the girl returned, the matron said tersely to Logan, "She's clean, inspector."

Patricia was all on edge, Gregg saw. She had not got over the shock of Martinson's murder, and she was very worried about the currency and papers in his pockets.

Kruger stopped ranting when she came in, and after the matron was gone he lifted the sheet of paper on which Gregg had written his resignation, and said, "With your permission, Professor," and tore it into bits. "Now," he said, "we can send Miss Rodney home and get down to the real business of capturing the Buccaneer."

As Gregg was about to lead the girl out, Furman spoke from behind his desk.

"Of course, Professor," he said with hard malice, "you will want to be searched yourself, along with everybody else." He added hastily, "If only to serve as an example."

Gregg felt Patricia's body tense.

"Of course," he said. "As soon as I see Miss Rodney off."

Logan glowered at Furman. "You don't think Professor Braden is the Buccaneer, by any chance?"

Furman shrugged, glanced at Siever, whose eyes were on Gregg's pockets. Gregg hurried out, before Furman could say anything further. Logan called to one of his men to escort them down and pass Patricia out at the door.

ON the ground floor things were proceeding as usual. The floor show was over, and the dance floor was crowded with couples. Waiters were threading their way among the tables, with trays. The patrons seemed unaware of anything out of the ordinary, but the waiters all bore worried expressions. They knew, by this time, that a dead man had been found in one of the pantries, and that the Buccaneer was loose somewhere in the building. The plain-

clothesmen had moved over to the edge of the floor and were standing about, tense, ready for anything.

As they got out of the elevator and walked across the lobby, Gregg had to smile inwardly at all this preparation. As Professor Gregory Braden, he had twice lectured these men at the Police Academy on the theoretical aspects of crime detection. Now, as the Buccaneer, he was giving them an object lesson in the practical methods of law evasion.

The plainclothesman who had gone down in the elevator with them walked a little in advance. Patricia pressed Gregg's arm, and he looked down to see her eyes, wide with concern, raised to his.

"They—they're going to search you!" she whispered.

"Don't worry. They won't find a thing," he said.

She lowered her eyes to the bulges in his pockets. "What are you going to do with—?"

"Watch and see."

She stopped abruptly in the crowded foyer, spoke very low. "Those papers that Furman had—would you give them to me? Please?"

He shook his head. "Sorry, Miss Rodney. Getting you out of a jam is one thing. Giving you the fruits of my—er—crime is another."

She would have argued further, but he saw Kuralenko standing near the door, next to the cloakroom. He hurried over to him.

Kuralenko was a Cossack who had served in the White Russian army. He weighed two hundred and thirty pounds, and was all muscle. He loomed above the hefty headquarters men around him like a giant among pigmies. He had fled to this country at the collapse of the counter-revolution in Russia.

Up till tonight, he was the only person in the world who knew that Gregory Braden, Ph.D., LL.D., was also the Buccaneer.

His blue, innocent-looking eyes lighted up when he saw Gregg, and he pushed three or four policemen roughly aside, al-

most bowling them over, in his haste to get to him.

Gregg said, "Andrei, this is Miss Rodney. You are to take her to her home, and then come back for me."

Kuralenko nodded, and bowed to Patricia.

She smiled wanly. Beside the big Russian, she looked like a child.

The officer who had brought them down said to the guard at the door, "You can pass this young lady out. She's been searched."

There was a good deal of excitement around them. Several couples had already attempted to leave and had been stopped. They were now fuming in the lobby, demanding to be allowed to speak to someone in authority.

Gregg took Patricia's arm, escorted her out, following Kuralenko. The plainclothesman with them made a half motion to stop Gregg, but he said: "I'm just taking her to the car. I'll be right back."

That fellow wanted no trouble with the man who might be his next mayor, so he let Gregg pass.

Outside, at the car, there was another officer on guard. Kuralenko got behind the wheel, and Gregg helped Patricia into the rear. Then, under pretext of giving Kuralenko instructions, he dumped the money from his pockets onto the floorboard at his feet and handed the Russian the package of papers.

"Hold onto these, Andrei," he said, "and don't give them to anybody. Understand?"

Kuralenko nodded. His huge hands meshed the gears, and the car pulled away. The last glimpse Gregg had was of the girl, looking at him queerly out of the side window. There was a strange smile on her lips. It made him uneasy.

The officer was watching him, and he smiled and went back into the club to be searched.

Robbery—and a Near Murder

THE searching was in full swing when Gregg got upstairs. Logan was sweating, and Dan Kruger was cursing. They

had given up the idea of keeping the patrons in the dark, and everybody in the place was being subjected to a thorough grilling. Each person's whereabouts for the period between eight-thirty and nine o'clock were being checked by statements from his companions at the table as well as from the waiters who served him.

Every nook and cranny of the place was being gone over with a fine comb, on the theory that the Buccaneer might have cached his loot and the papers. But, naturally, they drew a blank.

It wasn't till eleven that Kruger gave up. Gregg had submitted to being searched, had called Lasker to witness that he'd been behind the scenes at the floor show at the time in question. But they didn't even call Lasker to ask him about it.

Kruger said, "Come on, Professor, let's get out of here. You have a speech to make tomorrow morning before the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Rotary Club." He threw a nasty glance at Furman, and rushed Gregg out. Gregg noticed that Siever was not around, but didn't say anything.

Furman saw them to the elevator. There he drew Kruger aside, whispered to him out of earshot for a couple of minutes, his venomous black eyes on Gregg all the time.

The elevator came up, and Kruger said out loud to Furman, "I'll look into that angle." Then he took Gregg by the arm, and they entered the elevator.

Downstairs, Logan was directing his men. When he saw Kruger and Gregg, he came over.

"I'm working on a new line, Dan," he said. "Furman tells me that the Buccaneer had white gloves on when he was upstairs, but I was standing down in the alley, and I saw his hands for a minute. I'm sure he didn't have any on. So maybe he took them off when he climbed out of Furman's window."

Kruger looked a little blank. "What of it, Logan?"

It didn't mean anything to him, but it meant a lot to Gregg. He started to get cold chills.

Logan said triumphantly, "Don't you see, Dan? If he took his gloves off, he must

have left his prints somewhere along the fire-escape. I'm having a couple of men dust every inch of it. If they find any prints on there, we can be sure they're the prints of the Buccaneer!"

"Hell!" Kruger exclaimed. "That's fine!" His lips set in a savage line. "If there's one thing I want more than anything else, it's to get the Buccaneer!"

They left Logan, and Kruger said to Gregg, "I'll give you a lift home, Professor."

"That's all right, Dan," Gregg said. "Thanks, but Kuralenko'll be waiting for me."

They went outside, but there was no Kuralenko. Gregg began to be worried. Kuralenko had had plenty of time to take Patricia Rodney home and come back.

Kruger grinned. "That's the worst of those Cossacks. You can never tell when they're going to get drunk on you. Better come with me."

Gregg got into his car, which was driven by a combination bodyguard and chauffeur. Kruger talked about the Buccaneer all the way, but Gregg answered only in monosyllables. He was worried about Kuralenko. He knew the Russian wasn't drunk, because Kuralenko never drank when on duty. Something had happened. Gregg remembered uneasily the queer smile on Patricia Rodney's mouth.

He lived on South Twelfth, just below Glendale, and it took about fifteen minutes to get there. He had a two-room place, with a kitchenette, in a remodeled building.

When they got there he said, "Thanks for the lift, Dan," and started to get out. He saw his car parked a little way down the street, and he was anxious to see what was the trouble. He figured that Kuralenko would have come back here to stow away the money and the papers before calling for him; but he couldn't understand why he'd been there two hours.

Dan Kruger got out with him, saying, "I think I'll go upstairs with you, Professor. There are a couple of things I want to talk about, and you can give me some of that Polish cherry brandy you've got."

"Sure, Dan, come up," Gregg said, but he was in an agony of apprehension.

As soon as he got to the first landing, he knew something was wrong—for the door of his apartment was ajar. Light was streaming into the hall from the living room. He eased the automatic out of its clip, pushed the door in, and threw a quick glance into the room.

It was unoccupied—except for the body of Kuralenko, stretched on his face on the rug, in the middle of the floor. An empty sensation at the pit of his being, Gregg rushed across the floor, knelt at his side.

THE haft of a knife protruded from Kuralenko's back between his shoulder blades—and it was exactly the same kind of narrow steel handle that Gregg had seen on the knife in Martinson's body. Only he noticed with a pang of hope that its angle was to the right, away from the heart, this time.

It's funny what things you'll notice at moments of great grief or sudden shock. Just then, as Gregg knelt beside Kuralenko, he noticed that the Russian had a scar almost an inch long on the back of his neck; and he made a mental note to ask him how he'd got it—provided he lived.

The back of his coat was bloodstained, and there was blood on the floor. Gregg was afraid to pull the knife out, but he lifted Kuralenko's head a little, and the Russian uttered a deep groan. There was a little froth of blood at his mouth. His eyes were closed, but he was muttering something in Russian.

Gregg tried to say something to him, but the words choked in his throat. He felt a film of tears in his eyes. Kuralenko's head was over on one side, resting on Gregg's arm. His face was white. A surge of rage swept over Gregg. A knife in the back was about the only way to down Kuralenko.

Suddenly Gregg became aware of Dan Kruger. He was stopping to take something white from Kuralenko's right hand. He pried it out, held it up.

"A woman did this, Professor. It's a woman's handkerchief!" he said.

Gregg recognized that handkerchief, because it had little rust marks on it! For a moment he struggled against the implication of that handkerchief. There it was, staring him in the face, while Kuralenko's breath was coming in painful gasps, depositing a little more frothy blood on his mouth with each exhalation.

In grief and rage, Gregg cried, "Don't stand there like a fool! Use that phone! Call an ambulance! Damn it, don't you see he's dying?"

Kruger said, "Sure, Gregg, sure," dropped the handkerchief and hastened to the phone on the end table near the door.

Kuralenko was mumbling and moaning. Gregg bent close, whispered, "You'll be all right, Andrei. They'll make you all right. You're going to have the best surgeons in the world. You'll be okay!"

And suddenly Kuralenko opened his great blue eyes and looked up at him, his leathery face wrinkled in pain.

"Swell!" he said, and fainted.

Gregg remembered little of the next twenty minutes, except that his arm got numb, and his heart almost stopped beating because at one moment he thought that Kuralenko had died. His face was waxen and Gregg had to bend close to detect his breathing.

Kruger used the phone, held a low-voiced conversation, and Gregg, in rage, ordered him to cut it short and phone the hospital again. Then Gregg was pressing a huge wad of bills into the hand of the interne, begging him to see that Kuralenko had the best of accommodations and the best surgeon in the city.

Newspaper reporters came. After all, this was no ordinary knifing. The victim was the servant of the City Party's candidate for mayor. Kruger shooed them all away. In the meantime, Gregg went into the bedroom, closed and locked the door, and unscrewed the wall-bracket over his bed. Behind it was the secret safe where he stowed things that the Buccaneer had acquired until he could dispose of them. He wanted to see whether Kuralenko had had a chance to put the stuff away before he'd been attacked.

The compartment was empty.

There had been nothing in Kuralenko's pockets when they took him away on the stretcher, either. Grimly Gregg screwed the fixture back on again and went out into the living room. He had the rust-marked handkerchief in his pocket, and he showed it to the precinct sergeant, who had come to investigate. Dan Kruger put his hand on his shoulder.

"You can tell the sergeant whose handkerchief that is, Gregg. You're an impressionable young fellow, and I don't blame you for shielding that girl back at the club. But now you can see—"

"Wait a minute, Dan!" Gregg said. He couldn't accept the evidence of that handkerchief. Back at the Montevideo Club, when he had seen Patricia Rodney standing over the dead body of Martinson, he hadn't for a moment believed that she had killed him. Perhaps it was because Martinson didn't mean anything to him. But this was different. Andrei Kuralenko had come to mean more than a servant to him. He was a partner in crime. He had pulled Gregg out of many a tough spot by that massive bulldog strength of his. If that girl had knifed him—

Rage burned up in Gregg. Whoever had struck down Kuralenko should pay, and pay high. It couldn't be Patricia Rodney, and yet—

He said slowly to Kruger, "Do me a favor, Dan. Tell the sergeant here that it's okay for me to take this handkerchief with me. I want to—find out something."

The sergeant scratched his head, looked inquiringly at Kruger. But Dan Kruger lost some of his geniality.

"Nothing doing, Gregg. I'm not going to let you be a fool any longer. That girl's got you going, and you're letting her get away with murder. The handkerchief stays here!"

"All right," Gregg said flatly, and handed it to the sergeant. "I don't know whom that belongs to. I can't identify it."

Kruger exclaimed, "Hold on, Gregg!"—but Gregg was already out the door. He had to see Patricia Rodney—and see her quick.

The Case of the Rodneys

GREGG drove the car uptown himself, and he would have got half a dozen tickets if he hadn't been the candidate for mayor. As it was, the traffic officers who stopped him saluted uneasily and apologized for delaying him. They must have thought he was crazy, driving through the streets of Newcastle with dried blood on his sleeve and a wild look in his eye. But Gregg didn't care. He parked in front of George Rodney's house on Madison Street, but as he started to cross the sidewalk, someone touched his arm.

He whirled, growling, "What is it?"

She was a thin, frail woman of forty or forty-five. Her hair hung in wisps under an outmoded hat, and she wore a threadbare suit with a worn fur collar. The hand she laid on his arm was trembling.

"Take me in there, sir, won't you please?" she said pleadingly.

"What do you want in there?" he said impatiently. "Who are you?"

Her eyes searched his face. "You're Professor Braden, aren't you?" she asked. "I've seen your picture on the posters—"

He nodded. "I'm sorry, madam, but I'm in a hurry. If you want to go in there, you don't need me—"

"But George won't see anybody!" Her voice was low, desperate. "He's locked himself in his study, and the butler won't even tell him I'm here. He thinks I'm—thinks—I'm drunk!" Suddenly her grip tightened and her tired eyes blazed at him.

"You and your dirty crowd! Why don't you leave George alone? I didn't understand. You—you tricked me. Give me back those papers!" Her voice rose hysterically. Color went from her face, and she wavered, seemed about to fall. Gregg put an arm about her, guided her into his car. She sagged, and he thought she was going to faint. But she didn't. She looked up at him, and the fight was gone out of her. She began to plead.

"Please! You're so young, you have your future before you. *Why* must you wreck an old man's life for the sake of your ambition? Give me back those papers."

Gregg had the door of the car open, and he put his foot on the running-board, leaning close to her.

"Madam," he said, "will you take my word that I don't know what you're talking about? Will you tell me who you are?"

She looked at him, seemed to study him a long time. Then she nodded slowly to herself.

"I do believe you're speaking the truth!" She tilted her chin a little, patted the cheap, worn fur of her collar. "I," she said, "am Mrs. George Rodney."

Gregg gasped. "But Rodney's a widower!"

She shook her head, smiled wanly, and he could see that she must once have been very beautiful. Looking at her, he even thought he could detect a likeness between her and Patricia.

"I," she told him, "am George's first wife. He never legally divorced me, because he thought me dead. I left him when Patricia was only a year old, and I was reported killed a week later in an auto wreck. They thought me dead, but I wasn't; I was ashamed to come back. I've followed George's career in the papers. I read how he got married again, and how his second wife died. I longed to see Patty. I brooded and brooded, while I slaved in a canning factory in the South. I got terribly bitter."

She wasn't looking at him now. She was looking out through the windshield, as if she were seeing visions of the past in the glass.

"I came to Newcastle and saw a lawyer. He told me he knew a man who'd pay me a lot of money if I signed affidavits. He sent me to a man named Furman. Before I went, I phoned George and told him what I was going to do. George is a stubborn, violent-tempered man. He—he's never forgiven me in all these years."

Tears were working their way down her cheeks now, as she turned her eyes to Gregg. "Furman gave me five thousand dollars. I have the money here—" she tapped the breast of her blouse "—and it burns. Burns! After I left Furman, I realized what I was doing to George and to Pat.

I went back to get possession of the papers, but there were police all over. I couldn't get in. Please—" she stretched her hand appealingly—"give me back those papers. Don't spread this scandal before the world. *Don't ruin George.*"

The whole thing was clear to Gregg now. He saw why Kruger had wanted those papers so badly; saw why Patricia had gone to the Montevideo with a private detective—in an effort to head off her mother. He put his hand over the woman's.

"Stay here," he said. "I'm going in and talk to Rodney. Believe me, I haven't got those papers. I didn't know about them until just now—and I'm glad you told me."

He left her in the car, raced up the stairs of Rodney's house.

THE butler was very polite, but very firm. "I'm sorry, sir, but Miss Rodney is not at home. No, sir, Congressman Rodney is at home, but he has given strict orders not to admit anyone."

"Listen!" Gregg said. "Do you know who I am?"

"Of course, sir. You are Professor Braden. May I say that I have read your articles on criminology in the daily papers, sir, and that I admire you immensely. If it were not for my loyalty to—"

"All right," Gregg interrupted desperately. "I've got to see him at once. Tell him it's about his daughter—"

From inside a weary voice came: "Let the gentleman in, Brooks."

Brooks started, opened the door wide. Gregg followed him into the study, and stood facing George Rodney. Brooks left, closing the door.

Gregg had met Rodney before, but was startled by the man's appearance now. There were heavy pouches under his eyes, and his stiff-backed, aristocratic bearing was gone. There was a stubble of grayish beard on the lower part of his chin.

Rodney said nothing, just stared at Gregg, haggard-eyed.

"Your wife is outside in my car, Rodney," Gregg said.

Rodney took a single step backward, as if Gregg had struck him. His bloodshot

eyes blazed, and he kept his voice low with an effort, though it was hoarse with emotion.

"I'll thank you to keep out of my family affairs! Braden, I always thought you were a gentleman—"

"Wait, Rodney!" Gregg said tensely. "There is no time for argument. There's something I must know. *Where is your daughter?*"

"Damn you!" he shouted. "You know where my daughter is! You framed her yourself! Kruger just called me—" Rodney turned away, covered his face with his hands.

Gregg stepped close to him, seized his shoulder, and demanded fiercely, "What did Kruger say? Where is she?"

Rodney lifted his face from his hands. It was drawn with misery. "Why do you torture me? You're Kruger's man—you know what he's doing. Here—" he snatched two sheets of paper from the writing desk beside him—"here's everything you want." He stuffed the papers into Gregg's hand. "There's my withdrawal from the mayoralty contest, in your favor. And there's my resignation from Congress—so that Kruger can have the governor appoint a City Party man." He fairly pushed Gregg toward the door. "Go! Take it to Kruger! You've beaten me, the two of you—you with your suave, criminal mind, and Kruger with his ruthless politics. You have everything. Only send me back my daughter! My God, man, you can't charge my little girl with murder!"

His frenzy was so great that he had pushed Gregg almost to the door. Gregg got a grip on his shoulder, swung him around, and pushed him forcibly into the chair before the writing desk.

"Mr. Rodney," he said urgently, "you've got to believe me. I didn't plan any of this. I begin to understand what Kruger's been doing, and I don't want any part of it. I'll get Patricia out of this without any resignations from you—but you've got to help me!"

Rodney looked up dully. His eyes searched Gregg's and he shrugged hopelessly.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Tell me where Kruger took your daughter. Is she in headquarters?"

"No. Kruger has her somewhere. He let me talk to her on the phone. They—they accuse her of killing Martinson, and of stabbing your man. But Kruger promised that he wouldn't even have her booked if he got those resignations within two hours. I—I told him I had to think about it. I'm to call him back."

"And you don't know where they've got Patricia?"

"No." The word was almost a groan.

"All right," Gregg said. "I think I can find her."

Gregg crossed to the phone and dialed the number of the Montevideo Club. Furman's voice answered, and Gregg asked him curtly whether Kruger was there. Furman hesitated, put his hand over the mouthpiece as he spoke to someone there—Gregg could tell what he was doing by the vibrations that were transmitted through the palm of his hand—and then said, "Just a minute, Professor."

A second later, Kruger's voice came over the wire.

Gregg said, "Listen, Dan, I've had a chance to think about that business. Nobody else could have stabbed Kuralenko. I want to press a charge against a certain person."

Kruger's voice sounded relieved. "Glad you got yourself some sense, Gregg. I thought for a while you were going haywire. Come right over. We've got the girl here, and Logan's grilling her before taking her downtown."

"Be right over," Gregg said, and hung up.

Rodney was looking at him perplexedly. "What—"

"They've got her at the Montevideo. I'm going over there and break this thing up."

Rodney got up. "I'll go too."

"No," Gregg said. "You stay here and pull yourself together. You're in no shape to go out!"

Rodney sank back into the chair, mumbling, "That's right. I'm not fit to go. All broken up—getting old—"

Gregg said gently, "Your wife's outside. Do you want me to send—"

Rodney jerked his head up, and in spite of his dejected, beaten weariness there was a stubborn gleam in his eye. "No! I'll never look at that woman again." His voice broke. "I loved her—"

He broke off.

"George!"

The door had opened silently, and the woman with the worn fur collar stood there, hands outstretched, palms up. Gregg tore his eyes away from the agony in her face, and looked down at Rodney. He saw the cold stubbornness go out of Rodney's eyes. "Natalie!" Rodney whispered.

Her eyes never left his face.

"George," she said, "I've done such terrible things to you! Can you forgive me?"

Gregg, unnoticed, turned and tiptoed out of the room. It would have been sacrilege to stay longer.

The Violent Wind-up

MADISON STREET is all the way across the city from the downtown section, but it was long after midnight, and there were no more traffic lights. Gregg made it to the Montevideo Club in eleven minutes.

There was a uniformed cop before the entrance, and a couple of plainclothesmen lounged in the foyer. The patrons had long since gone, but the lights were all on. The great dining room on the first floor looked like some ghostly banquet hall. The tables were all set, with their white linen and the silver and the dishes, many of them left untouched by the guests. A couple of plainclothesmen were poking about, killing time.

Gregg used the telephone at the desk to call the hospital, and was informed that the knife had just grazed Kuralenko's lung. His vitality, they said, was amazing, and he would recover.

Gregg, breathing a little easier, went up to the third floor.

There was quite a gathering in Furman's office. Furman was there, but he wasn't at his desk. Dan Kruger sat there.

Patricia Rodney sat in a straight-backed chair in a corner near the still open safe. Her hands were in her lap, and she was twisting her fingers. Her eyes were red, but in spite of that she was still pretty, appealing. Gregg was amazed to see how much like her mother she looked. She looked at Gregg dully, hopelessly.

Logan was standing on one side of her, Siever on the other. Logan looked very serious, and slightly irritable. Siever was smirking. His crooked nose made him look like a gargoyle.

Furman was standing near the door, and he kicked it shut after Gregg got in. Gregg didn't glance at him, stood spraddle-legged in the middle of the room, facing the others.

Kruger seemed ill at ease. He said, "We've been waiting for you, Gregg. This thing is shaping up nicely."

Gregg was holding Rodney's two signed papers in his hand. He slapped them down on the desk.

"That's what you wanted from Rodney, Dan," he said mildly. "I saw him and he gave them to me."

Kruger examined them eagerly. "Fine! You're a cinch for the next mayor, Gregg!"

"And the girl goes home to her father?"

"Sure. We've got nothing against her—or against Rodney, for that matter."

"And the papers?" Gregg said. "The affidavits that Miss Rodney came here with Martinson to get—they go back too?"

"Sure, Gregg. As long as Rodney is out of the picture, we don't need to hurt him."

Gregg pondered that a minute. Then he said slowly, "Then there's only one fly in the ointment."

Kruger got up, a worried frown on his forehead, and his shrewd old eyes bored into Gregg.

"What's that?" he said.

"Martinson's murder. We need a fall guy for that—somebody to feed to the wolves. You can't let it go unsolved just before election."

Kruger said, "You're right. I wish to hell Martinson hadn't been killed. I tell you, Gregg, I don't know the answer to that one. Whoever did it certainly gummed up

the works. We would have had clear sailing if it hadn't been for that."

Gregg believed him. Kruger hadn't planned Martinson's murder. He had walked in on the accomplished fact, and, like the practical politician that he was, he had tried to make the most of it.

"Maybe," Kruger said, "we could just string it along till after election; you know—give out word that we expect to apprehend the murderer any day. What do you think, Logan?"

Logan scratched his head. Gregg could see that he hadn't liked the whole business from the start. He was just a good cop, caught up in the whirl of crooked politics, and letting the tide drag him around.

"I don't know," he said doubtfully.

"No!" Gregg rapped out. "We need a fall guy!"

Kruger saw that he was aiming at something, and said, "Who do you suggest, Gregg?"

Gregg looked at Siever, then at Furman, and let his fingers wander along the lapel of his dinner jacket, near the shoulder-clip where his automatic rested.

"Why," he said slowly, "I should think that the best fall guy for the murder would be the murderer himself!"

He saw Siever's body go tense. Furman stirred nervously.

Logan caught the tenseness that had suddenly come into the air, and so did Patricia. She hunched forward in her chair, and her anxious eyes traveled swiftly from one face to another. Then her eyes met Gregg's, and he saw confidence in them, and trust.

Furman snickered. "Maybe you've got the murderer spotted, Professor?"

Gregg didn't answer him, but didn't turn his back on him either. He said to Kruger, "Have you got those affidavits, Dan?"

He nodded. "Right here." He reached over, took them out of the open top drawer of the desk. It was the same packet Gregg had taken from Furman's safe earlier in the evening.

"Who brought them back to you?"

"Siever."

"All right," Gregg said. "Now we're getting somewhere! Will you tell us where

you got them, and just how, Siever?"

Siever said hoarsely, "No. It's none of your damn business. I work for Dan Kruger. I'm not answerable to you."

"Let it slide," Gregg said, "for the present." He swung his glance to the girl. "Will you tell us, Miss Rodney, how your handkerchief came to be in Kuralenko's fist when Kruger and I found him with a knife in his back?"

Patricia paled, but she braced her shoulders, spoke evenly.

"You want me to tell—everything?"

He nodded. "Everything."

PATRICIA took a deep breath. "Kuralenko took me home. I asked him to come in, but he wouldn't. I knew he had those affidavits, and I was desperately anxious to get them, so I told Kuralenko that something had come up and I had to see you again. He said he had to go to your apartment first, so I went there with him. He opened the door, and we entered. Then somebody jumped out from behind the door"—she shuddered, and closed her eyes, then opened them and forced herself to go on—"and stabbed him in the back before he could put the light on. I tried to scream, but someone put a hand over my mouth and slammed my head against the wall. That's all I know. They must have taken my handkerchief and put it in Kuralenko's fingers."

"Thank you, Miss Rodney." Gregg stepped back a pace, let his glance travel from Furman to Siever, to Logan, to Kruger. "Now, gentlemen," he went on, "I can vouch for the fact that Kuralenko had this package of papers when he left here. I gave it to him—"

Furman broke in. "Then that makes you the Buccaneer, Braden!"

"That's right. It makes me the Buccaneer. And it makes our friend Siever the stabber of Kuralenko—and the murderer of Martinson. He's probably cached the money he took from Kuralenko when he stabbed him."

Siever backed to the wall, and his hand went to his pocket. "So what?" he snarled. "Sure I killed Martinson! We're all in on

it, so it doesn't matter what I admit here. Furman told me to knock off Martinson, when he learned that this girl was here with him. He thought it would be a perfect frame." His eyes sought Kruger's. "We were working in your interests, Dan, and in the interests of Braden. We thought—"

"Damn it!" Kruger exclaimed. "Why did you have to pull such a raw stunt?"

"Why can't we forget the whole thing?" Furman suggested. "The girl won't dare to blab—we can keep those affidavits. We'll forget that Braden is the Buccaneer—"

"No!" Gregg broke in. "I'm the Buccaneer, and Siever is a murderer. Logan, make your arrests! You've heard Siever's confession!"

Dan Kruger shouted, "Hell, you're crazy! Who cares if you're the Buccaneer? We'll keep it quiet. Do you want to go to jail and give up the mayoralty?"

"That's just what I want to do," Gregg said, "just so Siever and Furman can take the rap for Martinson's murder!"

Kruger stared at him uncomprehendingly. "You're willing to go to jail, lose your chance of becoming mayor, lose your position at the university? You'd be throwing away your whole life, Gregg!"

"If it's the only way of getting these two to the chair, Dan, that's what I'm going to do—unless you can figure another way out."

Logan's eyes narrowed, a dawning light of comprehension in them. He saw the goal Gregg was working toward, and he unostentatiously let his hand creep toward his shoulder holster.

Siever and Furman were staring at Gregg as if he was crazy. Patricia Rodney was on the edge of her chair, her eyes flitting from one face to another.

Kruger said musingly, "I believe you'd do it, Gregg. You're just that much of a fool!"

Siever said hoarsely, "To hell with him, Dan! Tell Logan to throw him in the can. We can pin the murder on him—"

"And lose my candidate for mayor?" Kruger snapped. "I can't do that. It's our chance to rule the city. Maybe," he went on reflectively, "*you* could take the rap,

Siever. I'd get you a commutation, and a pardon within a year—"

Siever's face went black with rage.

"You rat, you!" he snarled.

His hand came out of his pocket with a gun at the same time that Furman pulled his gun.

Gregg been waiting for it, and so had Logan. Gregg's automatic was out at the same time as Siever's, and they fired at the same instant, as did Logan and Furman. The room was filled with the thunderous detonations of the explosions. Gregg shot only once, at Siever's heart, and then he ducked across, pulled Patricia out of her chair and down to the floor.

When the smoke cleared, Dan Kruger was lying across the desk, panting, with blood running down him from two places—where both Siever and Furman had shot him. And those two were on the floor—dead. Logan had got Furman just as Gregg shot Siever. Logan was standing looking somberly down at the two bodies.

The crooked city ring was broken!

Gregg helped Patricia to her feet. She wobbled, and was a little sick, but he got her into the chair again.

Big Dan Kruger wasn't yet dead. He moaned, and Logan stepped over to him, raised his head. Kruger's eyes were filming. He said brokenly:

"Shrewd old fox like me—you out-

(*The End*)

smarted me, Gregg!" And, with a last, painful breath, big Dan Kruger died.

Logan laid him down gently.

"All right, Inspector," Gregg said. "Now you can arrest the Buccaneer. It's a big day for you!"

He held out his hands for the cuffs, but Logan smiled grimly, shook his head. Instead, he reached out his hand and gripped Gregg's.

"I'm shaking hands with the next mayor," he said. "And I don't know a thing about the Buccaneer. Only I'm sure we'll have a decent administration, and a cop won't have to be a crook to keep his job!"

Their eyes met, and Gregg returned his grip. Then he picked up the two papers Rodney had written. He tore up the resignation from Congress, but kept the withdrawal from the Mayoralty contest.

"Congressman Rodney remains in Congress," he said. "Here, Patricia, you can take these back to your father—and mother."

Patricia tried to thank him, but the words wouldn't come.

"Come along," Gregg said. "I'll take you home. That is—if you still trust the Buccaneer."

"Trust him!" Patricia said. "Oh, Gregg, what would I have done *without* you?"

And that answer, for the moment, was enough for Gregg.

Writers Here and There—

STILL out in Washington, L. Ron Hubbard seems a bit entangled with Hollywood. We wish him luck, and we know he's going places in this writing game. We hope, being human, that he won't welch on us—but he's not the type to do it. . . . L. P. Holmes still turns 'em out to the Queen's taste—and we've heard writers say he's the most human of Western writers. A feather in your cap, Mr. Holmes—writers are sparing in compliments! . . . Philip L. Scruggs is making tentative motions toward Paris. Ourselves, we'd sit down and bask in the sunlight—or mist—of "gay Paree" and do nothing, I'm afraid, but Phil's a bear for work and expects to stick to his job. Trouble is, Paris may run into cafés and talk and more talk, so—well, what's French for *mañana*? But Phil is made of substantial stuff, so he won't fall down—and we trust him—amazing, coming from ye ed!



WE HOPE that we'll be able to run the *Cove* more often. We have some stories on hand, and we intend to buy more, paying \$10.00 for the best story run in the *Cove* each time and \$5.00 for all others we use. The stories must be true, or at least based on actual happenings, and only readers may enter stories for *Adventure Cove*—we will not consider the work of professional writers.

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The rules for contributions are simple:

1. Keep your story between 1000 and 1500 words.
2. Type it, if possible, double-spacing the lines. If you cannot type it, write it clearly, using only one side of the paper.
3. Put your name and address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story.



Stories should be sent to

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FIVE-NOVELS MONTHLY,

149 MADISON AVENUE,

NEW YORK.

Mutiny on the Vanadis

By Erik Meidell

IN 1889, the Swedish barkentine *Vanadis*, on which I was serving as cook, lay at the mouth of the Ongeman River off the coast of northeastern Sweden.

As we were to stay there for a few days, the crew was ordered to give the ship's rail a coat of paint. After a thin crust had formed, I tied a pile of newly washed clothing to a line and proceeded to rinse it in the water splashing about the ship. I held the rope well away from the rail, being careful not to scrape the paint.

The first mate, who was painting one of the lifeboats on the roof of the foc'sle, saw me and yelled:

"Hey, you down there! Be careful with that rope! Don't scrape any paint off!"

As I turned to look at him, the ship rolled slightly, but, slight as it was, it caught me unprepared and was enough to throw me off balance. I shifted my feet to regain my balance and in doing so the rope touched the railing lightly, but did no harm. The mate, however, thought the paint had been scraped off.

"You did that on purpose, you fool!" he yelled.

"I did not," I defended myself promptly. "I couldn't help it any more than you could."

"Don't talk back to me!" he yelled, cursing me.



I was not used to having anyone swear at me, and I promptly retaliated with a few pet cuss words of my own, beginning with the mate and going down the line of his ancestry all the way back to Adam.

This was too much for the mate, and losing complete control of himself, he picked up the paint brush and hurled it straight at my face. I sidestepped quickly, and reaching out with my hands, made a foolish attempt to catch it. I almost succeeded, but just as I thought I had it, it slipped through my fingers into the sea.

I turned to watch it fall when something hit me a stunning blow on the back of my head and a white liquid poured down my face and body, completely blinding me. As I wiped the liquid from my eyes, I had a glimpse of the paint bucket the mate had been using, lying on the deck. It was this which had hit me. When I saw this, I lost complete control of myself and burned with a fierce anger. I hurled all the accumulated profanity of a year spent with rough sailors at the mate and threw in a few of my own inventions to boot.

No man will stand for anything like that, and the mate, his face black with rage, leaped from the foc'sle roof and started for me with murder clearly written on his face. I was angry too, and instead of retreating and waiting till he cooled off, as any sensible person would have done, I picked up a capstan bar near me, and whirling it around my head, yelled:

"Come on, you Swede, and I'll show you how hash is made!"

This only added to the mate's fury, and half crazy with rage, he came rushing at me.

I MUST have been a little out of my head too, for as he charged at me I swung the capstan bar with all my might and dealt him a terrific blow in the head. He fell like a slaughtered ox and, to my eyes, looked stone dead.

I looked about to see if anyone had witnessed the fight, and saw the skipper striding toward me. By this time I had calmed down considerably, so I did not stay to fight him, but dropped the capstan bar and ran toward the galley. The skipper, however, kept right behind me. I looked frantically for some weapon with which to protect myself. Finally my eyes fell on the big brass coffee pot boiling on the stove. I picked this up and, running to the door, saw the skipper about five yards away. He saw me at the same time, and noticing the coffee pot, divined its purpose. He stopped, undecided on what to do. His indecision did not last long, however. When he saw me bring the pot back to hurl at him, he quickly turned and attempted a hurried retreat; but before he was out of range I managed to throw it. As it sailed past his head, some of the hot water spilled on him. He yelled with pain as it scalded him and, cursing me for a crazy maniac, hurried toward the bridge.

A few minutes later I saw the skipper and the second mate leaving for shore in the boat. From what I overheard from the crew, who were deadly afraid of me, as I was a supposed maniac, they were going for the police, or "lensman" as he is known in Sweden.

This gave me something to think about. I knew there was sufficient proof that I had killed the mate. The skipper had seen me, and many of the crew had probably observed the fight too. If I remained on board the ship, I would be captured, convicted of the murder, and sentenced to spend the rest of my life behind bars. The only thing to do, I decided, was to leave the ship.

Having reached this decision, I waited no longer, but proceeded at once to put it into effect. I hastily gathered a few necessary belongings and made my way aft, where a small boat was tied. No one attempted to stop me, as all were afraid of me. When I arrived aft, I threw my belongings into the boat and slid down the rope after them. I looked at the point around which the skipper's boat had disappeared a few minutes before, and estimated that I would have plenty of time to reach shore before he returned. I threw off the rope and started for shore. As I rowed, I kept a wary eye on the point where the skipper would appear when he returned. I wished now that I had not been so rash in my disagreement with the mate, but it was too late now. I would have to make the best of what had happened.

After what seemed hours of rowing, I finally reached shore. I picked up my belongings, and letting the boat drift, started through the woods, going southwest, away from the big cities. I half ran, half walked till I tired and could go no farther. By that time it was dark and I decided to rest until the next day. That night, and many after it, I spent out in the open.

The next day I continued through the woods, and toward noon came upon a small farm. Here I was allowed to work for the remainder of the day, receiving as pay supper that evening and breakfast the

next morning. Thus I traveled for many days, keeping off all roads and working at obscure farms for my food.

AFTER traveling southwest for two weeks, I finally reached Sundswall, a small city on the coast. It was with much trepidation that I entered the city, but as no attention was paid to me, I soon regained my courage. I proceeded at once to the waterfront, where, of course, I felt more at home, especially after my long stay ashore. I had been in the city only a few hours when I discovered that an Italian boat was leaving that same day for Algeria. I shipped on this boat, and a few hours later I watched, with great relief, the shores of Sweden sink behind me. I felt that, for the time being at least, I was safe.

I took no chances, however. When I arrived at Algeria, I deserted and shipped on an Austrian boat leaving for France. From France the ship went to Spain, took on a cargo of cork and left for New York. In New York, my time out, I got work at last on a boat from my own country, the Norwegian bark *Noah VI*. This ship sailed to London, and then returned to New York.

When I arrived in New York, I wrote home for the first time since my fight with the mate two years before. A month and a half later the reply came. My hands trembled as I opened the letter. I read it through once, then once again. I could hardly believe my eyes. The letter, which was from my mother, stated that the mate had not died! He had recovered completely and was still serving as mate on the *Vanad's*.

When I read this I almost keeled over. For two years I had lived in constant fear of capture, only to find it had all been for no cause!

Death's Miracle

By Al Weber

I WAS known as the Flying Rabbi among the fraternity of the racing

game fifteen and more years ago. During my heyday I raced all over the United States—on dirt tracks, wooden tracks, on the bricks, and even in road races. During a dozen years I witnessed many thrilling adventures in various automobile races, not a few of which were hair-raising spectacles. More than once I have seen death overtake an intrepid driver; but of all the breath-taking events it has been my lot to observe, one stands out with a clarity time cannot dim. It took place on the old board track at Council Bluffs, Iowa.

The track was two miles around and had a 63 o/o pitch. It was the scene of many an exciting encounter among the best and most daring drivers of the United States and of foreign countries. These would foregather here each year for the annual Council Bluffs 200 mile race. Ralph De Palma, Eddie Hearne, Barney Oldfield, Jimmy Murphy, Eddie Rickenbacker, Earl Cooper, Peter De Paola, and the Chevrolet brothers are some of the famous drivers who vied for honors on this track.

De Palma, Cooper, Pete Galvin, Hughie Hughes, several other well-known racers, and I took part in the classic of which I am writing. De Palma, in a Blitz-Benz, had the No. 1 position; I was in No. 2 post; Hughes, in a big Sun Beam, was on my right, in No. 3 place; and Pete Galvin occupied No. 4 position with his powerful Simplex. The other drivers were behind us, in rows of four each.

At the sound of the starter's gun we were off! Down and around the track we sped like a flash. De Palma and I got the jump on both Hughes and Galvin. I was at the wheel of a giant Mercer, a wonderful piece of machinery that had won many a bitterly contested race for me. For three laps Ralph and I swept around the track as if we were but one car, and then I slowly forged ahead. In the twentieth lap De Palma overcame my lead, and in the twenty-fifth he was leading me by half a mile. Half a mile behind me was Hughie Hughes, with Galvin grimly hanging onto his tail.

At the thirtieth lap a scant twenty-five yards separated me from De Palma's Blitz-

Benz, and Hughes was creeping up on us. Slowly but surely the powerful Sun Beam was eating up our lead. Just when it seemed he would overtake me, Hughie lost control of his car. It climbed the steep grade and hung itself across the fence. Hughes and his mechanic, Johnny Bresham, escaped unscathed.

NOW Johnny Bresham was said to have borne a charmed life. Several times before he had looked into the jaws of death—and lived! When the last of the cars had sped past them, Hughes and Bresham lifted the Sun Beam from its perch and pushed it into the pit. There Hughes sat, on the side of his car facing the track, while Bresham sat on the opposite side.

Around and around the wooden track thundered the cars still in the race. Sometimes De Palma, sometimes Galvin, and sometimes I was in the lead. We fought tooth and nail.

I was in the lead when Galvin came flying down the stretch of straight-a-way like a demon possessed. He tore past me like a streak of lightning. My position enabled me to see what happened as if in the blink of an eyelash. Galvin's steering post snapped! His big Simplex swerved and careened drunkenly off the track. Horror-struck, I saw Galvin's car crash headlong into that of Hughie Hughes. Poor Hughie didn't have a chance to rise to his feet as the steel monster bore down on him. He sat petrified at sight of the Grim Reaper closing in on him with his huge scythe. As for Johnny Bresham, I afterward learned that he was totally unaware of his plight until the terrific impact hurled him into space.

The crash of the two cars was awful. Galvin's Simplex did a complete somersault! Of the four men involved, only one survived. It was Johnny Bresham—he of the charmed life! Hurlled through the air for a distance of fifteen yards, Johnny lit on his feet—but little the worse for his experience. Again he had cheated death!

After the race, in which I took second place, De Palma winning, I got the shock

of my life. Looking down at what remained of poor Hughie, I gasped at what seemed a miracle. Hughes's mop of fiery red hair had begun to turn snow-white!

Singing Wires

By Charles A. Ellis

NO MATTER which line of work a man may follow, there will be some incident which stands out more clearly during his life, something that remains etched on his memory so vividly that it can be recalled even to the minutest detail, even though many years may have passed since the incident occurred. Some turn out to be tragic. The story I am about to relate could have been, except for one of those lucky breaks a man has now and then.

I was working as a lineman for the Western Union and Santa Fe. The Santa Fe was building a cut-off from Farwell, Texas, to Belin, New Mexico, at the time. This was known as the Belin Cut-off, and work was started from both ends of the line, meeting at Vaughn, New Mexico. Our part of the job was digging the holes for the telegraph poles, putting in cross arms, setting poles, and stringing five wires, keeping close up with the laying of the rails.

We lived in bunk cars and there were some thirty of us, all husky young fellows, full of life from living out in the open and breathing the pure air of the Llano Estacado (Staked Plains). The work went on without a hitch and we were nearing the meeting point at Vaughn. The ground hogs (boys digging holes) were a mile or two beyond the bunk cars, pole sitters following up closely, while the linemen were bringing up the rear with the wire and were in sight of the cars. Only one accident so far in our bunch, but that didn't happen on the works.

Two of our boys on Sunday decided to make a big kite. They tried it out, using marline twine to fly it with. After tearing up all the old shirts they could find, they managed to make a tail long enough to balance it. It seemed to work all right, so they thought it would be grand fun to tie

a couple of sticks of dynamite to the tail. Fixing a short fuse to the dynamite, the boy holding the kite got all set, lit the fuse and hollered, "Let 'er go!" and up she went.

The wind in the meantime had freshened, and before the boy holding the twine could let out much, that kite was just about over his head, pulling like a bay mule. He did manage to let out some more, but not nearly enough, for that kite turned right down in a nose dive. It hit the ground, the dynamite exploded, throwing gravel for yards around, some hitting the boy who held the kite in the face, nearly tearing an ear off. Well, just another one of those incidents which could have been worse.

At last we finished the line to Vaughn. The next thing was to string a cable from terminal pole to each new station that was built along the line. The terminal pole is a forty-five-foot pole with a buck arm at the top, where the cable is stretched from the station to the buck arm, then down to the wires in the cross arms fifteen feet below, connecting the telegraph office to the line. Two linemen usually work together, and Slick Warner was my partner at the station.

Slick was an old head at the game, having worked on high tension stuff in California, and was considered a careful, first-class lineman. He was a tall, slim, gangling hombre, about thirty-five years of age, and could run up a pole, go over the top and with a couple of drops be on the ground again. That boy didn't seem dressed unless he had on a pair of hooks, something like a cowpuncher without his jingling spurs.

Slick was fastening the cable to the buck arm while I was tying in the wire on the insulation below. My safety belt was around the pole, and my head just above the wires. I looked up, Slick being on the same side of the pole, some fifteen feet above. I was just going to make some joking remark to him when all of a sudden he flung his arms up and out, dropping his pliers, which missed me by a narrow margin. It all happened so quickly, I

ducked my head below the wires and hugged the pole. Down came Slick. He hit the wires and they twanged and sung like big harp strings, but those five strands of new number eight held.

I glanced fearfully around and down, expecting to see old Slick a mess on the ground, but no Slick—the wires were still holding. Looking back along the lines, lo and behold, full length across those wires, about six or seven feet out from the pole, lay Slick, mighty stiff and rigid. I should have said *bounced* Slick, for the wires were sending waves back and forth between those poles like waves coming in on the beach.

He had fallen flat on his back across those five wires, and had the presence of mind to make himself rigid, so as not to slip between them. Finally the vibration ceased. Slick turned a sickly face toward me and drawled, "Nobody but old Slick could have done that!"

"Singing wires," says he. "And do I hear them!" He began to slowly edge his way along those wires to the pole, and soon we were both on the ground. How good that old gravel felt! But I was so darned nervous coming down that pole that I did not unhook my safety until old Terra Firma was under me.

We sat down with our backs against the pole. "Sure you are not hurt, Slick?" says I.

"Naw, only a crick in my neck, where that blamed wire slipped off my shoulder in the second bounce and caught me behind the ears," says Slick. "You know, Shorty, it all goes to show what a little carelessness will do. Now I know good and well that I should have slipped my safety belt through that buck arm, then over the pole, especially when I had to use so much pressure on stretching that cable, but I didn't.

"You see, there was a piece of smooth bark on the back side of that pole at the top. Just a little heave and up slipped my safety, and me clawing the air! If I had failed to lay myself plumb flat on those wires, those same little wires would be telling the folks back home all about it."

"All in the day's work," says I faintly. "And speaking of wires, say, I bet you have knocked the ties off all the insulation for ten spans both ways from here!"

"I don't care if they are knocked off ten miles either way, so long as I'm still here to help tie them back," says old Slick.

So back up the terminal we hiked to complete the job. Such is the life of a lineman!

(*The End.*)

And Artists, Too—

WYNNE DAVIES, who usually illustrates our sport stories, was in today, and we found that he has had a colorful career. A scholarship man in England, with the South Kensington Museum School of Art, he shipped two years before the mast, barging off on an old windjammer . . . witness his drawings of ships! He jumped ship in Australia, and worked on a cattle ranch in Queensland. Following that, he was a timber wolf. Then, caught by the wanderlust—which gets us all sometimes—he came to the U. S. A.

When we asked how he liked this country, he said, "Fine!" and added that the field for an artist is much wider here than elsewhere, and that versatility in art, as in other fields, brings good returns and real satisfaction to an artist who likes what he's doing and really works at it.

A nice chap, Wynne Davies, and a good artist. Incidentally—you lads who want to get ahead—he's never through studying!

CONGO



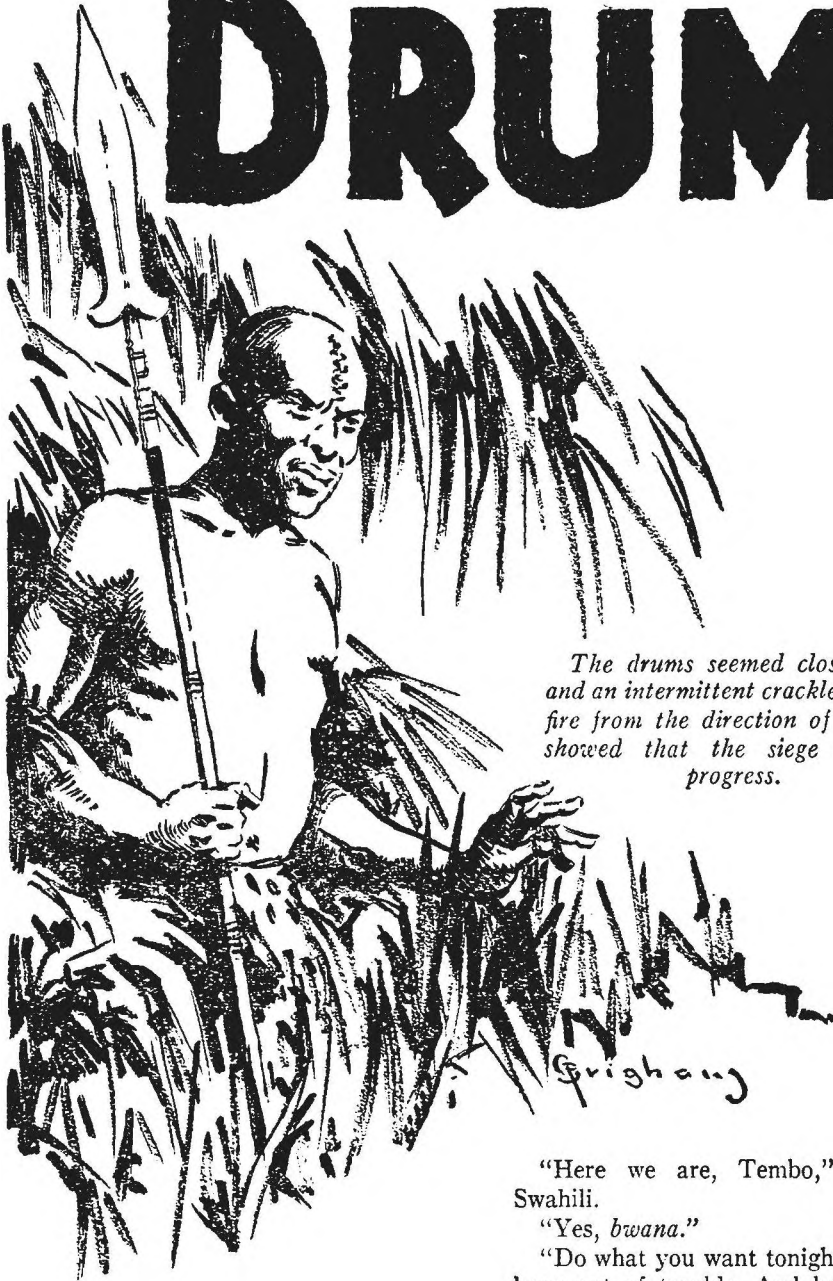
Dirt, Squalor—and African Stars

BOPOLA is no great metropolis of the world. It lies some distance into the interior of Africa above the mouth of the Congo, it is hot and dirty and very smelly, and to any visitor just come to the Dark Continent it appears a dump. At the moment, as the little river steamer *M'kuba* drew in across the muddy water

to the landing, Bopola looked like the height of civilization to Terry McLane.

Terry stood, in his soiled white ducks and his battered pith helmet, several inches taller than any of the motley crowd on deck of the *M'kuba*. Six feet two in his stocking feet, burned almost as dark as a native by the African sun, badly needing a haircut, and with a stubble of beard on his chin, Terry looked disreputable. He

DRUMS



The drums seemed closer now, and an intermittent crackle of rifle-fire from the direction of Kombo showed that the siege was in progress.

didn't care. It would be time enough to clean up after he got to Bopola's only hotel.

Lines were thrown across to the shaky pier, the *M'kuba's* screw reversed, threshing the river into muddy foam, and the steamer came to rest. Terry McLane turned, smiling, to the tall native who stood beside him.

"Here we are, Tembo," he said in Swahili.

"Yes, *bwana*."

"Do what you want tonight, Tembo, but keep out of trouble. And be at the hotel early in the morning."

"It shall be done, *bwana*."

One of the things that had brought Terry McLane a considerable measure of success in his African career was his understanding way of handling natives. Tembo, who was almost as tall as Terry himself and had a greater breadth of shoulder, who leaned on his tall spear like

an ebony giant, wearing only a leopard-skin loincloth and some bands of monkey fur around his elbows, had been with Terry for over five years and had risked his life for his white *bwana* on more than one occasion. He was a Wunguba tribesman, a warrior by profession and inclination.

The two men, the American and the African, parted on the dock. Tembo went striding off up the dusty street as majestically as the elephant for which he was named, the long blade of his seven-foot *assegai* gleaming in the sun. Native loafers idling along the way were careful to step clear of his path. Terry gave his baggage to a *shenzi* and strode off toward the hotel. The native porter followed, the American's bags balanced on top of his head.

IT was good to be in a town again after his long absence upriver, even as fifth-rate a town as Bopola. Three times along the way, Terry stopped to speak to acquaintances, and he was whistling as he strode through the dust. The fact that he whistled a tune ten years old, and half forgotten in the States, indicated how long it was since Terry had been in the land of his birth.

Passing the office of the local commissioner who represented the Belgian government in this part of the Congo, Terry saw several Europeans standing in the open door. They looked like tourists, which was surprising, as Bopola lay far off the beaten track for that sort of traveler. Perhaps they were missionaries. One was a fair-haired girl in a white silk dress, a tall and slender girl who looked out on the squalor of Bopola with thinly concealed scorn.

Terry McLane's whistle died away. For a long minute he stood there, looking across the dusty street at the white-clad girl, then he shrugged and strode on. The smile had left his bronzed face, and it was set in lines that made him look older than his thirty years.

That was the trouble with the roving existence he had now been leading for nearly ten years. He had enjoyed himself, and he had seen a lot of life, but he had

neither family nor home. It was hardly once a year that he even saw a white woman of his own sort. He had no roots, no anchor, no more home than some wandering bird-of-passage. Well, what did it matter? He shook his shoulders angrily, and turned to kick open the dingy screen door of the Hotel Europa.

The fly-filled little lobby of the hotel, with its white-washed walls and its few shaky chairs, its battered water cooler in the corner and its two-month-old Brussels newspapers in a rack on the wall, was deserted except for a gray-bearded little Belgian perched on a high stool behind the desk in the corner. Papa Fontaine, resident manager of the *Europa*, peered over the top of his glasses and then broke into a beaming smile.

"*Mon Dieu, M'sieu Terry!* Is it you?"

"The same, Jules. Still alive and kicking."

"I was a little afraid you might not be, after the tales we have heard of Blackie Du Bois moving into your territory. It is good to have you with us again, my friend. How long will you be staying?"

"Only until the *M'kuba* starts upriver again tomorrow. I just came down to meet a new official of our company."

Fontaine pushed the hotel's ink-stained register across the desk, and from several rusty pens selected one that would write after a fashion. A low murmur of voices came from the "Café and Bar" adjoining, but the scratch of the pen seemed loud in the stillness of the lobby as Terry signed his scrawling signature. Then Fontaine shouted "*Boy!*" and a native boy shambled out from somewhere at the back. He wore a buttonless white coat, but below it was only a loincloth and his bare brown shanks.

"Take the *Bwana* McLane's bags to Room Three," Fontaine ordered, and to Terry he said: "Before dinner, my friend, you must drink an *aperitif* with me."

When the dusky bellboy had left him alone in the bare little room, Terry threw his pith helmet on the bed and turned to the window. For an instant he stood looking out at the corrugated-iron roofs of

Bopola, with the dense green of the surrounding jungle crowding close behind them. It was near dusk, and at this sunset hour the squalid settlement almost took on a certain sort of beauty.

Terry turned back to the door. He should probably change his clothes right away, but he was thirsty. It would be time enough to shave and change later; first he'd go to the bar for a drink.

THE long barroom, a wing of the hotel, was partially filled with the usual polyglot assortment of customers. Except for a new calendar on one wall, a vivid lithograph put out by some French soap concern, it was unchanged since Terry had last seen it, six months before. He greeted several acquaintances, and sat down across a little round table from a squat, red-haired man named Wheeler, who was an ivory hunter from the upper Ubangi country.

"How're you, Ned?" Terry said. "How's tricks?"

"Fair, Terry, only fair." Wheeler glanced intently into his empty glass for a minute, then waved to the black boy waiter who lounged at one end of the bar. "You work pretty hard for what elephant you shoot nowadays. By the way, are you paying a good price for ivory up at Kombo? I might stop by your station when I'm upriver again."

"Do that."

"How are things with you?"

"Pretty quiet." Terry took a long pull at his brandy and soda, then sat back with his legs stretched under the table. He felt comfortable. "Things are really too quiet in this trading game. I'm sometimes sorry I ever took a steady job."

"I'd think you would have had some excitement, from what I hear of Blackie Du Bois."

"Just what is all this talk about Du Bois anyway?" Terry demanded. "Papa Fontaine made some crack about him too, but I didn't have time to find out what he was driving at."

Wheeler hesitated a moment, twirling his glass on the table and making wet rings

on the stained wood. His wide, freckled face seemed vaguely worried.

"You know who Du Bois is, of course," he said at last.

"Sure. Renegade white leader of some bunch of native outlaws over in the Middle Congo country."

"He was over there, but the French made it too hot for him. Now he's crossed the Ubangi into Belgian territory, and they say he's operating around your place at Kombo."

"I'm not worried about him, so long as he doesn't start any trouble until I get back," Terry said with a thin-lipped grin. "I haven't been in a good scrap in several years."

AN hour later darkness had come to Bopola. Wailing native music sounded in the byways, some signal drums were talking across the distance in the dense jungle beyond the settlement. Dark-skinned men and women moved softly through the narrow lanes that were odorous canyons of mystery as the dense darkness hid their dirt and squalor. The brilliant African stars swung low above the roofs, burned brightly behind the tracery of the palms. In the bar of the Europa, an aged mechanical piano tinkled dissonantly, and the hum of voices had increased as Bopola society gathered for a before dinner *aperitif*.

Terry McLane had had a drink too many, but its only effect was a general feeling of good fellowship and peace with the world. As soon as he finished this last drink he intended to go up to his room and shave, and otherwise make himself respectable. Then he had promised to go over to the Army Club and dine with some young Belgian officers. Mr. Barton, the new director of the Upper Arubi Trading Company, whose arrival had brought Terry down to Bopola, could wait till morning.

Another group of people came into the bar, the tourists Terry had seen in the door of the Commissioner's office late that afternoon. With their formal clothes and their air of uncertainty, they looked out of place. They took a table near Terry, the

only one left vacant, while Papa Fontaine himself came bustling up. The fair-haired girl glanced around with disdain.

"There," Terry said to himself, "is a girl with whom I'd be certain to pick a fight in the first five minutes of our acquaintance!" He leaned across to another table, where Ned Wheeler was now sitting with a group of local officials, and said in the Swahili dialect, "Apparently the Queen of Sheba doesn't like the looks of our little place here."

"Anyway, she's a nice piece of goods," Wheeler replied in the same tongue.

Several men who had overheard them laughed, and the group at the center table looked more ill-at-ease than ever, as though they had guessed they were being talked about. The girl gave Terry a furious glance that was surprising in the intensity of its anger.

A few minutes later Terry rose to go to his room. He paused to say goodby to Ned Wheeler, and as he turned away his coat brushed against a glass near the edge of the nearby table. The liquor splashed on the floor, and a fair portion of it spilled on the girl's dress.

Terry started to stammer an apology, but the girl's temper had again flared up. She interrupted him with a rush of angry words.

"You clumsy fool! You've ruined my dress! You—you river bum!"

Terry stared down at the girl's flushed face, and he felt more amused than anything else.

"I've been called quite a few things in my time," he said, "but that's a new one! Well, have it your own way. But for the sake of your peace of mind I hope you're not planning to stay in Africa long!"

Introducing K. Barton

WHEN Terry McLane reached the bare little building that served as a club for the Belgian army officers stationed in Bopola, he was greeted with a shout by a tall young man whose white uniform bore the insignia of a Sous-Lieutenant. Terry and Pierre Manet had once hunted ele-

phant together when the young Belgian was on leave, and that brief but close association had led to an enduring friendship. They dined with several other officers, and afterward they sat around smoking and swapping yarns. Several times Terry made half-hearted attempts to break away.

"But I've got to look up my new boss," he protested when urged to stay. "Man named Barton. He's going upriver with me on the *M'kuba* tomorrow."

"Then you can meet him on the boat in the morning, *mon ami*," Pierre insisted. "I want you to stay around till the commandant comes and talk to him about this Du Bois matter."

"That seems to worry you."

"It does, because he has a weakness for raiding lightly defended trading stations. They say that we are to send an expedition to search the jungle for his band of outlaws, and in that case I want the commandant's permission to leave a squad or so at Kombo for your protection."

Terry stayed late at the officers' club, and when he at last came back to the hotel, the bar was closed and the lobby was deserted, except for a drowsy old Portuguese who served as night clerk. Leaving strict instructions to call him half an hour before daylight, Terry turned in.

It was a chill and foggy dawn when Terry snarled a sullen reply to the pounding at his door and swung himself out of bed. A slow waterfall of mist seemed to be pouring in the open window, and the mosquito-bar over the bed was heavy with moisture. An hour or so later the fog would all have vanished before a scorching sun, but at dawn the Congo frequently sends up a fever-laden mist that shrouds both banks in an unhealthy pall.

Completing his hasty packing, Terry went downstairs and drank a cup of hot coffee laced with brandy. He had just finished his breakfast and given his baggage over to a porter when Tembo appeared in the door, his black skin and long-bladed *assegai* glistening with the wet. The three of them started down the street toward the river, with Tembo muttering to the frightened *shenzi* in venomous Swahili: "Take

heed with the *Bwana m'kubas* baggage, misbegotten son of a jungle monkey, or I'll slit your throat."

The captain of the *M'kuba* was a short, round, disreputable little man whose shaggy black beard covered almost everything except his eyes. A Welshman with an unpronounceable name, he was known the length of the Congo as Taffy, and his long years in Africa seemed to have deepened his native melancholy, so that he regarded almost everything as a prelude to disaster.

"Hi'ya, Taffy," Terry greeted him, "I'm back."

"So I see." The captain spat out a piece of betel nut through his beard, and settled his greasy pith helmet more firmly on his head. "You should have stayed here longer. It's not healthy to stay out in the bush too long."

"Guess I'll survive it," Terry said with a grin; "that is, if this floating egg crate of yours doesn't fall apart in mid-stream and drown me. Do I get the same room?"

"Aye. There's a bit of cargo for Lumbwa Landing stowed in the room right now, but I guess you'll find room for your bags."

"Thanks," Terry said drily. "Can you spare it? By the way, Taffy, has a man name Barton come abroad yet? K. Barton is the name. I telegraphed I'd meet him on the boat this morning."

"No one of that name aboard yet."

TERRY stowed his luggage in the cabin assigned to him. A tiny room, it had been half filled with bales of cargo, but he did not care, as he had learned from experience that, in most kinds of weather, sleeping on deck was preferable to the vermin-ridden cabins of the *M'kuba*. He strolled up to the bow, leaning on the rail and filling the charred bowl of his pipe with rough-cut tobacco.

Before him was the vast, muddy stream of the Congo, still veiled by the mist, through which the sun was just beginning to strike. The far shore was yet invisible. Along the near shore, the ramshackle docks of Bopola and the dense jungle a few hundred yards upstream were dim and indistinct.

Staring along the vast river in the morning silence, while the smoke from his pipe drifted slowly off into the mist, Terry thought how little changed the place was from the old slaving days. Take away the *M'kuba* and substitute a black-hulled slaver, imagine a palisaded barracoon in place of the corrugated iron shacks of Bopola—all else was the same. Through his mind ran a snatch of an old song of the slavers in the bad old days:

*Jungle Walls are crowding close
In old Calabar,
Where the muddy river flows
To old Calabar. . . .*

Behind Terry, cool and aloof and somehow startling, a feminine voice said quietly, "Pardon me, but I understand you are Mr. McLane."

It was the girl he had first seen in the door of the Commissioner's office, and later in the café. Now, wearing tan whipcord riding breeches and a silk shirt, a pith helmet atop her fair hair, she stood beside the rail and regarded Terry with a cold and haughty glance. For an instant Terry stared at her, then a slow and derisive smile spread over his tanned face.

"Well, if it isn't little sunshine again!" he said. "Yes, my name's McLane. But that isn't what you called me the last time we met. If I remember correctly, the term was 'river bum.'"

"Never mind that now," she said curtly. "I'm Katherine Barton. I—"

"What did you say?" Terry gasped.

"I am K. Barton, new director of the Upper Arubi Trading Company. It was—er—good of you to come down to Bopola to meet me at the start of my tour of inspection."

Terry pushed his helmet well to the back of his curly head and put his hands on his hips and stood there staring.

"Well, I'll be—! Are you joking?"

"Certainly not!"

"But this is no trip for a woman to take. And Kombo Station is no place for you to stay. Better change your mind and go back before the steamer pulls out."

"Your solicitude is flattering," she said, "but I'm going on."

"You're not going to Kombo."

"Really?" she flared. "And just how do you intend to stop me? You seem to forget that you are just the manager of the Kombo Station, and that I can discharge you at any time."

"Lord keep me from a stubborn woman!" Terry exploded. "Listen, Bright Eyes! Let's you and me understand each other right here and now. I don't give a hoot in hell about being manager in that dirty hole you call Kombo Station. I only took the job a year ago as a favor to old Pop Blaine, because he was dying and was loyal to your damn company and wanted me to take his place. I wasn't cut out to be a penny-pinching trader anyway! I'll go back as far as Kombo with you, but I've resigned right now!"

Terry turned on his heel and stalked aft, sorry he had not quit his job a month ago, sorry he had come down to Bopola. But how was he to know that K. Barton would turn out to be a girl?

Drums Across the Jungle

THE last bales of goods went aboard the *M'kuba*, piles of firewood for fuel were heaped on deck, and the *shenzis* who had done the loading trooped ashore. Taffy barked some orders through his beard, smoke belched from the steamer's single rusty funnel, and the lines were cast off. To the accompaniment of a shrill shouting from the dockside crowd, which included most of the population of Bopola, and a mighty churning of the muddy river water, the *M'kuba* moved sluggishly out into the stream.

Once around the first bend, with Bopola hidden from sight, they might just as well have been hundreds of miles from any settlement. Lush, dense jungle lined the bank in an unbroken wall of greenery. Creepers trailed down into the water, some brightly colored parrots chattered at the steamer as she clanked past. A *colobus* monkey peered at them curiously from the branches of a tree. Now the sun was fully

up, and a blast of furnace-like heat beat down upon the decks of the *M'kuba* and penetrated under the scanty shade of the awnings. The jungle overside was still steaming as the sun dried up the night's moisture.

For a while Terry wandered forward to where the tall Masai native who acted as bosun stood at the wheel with the steamer's captain beside him. Taffy's greasy helmet was pushed well back on his shaggy head, and his eyes were constantly moving as he surveyed the muddy stream before them. From time to time he glanced shoreward, as though seeking some landmark. He grunted something to the Masai, the tall native's muscles rippled under his well oiled black skin as he spun the wheel, and the *M'kuba* veered sharply. Terry knew that they were dodging some hidden shoal.

"How do you spot the shoals and mud flats, Taffy?" he asked. "I can never see any sort of marker."

The bearded little Welshman grinned. "I smell 'em," he said.

What little wind there was seemed to be moving upstream with the *M'kuba*, as though to rob her passengers of even the slight breeze that would normally be generated by her slow progress. The cabins of the boat were like ovens, the deck was a frying pan. Men stripped to the minimum of clothing and lay around, cursing the heat. Terry sat crosslegged under the awning on the stern and wished he were back in the cooler, healthier open veldt country of South Africa, instead of here on the Congo.

All day Terry was careful to avoid Katherine Barton. It was not difficult, as she had shown no desire to seek his company. From a distance Terry had seen that she had an older white woman with her, apparently a servant. The two kept to themselves and ignored the curious glances of the other passengers and the crew.

AT last, late in the day, they rounded a bend in the river and came in sight of another landing. The recumbent figures on deck stirred into life, and someone said with a yawn, "Lumbwa Station." A rickety



"Put 'em up and keep 'em there!" Dobbs snarled. "And if you open your trap, I'll drill you where you stand!"

dock, a corrugated iron warehouse, some native shacks, two small bungalows, the whole compound surrounded by a high fence—it was an almost exact duplicate of any other river trading post in the territory. The *M'kuba's* asthmatic whistle tooted, and a man in white appeared on the porch of one of the bungalows.

The sun was nearly down, a copper-colored ball above the fringe of jungle to the west. As Terry McLane stood up, stretched his stiffened legs, and began to walk about the deck, he saw Katherine Barton coming toward him. Now that the intensity of the sun had lessened, she had laid aside the pith helmet and bound a silk

scarf over her moist hair. She looked tired, as though this day's journey had taken a heavy toll from her. Terry started to turn away, but the girl came straight up to him.

"I want to apologize," she said.

"You what?"

"I want to apologize for the things I said to you last night and this morning. I guess I was tired and nervous. Will you forgive me?"

She held out her hand, her eyes level and friendly. Terry hesitated a moment, then suddenly he grinned and shook hands.

"Okay," he said. "Matter of fact, I guess I wasn't any Galahad myself. Tempers are short in this country—Africa does that to you—so let's start over again. No hard feelings."

"I'm glad," she said simply, "because I do want us to be friends. You can help me a lot."

"Well, I'll do what I can. I still think you shouldn't come up to Kombo, but I suppose it can't be helped now."

"Not a bit," she said cheerfully. "You'll just have to put up with my presence for a while."

"Oh, that part of it will be a pleasure," he said. "It's just that—"

"Mr. McLane! You turning gallant?"

"All right, don't rub it in," he grinned. "My name is Terry."

"That's better. My name is Kay. I'm eager to learn all you want to teach me about Africa. And don't worry about me being in the wilds of the Congo—I usually manage to take care of myself pretty well."

Terry smiled. "I'm beginning to think you probably can!"

A few minutes later, when the *M'kuba* was tied up to the dock at Lumbwa Landing, Terry went ashore to see if he could learn anything new from the gossip that always passed from mouth to mouth at these scattered trading stations. As he turned away from Kay, he almost collided with another man who had been standing a few feet behind them. A tall, lean white man with a pointed black beard, he apologized and stepped aside. For an instant Terry hesitated, convinced that the stranger had been deliberately spying upon

them. Then he shrugged and strode on. No use letting his imagination run away with him!

THE *M'kuba* was not to sail on again for two hours after dark, and Terry went to look for Kay Barton. He searched the deck, and at last found her sitting in the smoky and odorous main cabin with the bearded stranger.

"I've been hoping you'd reappear, Terry," she said. "This is Mr. Dobbs, a scientist."

"John Dobbs, naturalist from the Smithsonian, in the Congo to make a study of insect life," the stranger explained as the two men shook hands. "Probably sounds like a silly thing for a man to be doing, but it's my profession."

"I don't recall seeing you on board before," Terry said.

"I stayed in my cabin most of the day, trying to keep cool."

"New to Africa?"

"Why, yes."

"Thought so. You'll make out better if you'll avoid the cabins of a boat like this and simply keep as still as possible in whatever shade you can find on deck."

The three of them talked a few minutes, and all the time Terry was quietly studying John Dobbs. There was something about the man he could not quite fathom. A just noticeable accent that did not seem quite right for an American—a little too obvious attempt at friendly good-fellowship, a certain shiftiness about the eyes—Terry could not quite put his finger on the cause, but he somehow distrusted the man. And he still had the impression that Dobbs had been eavesdropping when he had first bumped into him on deck.

After a while, when Dobbs had left them, Terry turned to the girl.

"We've got at least another hour. Want to go ashore and see what we can see?"

"I'd love to."

They crossed the rickety little dock and strolled around the stockaded compound of Lumbwa. Tembo had been nowhere in sight while they were still on the steamer, but the minute they set foot on the dock

the tall Wunguba tribesman materialized from the shadows and followed them without a word. The girl gripped Terry's arm.

"Who's that?" she whispered.

"Just Tembo, my gun bearer and friend and general man Friday. Don't let him frighten you. I'd trust him with my life, and he's a good man to have around."

They walked slowly several times around the limits of the compound, threading their way between the huts and sheds. Lamplight gleamed in the central bungalow, and through the open door they could see Taffy and his mate and the manager of the station sitting sprawled around a table. Several empty whisky bottles stood before them, and Taffy beat time with another bottle as the three men bawled out the words of a bawdy song.

Terry could well understand the cause of that scene and the state of mind that lay behind it. Men exiled and far from home, leading lonely lives most of the time, they had few enough emotional outlets. He knew how much it had always meant to him on the rare occasions when a visitor came to Kombo.

They strolled around the compound a few times more, and then the girl paused near the barred outer gate.

"Couldn't we go outside a little ways?" she asked. "I've always wanted to see what the jungle is like at night."

"I don't think it would be wise," Terry said.

"Why not?"

He hesitated, head bent slightly forward, as though listening to some new sound.

"There's *one* reason," he said grimly.

"What?"

"Don't you hear it? Listen!"

A faint sound came drifting out of the jungle, a low and distant throbbing that was just audible between the snatches of song from inside the bungalow. Staccato and irregular, yet at the same time steady and insistent, it formed a faint undertone to all the hushed noises of the night. A few feet away, Tembo was silhouetted against the stars as he leaned on the shaft of his seven-foot *assegai*, and from the set

of his head it was evident that he too was listening.

"What is it?" the girl asked, instinctively speaking in a whisper.

"Drums. Native drums, talking to each other across the distance. What men call the bush telegraph. It's native Africa's ancient and amazingly efficient method of long-distance communication."

"What are they saying?"

"Lord knows," Terry answered with a shrug. "Perhaps exchanging some gossip of friendly witch doctors, perhaps carrying advance warning of some raid, perhaps even spreading the news that you and I are traveling upriver on the *M'kuba*. One never knows. But that, aside from the forest leopard and similar animal menaces, is one of the reasons I'm not taking you outside the compound gate."

"And I *would* come to the Congo!" the girl said, more to herself than to Terry. "Kay Barton, you wanted adventure, and I hope you're satisfied, now that you're beginning to get it!"

Tribal War—or Blackie DuBois?

THE long days passed slowly as the *M'kuba* made her sluggish way up the river. One day hardly varied from the one before or the one following. Long daylight hours of moving over a muddy stream under a scorching sun, when the shade of the awnings was pitifully inadequate and one thought longingly of such distant and impossible things as cracked ice and cool drinks and cold showers in clean water. Long night hours when hot stars smoldered just above the top of the *M'kuba's* stubby funnel, and strange land smells came drifting out of the jungle, that was a dense ebony rampart just across the water. Brief halts at lonely and isolated trading stations that were all alike. When the steamer left the main stream of the Congo and swung off into the narrower Arubi, the relative closeness of the two banks made the isolation of the handful of people abroad the *M'kuba* seem all the more acute.

Once, when the steamer had pulled into

the bank for more firewood, they saw a clearing where a native stood tied to a post, with his hands high above his head. A white man was flogging him slowly and methodically with a bull whip, the native wincing and gasping every time the heavy whip landed. Kay, white-faced and stormy-eyed, came to Terry about it.

"Nothing I can do," he said. "I never try flogging 'em, but there's plenty of it. The boy evidently did something to deserve punishment, and you can't very well try moral suasion on a bush boy. I warned you—Africa is strange."

They saw quite a lot of John Dobbs during that long journey upriver. He helped pass the time, for he could be an amusing companion and he was evidently trying to be friendly. Though there was no added cause for Terry's vague suspicion of the man, the feeling persisted. When he spoke of it to Kay, she only laughed.

"You're imagining things. John is a nice chap. As a matter of fact, I've invited him to stop off at Kombo and start his bug-hunting from there. Do you mind?"

"No, of course I don't," he said. "He'll be that much more company."

As a matter of fact, Terry did object, but he could not think of any reasons for it that sounded logical when put into words. He did not even understand his feelings on the subject himself. His suspicions were too vague to amount to anything, being little more than an instinctive distrust. For that matter, he did not understand why he was worrying about such things so much more than usual. The Barton girl was not any responsibility of his.

AT last there came a day when, far up the muddy Arubi, they neared Kombo Station. Big Tembo sat cross-legged on deck, his black skin newly oiled and very shiny, busily polishing the two-foot blade of his long *assegai*. Terry went down to his room and routed out his luggage from under the cargo which almost filled the cabin. Taffy, the captain, came strolling along the deck with his thumbs hooked in the piece of rope which served him for a belt.

"I'll be back in a fortnight, Terry lad," he said. "Reckon your lady will be ready to start back down river by then."

"She's not *my* lady," Terry answered irritably. "I'm only a working man!"

"Instead of a gentlemanly bug-hunter! Haw!" Taffy observed, in a bit of Welsh wit which did not strike Terry as funny.

The *M'kuba* puffed her laborious way around another bend in the river, and they sighted a landing ahead. There was the usual dock, fenced compound, warehouse and bungalow, and cluster of native huts. A flag flew from a pole at the head of the dock, the little cluster of buildings seemed to shimmer in the heat, even at this late hour of the afternoon. Kay Barton, who had come over to stand beside Terry at the rail, sighed.

"So that's Kombo!" she said.

"That's the dump."

"It looks bigger than the other trading stations."

"It is. Biggest place on the Arubi. There's a young native village growing up beyond the compound at the edge of the jungle."

As the steamer straightened her course to head straight for the landing a mile away, Taffy blew three short blasts on the whistle. Almost immediately figures of men appeared at the doors of the various buildings. By the time the *M'Kuba* drew near the dock, the entire population of Kombo Station had walked down to meet her. A few paces ahead of the dark mass of natives stood three white men.

The center of the white-clad trio was tall and gaunt. When he took off his helmet to wave it for a moment, he revealed a shock of white hair.

"That's old Suva Donlon, my second in command," Terry explained. "He's an old reprobate in many ways, but he's honest and dependable, and he knows the African native like a book. Likes to play checkers. Sometimes sings Irish songs in a terrible voice. Likes to use long words. When he snores, as he always does, it shakes the whole compound."

"Quite a man!" the girl laughed. "Who's the young fellow on his right?"

"Walter Turle, the storekeeper. I'm afraid he won't last. Beginning to crack. Sullen. Brooding. Drinks like a fish. Most of us have a tendency that way out here in the bush, but Turle is going to pieces fast. He hates spiders, snakes, and the noises that come out of the jungle at night. I think he came out here to forget some sort of woman trouble and has never succeeded."

"You certainly know your men!"

"You get to know people pretty well when you're thrown together for long months on end, seeing no other white men, except for the brief calls of the *M'kuba*. There are times when we all get on each other's nerves so badly almost anything could happen," Terry said grimly. "I warned you—Africa does funny things to people."

"I suppose so," the girl sighed. "Who's the other man?"

"Reverend Hoskins, from the mission a few miles away. I've never had much use for the gospel sharks and sky pilots as a rule, but Hoskins is a good egg. That's been one advantage of being at a station as big as Kombo. With the three of us regularly here, and the Reverend nearby, we've had more companionship than at most of these lonely posts. Didn't get on each other's nerves quite so badly."

THE *M'kuba* sidled into the berth, and the passengers from Kombo went ashore. Dobbs had a lot of luggage—bug-hunting paraphernalia. Terry performed the introductions. If it had not been for a vague nervousness beginning to stir in the back of his mind he would have greatly enjoyed the blank amazement on the faces of the other three white men as Kay Barton stepped off the boat.

He knew what was in their minds. It did not matter that Kay was travel-stained and evidently weary, that her face was bare of make-up, and that such of her hair as was visible beneath the covering scarf lay dank and straight against her cheeks. In their eyes, starved by months of loneliness, she was at that moment the most beautiful woman in the world. The same

thing showed in the gallantry with which old Suva Donlon assisted Kay's middle-aged and very plain maid ashore.

Even though he had known in advance the effect Kay was going to have on these men, Terry began to feel uneasy. He particularly noticed the sudden fire that burned in young Walter Turle's sunken eyes. As they all turned away from the dock, Terry managed to whisper to the girl:

"Please dress plainly at dinner, and use no make-up. Important. I'll explain later."

At the head of the group of natives clustered on shore near the dock stood a wizened, elderly black man wearing trousers and a coat. The frayed and filthy trousers had once been white ducks, the coat was a torn old khaki jacket that had obviously once belonged to a man many sizes larger.

"This is Cuchimbo," Terry explained to Kay, as the little native bowed and chuckled and took off his wreck of a hat. "He's our number one boy here, and has direct charge of all natives connected with the station. Cuchimbo, this is your new mistress. Watch over her with your own life."

"*N'dio, bwana*—it is good," the old man replied with a toothless grin.

Generally the three white men of Kombo all lived in the central bungalow, but now they moved to one of the smaller houses, to clear the main building for Kay and her maid. Terry installed two of the most dependable native girls, both granddaughters of old Cuchimbo, as additional maids. They could do all the hard work around the house, and at the same time they could serve as watchdogs. Terry devoutly hoped that Kay would have had her fill of Kombo and all the upper Arubi territory by the time the sluggish old *M'kuba* came down river again.

They all gathered for dinner in the main room of the central bungalow. Even in the space of a few hours, the appearance of the place had subtly changed. The plates on the table were the same old battered enamel ware, the furnishings of the big room were as usual. The head of the big *kudo* that Terry had shot far to the west-

ward, toward Kenya Province, was still in place on the wall, Suva Donlon's collection of empty and dust-covered whisky bottles from all over the world still stood massed on three rows of shelves. Yet in some way the place looked neater and more homelike since the women had come.

THEY made quite a gala occasion of it. Kay sat at the head of the table, wearing a simple white dress. Her gray-haired maid, Gretchen, acted as a sort of majordomo and shepherded the native girls who served the food. She beamed on them all, as though an occasion of this sort made her feel a little bit at home after the long journey to Africa and then up the river. Most of the time they talked of home, as people will when they come together in a lonely place.

Things that Kay remembered as happening six or eight months before were news to these men. They listened eagerly to every little incident of the outer world, and they shook their heads in wonder over matters that seemed to her utterly commonplace and devoid of novelty.

There were whisky bottles on the table, as a matter of course. Even Hoskins, the missionary, mixed his Scotch with water and twirled the glass on the table-top as he talked. For most people, life in the interior of the African jungle is only made bearable by considerable quantities of alcoholic stimulant. None of them was visibly affected by it, except young Turle. After an unusual burst of talkativeness at the beginning, and an attempt to tell one or two old jokes that fell flat, he sank into a morose silence. Terry noticed that his eyes seldom left Kay's face for an instant. He sensed that Turle's almost unwinking regard was making the girl uncomfortable, but he could not think of anything to do about it.

Later, the talk swung back to Africa.

"It's a strange land," Hoskins said thoughtfully, "but I've come to love it. For one reason, I flatter myself that I know and understand our black brothers better than many old-timers such as Suva here."

"Aye—you pamper and spoil the boys, then I have to give them a taste of discipline to bring them back in line again!" Donlon growled. It was an old dispute between them.

They all fell silent for a moment, one of those brief pauses that come occasionally to any gathering. A new sound drifted into the room. Above the song of the tree-toads and a faint murmur from the river, a distant sound of wailing music from one of the native huts—above all the small noises that the night breeze customarily brought into the compound—there came the sound of drums. Somewhere far off in the jungle, giant native drums were being beaten in a slow and broken rhythm.

The sound seemed eerie and almost ominous to Kay Barton. From the deck of the *M'kuba* she had heard drums beating in the jungle, but that had been somehow different. She had been on a steamer passing by, and the distant throbbing had not seemed to hold any personal menace. Now it was different. Here in this lonely trading station, with only a low stockade to keep out the menace of the jungle and a handful of men to act as defenders in any emergency, she felt terribly isolated and a little afraid.

"What—what do the drums mean?" she asked.

All the men had been listening in silence, their faces intent and their heads bent a little to one side. Now, at her question, they all spoke at once.

"Doesn't mean a thing," old Donlon rumbled hastily. "Just a lot of fool natives getting together for a *shauri*."

"You get used to those things after a while," Terry said reassuringly. "We hear them all the time, but never pay any attention to them."

TERRY had been watching Turle with growing alarm, anxious to avert anything that might spoil an otherwise pleasant affair. Once he laid a restraining hand on the younger man's arm as Turle again refilled his glass with shaking fingers, but the boy shook him off with a muttered oath. Then came the break.

Turle rose shakily to his feet, his burning eyes never leaving Kay's face. Twice he tried to speak to her, but the words were only a rumble in his throat. Then he collapsed like a loosened puppet and sprawled grotesquely on the floor.

"Out like a light," Donlon said grimly.

"You others take care of him," Terry said. "I think that Miss Barton—"

"We were through dinner anyway," the girl interposed quietly. "Is he—all right?"

"Oh, yes. He'll be all right in the morning."

For a few minutes, before the swarming mosquitoes drove them inside again, Terry and Kay stood out on the veranda. Some tree-tops were black against the stars, and beyond the stockade they could see a faint gleam of the river. The girl was only a shadow beside him in the utter blackness, but Terry heard her sigh.

"Why did you tell me to dress plainly tonight?" she asked. "Were you really afraid I would appear in an evening dress here in the Congo jungle?"

"It wasn't that. You see, I knew what effect the presence of a pretty girl was going to have on men who have been alone for so long, and I—well—"

"I know," she interrupted. "You wanted to minimize my fatal beauty. Why didn't you tell me, so I could put my hair up in a bun and wear glasses and make myself homely as possible?" From her voice he knew that she was laughing at him, but then her tone became serious. "I do understand, Terry. I saw young Turle tonight. Now—what about those drums?"

"Well—what about them?" he temporized.

"What did they mean? Please tell me the truth. After all, I'm no child, I've seen something of life, and I'd really much rather know the truth, if there's anything wrong."

For a moment Terry hesitated. The girl's sincerity was evident in her quiet voice, and he scarcely thought she was the hysterical type.

"It's probably nothing at all," he said. "When you've kicked around the bush as long as Donlon and I have, you get to

know a little about those drums. I told you they were Africa's telegraph. Well, those were not local drums we heard tonight. Suva and I are both sure of it. They were different. They indicate that some new group has come into this part of the country."

"Meaning either tribal war, or the coming of Blackie DuBois," Kay observed. "Oh, yes, I heard of him back in Bopola, Terry. Well, thanks for telling me. I don't scare easily."

Slaughter Strikes Nearby

THE next week passed uneventfully. Life at Kombo Station quickly fell back into its normal routine of daytime activity. Native boats came down the river to tie up to the dock. Puncheons of oil and other products came ashore. Tall, coal-black, well oiled natives stalked up to the warehouse to sit in the shade and argue for half a day before they made a trade. Other caravans came overland, out of the jungle trail to the main gate of the stockade. Business in the African manner, business conducted slowly and casually, with a good deal of ceremony, went on as usual.

Kay Barton was keenly interested in all of it, watching everything that went on without ever trying to interfere. The few suggestions she did venture were definitely good ideas. At intervals she worked on the report she intended to make to the board of directors back home in the States. For all his original cynical amusement at the prospect of a woman owning a controlling interest in a company like the Upper Arubi Trading Company, Terry had to admit that Kay seemed to grasp the methods and details remarkably well.

There were drums in the jungle every evening, and sometimes in the daytime, deep-toned thunder somewhere far off in the dark depths of the forest. None of them ever mentioned or appeared to notice these drums at dinner any more, but Terry and old Suva Donlon had talked together about them.

"I'll bet a pound of good quill gold to a broken whisky bottle that DuBois is

nearby," the old trader growled. "We'll be hearing of a raid on some station soon. Mark my words!"

Terry had an uneasy feeling that the old man was right. He did his job as usual, and he managed to appear unconcerned whenever Kay was near, but most of the time he went around with a feeling of impending disaster—and also a sense of helplessness. If Blackie DuBois really had the strong band of renegades and outlaws he was supposed to command, and if he had been able to stir up disaffection among nearby tribes as was his usual method, it might go hard with Kombo. They were poorly equipped to withstand an attack in force.

Meanwhile, Terry took what precautions he could. He made sure that the stockade was in good repair, and that heavy bars were ready for the landward gate. He erected a barbed-wire fence along the shoreward edge of the dock, which was normally open and unprotected. He sent word of his fears downstream to Bopola by trusted messengers in a native boat. Four of the natives who regularly worked around the station, men who had served as hunters and were as good rifle-shots as could be expected of any native, were quietly placed on guard in shifts all night.

One other precaution, and one in which Terry placed a good deal of faith, was a daily reconnaissance made by Tembo. Early every morning the big Wunguba warrior shouldered his long spear and disappeared into the jungle. He generally returned early in the afternoon, after having prowled through the jungle in a wide circuit around the vicinity of Kombo. It was unlikely that Blackie DuBois could come dangerously close to the station without Tembo getting word of it.

JOHN DOBBS had left Kombo for a while, going upriver in a native boat to continue his scientific work. Terry was glad to have him away from the station at this critical time.

Lately, since Terry's return to Kombo, there had been repeated attempts to break into the warehouse and storeroom at night.

Such attempts at petty thievery were fairly common, but now they had increased to an alarming degree. The marauders had not been very successful, and not much in the line of trade goods had actually been stolen, but Terry decided to take some action.

"I'm sure it means that the young men over at Lalu's village are getting restless," he told Kay. "I'm going over to talk to the old reprobate about it."

"I'm going with you."

"No, you're not!"

"Oh, yes I am! Please, Terry! I'm going back on the next boat. I'll probably never get to Africa again—don't let me go home without even seeing a native village!"

"All right," he said reluctantly. "Lalu's place is only a couple of miles away, and I guess it's all right for you to come along."

Terry armed two of his native hunters with rifles to serve as an escort for the trip the next morning, and he took Tembo with him as a matter of course. There were no porters with gifts, for this was not that kind of a visit. Terry carried a light Winchester repeater, and a gun-bearer carried his heavy, double-barreled .475 elephant gun. There was always the possibility of meeting the fierce and deadly forest leopard. When Kay appeared, she had a light automatic strapped on one hip.

"You're quite the Amazon!" Terry commented, with a grin.

"You needn't laugh!" she retorted. "I can shoot."

"Well, you won't need to today. These guns are largely for show."

Just as they turned to the gate, old Cuchimbo came across the compound to speak to them.

"*McLani bwana*, soldiers will come today," he said.

"How do you know?"

"The drums have spoken to me, *bwana*." He nodded toward the jungle, whence came a measured beating of some drums quite near at hand. "When it is the drums of my own people that sound, I can tell what they say. Many soldiers are coming up the river in boats and will be here before long."

"Glad to hear it," Terry grunted. The

presence of some Belgian soldiers would hearten him. "Tell *Donlon bwana* to make them welcome, if they come before I return."

"*N'dio*—it is good."

Beyond the stockade was a little cleared space; beyond that was the rim of the jungle, like a dense green wall. Tembo led

the way, Terry followed with Kay, the gun-bearer came just behind him, and the two hunters brought up the rear. They plunged into a narrow trail that led away from the river, and instantly the jungle swallowed them.

THEY were moving along a century-old elephant trail, a path quite easily followed. Because of the dense foliage over-



head; they were in a sort of pale gloom. Trellissed creepers hung low from the giant trees and sometimes brushed their helmets. Tall ferns grew close and thick on either hand. A parrot flapped swiftly across in front of them, a brief and vivid splash of color against the dense shadows.

It was very quiet here in the jungle. Once a *colobus* monkey chattered at them,

but there was almost no other sound, except for the buzz of insects and a faint rustling of branches in the wind somewhere far up above them. The two hunters had fallen silent and walked along without a sound. The tall Wunguba in the lead moved like a shadow. Kay noticed that Terry, even in his boots, made scarcely any more sound than the bare-footed natives. She tried to imitate them, careful not to step on a dry creeper that might crack. There was no real reason for this silent and almost stealthy progress, for they went on a friendly visit to a neighboring chieftain, but it was the way men used to the jungle instinctively moved when they took to the trail.

It was deathly hot. The air was motionless, and even though the sun did not penetrate down here, the place was like an oven. Little rivulets of sweat ran down Kay's face, and her shirt was drenched. Surely they must have covered the two miles by now! Then she began to notice a peculiar smell, a foul odor of rotteness that seemed to grow stronger at every step.

"Terry," she said, "what is that smell?"

"That perfume?" Terry looked at her with a faint grin. "That's just Walarumbi, the village of old Lalu, the place where we're going. It's still nearly a quarter of a mile away, but it's easy to tell that we're in that vicinity."

"But what makes the smell?"

"Lots of things. The accumulation of about five or ten generations of garbage—they just throw all the refuse outside the huts, you know. All native villages, all native settlements where the white men seldom come, smell like that. You'll soon get used to it."

Kay shook her head. The smell was unspeakable.

Suddenly the forest shadows vanished, bright sunlight seemed to sweep down upon them, and the little *safari* emerged into a large clearing cut in the heart of the jungle. The heat made them gasp, and the rank smell was stronger than ever. Terry lifted his arm.

"Walarumbi!" he said. "Charming spot, what?"

IT was quite a large village. Scores of peaked grass-and-mud huts were clustered about without any particular order or plan. There was a shrill hum of insects, attracted to this spot by the accumulated filth of ages that filled the narrow alleys and lanes between the straggly huts. A few vultures hovered lazily, high up in the sky above the clearing, just on the watch for any bit of offal that might tempt them. At one side of the clearing was the village *chamba*, a common patch of wild bananas and stunted maize.

A few heads peered in surprise from the low, beehive doorways of the nearest huts, as the visitors plodded across the clearing. Word of the coming of the *safari* spread quickly ahead, while more and more of the villagers thronged out to stare and comment. Kay was a particular target of the gaping, pointing throng. She was probably the first white woman any of them had ever seen. The kinky-haired wives and children of the tribe seemed particularly interested in her, giggling and nudging each other.

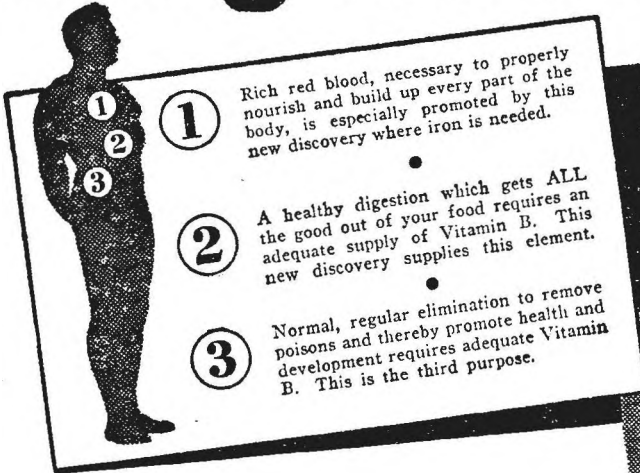
"Terry, I feel like a goldfish!" the girl muttered.

They came to a small open space in the center of the maze of filthy alleys that formed the village, and there rose the conical roof of the chief's home. It was the same sort of mud-and-wattle hut as all the rest, differing only in its greater size and in the presence of some grotesque carvings at the door.

Terry ducked through the low portal and entered the hut, followed by Kay and Tembo. The two hunters and the gun-bearer remained outside, swaggering before the villagers in their glory. *They* possessed firearms, the weird weapons of the white man that killed with noise. Terry had noticed a few things that were not right as he came through the village, but long experience had given him a sixth sense in such matters and he knew that Lalu's tribe had not yet become really unruly.

For a moment it was impossible to see anything at all in the deep gloom of the hut. Then, as his eyes began to adjust themselves, Terry saw some dim figures sit-

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ting along the far wall. He shifted the rifle to his left hand and stepped forward, raising his right arm in a gesture of friendship.

"*Yambo, Jahu Lalu*—greeting!" he said.

A dry, high-pitched voice answered him. "*Yambo, McLani bwana*. Your visit honors me."

The chief nodded, and one of the aged blacks beside him came forward with a pair of carved wooden stools. Terry and Kay sat down on the stools, while Tembo leaned on his long spear behind them.

Kay could see more clearly now. Lalu, the chief, sat on the ceremonial stool on a small wooden platform, his hands resting on his knees. He was a very old man, still quite fat, though the flabby skin hung in folds on his chest and abdomen. It was covered with old tribal scars and clan marks. A few broken teeth showed when he opened his mouth in a smile. In the gloom, the whites of his eyes shone. Around him, on the hard-packed earthen floor of the hut, sat six or eight aged natives. A young warrior armed with a spear stood at each side of the little dais.

"This is the new mistress of Kombo, Lalu," Terry said in Swahili.

"*Yambo*—greetings to your wife," the chief replied.

Terry flushed, glad that Kay could not understand the native dialect. He let the remark pass, for there was no use trying to explain the intricacies of American business organization to a Congo savage.

FOR a while there was silence. Kay sat motionless, sensing that this was part of the ceremonial way such audiences must be conducted. She had a queer feeling of unreality. It seemed almost impossible that she, who had always led a routine and sheltered existence, could really be here in a native chieftain's hut in the heart of the Congo jungle. She had been worried by many misgivings when she first started for Africa, but she knew now that she would not have missed the experience for anything.

At last, feeling that sufficient time had passed to fulfil the ceremonial require-

ments, Terry decided to start the conference.

"Where are your young men, *Jahu Lalu*?" he asked.

"I have guards." The chief glanced at the pair of motionless spearmen standing beside him.

"Fewer than usual. As I came through your village, I noticed that many of the young men were missing."

"They have gone hunting."

"The wise man is careful what game he hunts," Terry said drily. Lalu's heavy eyelids flickered for an instant, but he did not reply. There was a brief pause, then Terry started on another tack.

"Thieves have been trying to steal from the warehouse at Kombo, Lalu," he said. "That is bad for us, and it is bad for them. We are watching now, and any thieves will be shot. It would be wise to warn your young men. I have spoken."

"*N'dio*—it is good," the chief grunted sullenly.

They stayed a little longer, for Terry was also seeking certain routine information about trading matters. As is necessary when trying to get any real information from African savages, he asked simple questions, one at a time. He approached each point from several different angles, and at the end he had the information he wanted.

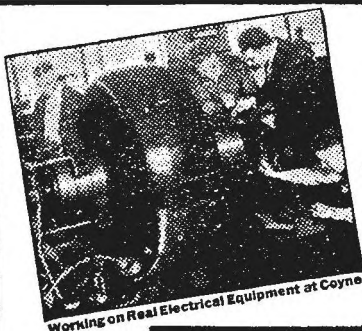
They rose to go at last, walking out through the village with tall Tembo striding in the lead and the swaggering hunters bringing up the rear. The glare and filth of Walarumbi fell away behind them, and soon they plunged again into the shade of the jungle trail. Terry chuckled to himself. As Kay glanced at him inquiringly, he said:

"I'm sure that it's Lalu's young bucks who have been trying to rob us, and I think I've put a big enough flea in his ear so that he'll try to stop them."

He did not tell her that it was probably the presence and influence of Blackie DuBois that had started the epidemic of thievery.

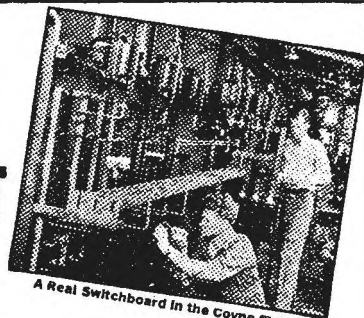
As soon as they emerged from the rim of the jungle and started across the cleared

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place before the stockade of Kombo, Terry knew that Cuchimbo had read the message of the drums aright. Several steamers crowded with khaki-clad Belgian soldiers were passing up the river in a long column, and one had pulled into Kombo dock, while some of the men scrambled ashore. Dismissing the natives, Terry hurried to the dock. A minute later he was shaking hands with Pierre Manet.

"It's good to see you, *mon vieux*," Terry said. "I thought you would still be enjoying the dubious charms of Bopola."

"The Commandant decided to send an expedition in search of DuBois, the outlaw, in the hope of catching him *before* he makes any real trouble, instead of after."

"Something new in military circles," Terry said drily.

Kay had come up, and Terry introduced Pierre to her. The young sous-lieutenant bowed from the waist, as formal and polite as though they met at some Brussels ball.

"Ah, yes, Mademoiselle Barton," he said. "You are without doubt the daughter of the M'sieu Barton Terry came down to Bopola to meet."

"No, this is the boss herself," Terry said, "and don't tell her any of the cracks I made that night about dumb greenhorns who come out to tell veterans how to run their business!"

"I am only sorry that I cannot stay to tell her all about that in great detail," Pierre said with his swift smile, "but I must go on. Terry, I have obtained permission to leave four men here with you until we come by again on the way back. It will give you a little added protection."

"Thanks, old man. We may need it."

Pierre hastily shook hands all around, bowed to Kay again, and lifted his hand to his helmet in salute. Then he climbed aboard the boat, which immediately shoved off. Four khaki-clad soldiers were left behind, leaning on their rifles on the dock, looking pleased at the prospect of staying here, instead of continuing upriver with the expedition to go through the drudgery and dangers of jungle warfare. Terry turned them over to Suva Donlon and Cuchimbo to be made comfortable, and

then walked across to the storeroom to tell Turle what had transpired at his conference with old Lalu.

IT was very still when the twilight shadows began to gather about Kombo that evening. No traces of breeze stirred the hot air, there was no sound from the jungle. Even the drums had momentarily fallen silent. The muddy stream of the Arubi lay broad between its banks, like a smooth sheet of dull copper. There were dark purple clouds overlaying a deep crimson sky, against which the rim of the westward jungle stood like some dark rampart of mystery and peril.

The scene was very peaceful. Terry, standing idly at the head of the dock for a moment before going in to dress for dinner, wondered if things were not a little too quiet, too good to last. The calm before the storm, perhaps. Then, far up in the middle of the river, he saw a native boat swing around the bend.

The ungainly craft was coming fast, with the combined power of paddles and current. As she drew nearer, Terry could see the swift dip and splash of the wooden blades, the steady bending of four gleaming brown backs. They paddled like weary men who had come many leagues, and yet they kept up their steady pace. Something must be driving them on—something beyond any ordinary urgency.

A premonition of disaster gripped Terry. This speeding boat meant that something was very wrong somewhere along the muddy stream of the Arubi. Terry walked back to the nearest bungalow and called Donlon. He tried to keep his voice casual, but something in its tone must have alarmed the others, for they all came straggling out and gathered on the dock. No one spoke, and only the splash and dip of the approaching paddles sounded above the low ripple made by the river as it sucked lazily at the piles of the pier.

Then, as the boat came within hailing distance and the four panting natives of the crew sat back to let her coast, Terry raised his voice.

"Whence come you?" he called in

Swahili. "Why the haste? From what do you flee?"

"We come from Jenkin's Landing, *bwana*," one of the natives panted. "The outlaws have sacked and burned the station. Only we survive."

The story was soon told, a tale now uncommon, but once familiar enough when the white man first came to Africa. A horde of yelling natives had swarmed out of the jungle at dawn and fallen upon the isolated trading station called Jenkins Landing. The white manager and his assistant had put up what fight they could, assisted by the loyal natives. They had barricaded themselves in the central bungalow when the outlaws stormed the stockade. For a while they had managed to hold out, but the attackers were directed by one or two white men, and their assault had a definite method and plan.

When the outlaws rushed the bungalow and ended the battle in a brief mêlée of bloody hand-to-hand fighting, these four natives had managed to reach a light boat moored at the river bank. For hours on end they had paddled madly downstream, ever expecting to see the boats of the pursuing renegades behind them. When they encountered the Belgian military expedition, they told their tale and then hurried on to Kombo.

Turning the fugitives over to Cuchimbo to be made comfortable, Terry nodded to the others and turned back toward the main building. Kay fell into step beside him.

Her eyes met his, fearless.

"DuBois has looted some trading station nearby, hasn't he?" she asked quietly. "I heard his name, and think I understand what those four men were saying. You needn't be afraid to tell me the truth."

"You're a good sport," Terry said. "Yes—the outlaws have sacked and burned Jenkins Landing, the next trading station up above here. Nasty mess. But I really don't think we need worry. We're better equipped to resist an attack here, and those four soldiers Pierre Manet left us will help a lot. Besides, that military expedition will probably take care of DuBois anyway."

Hoskins Sticks to His Post

KOMBO went on a regular military basis that night. The landward gate was kept closed and barred, a Belgian soldier always on guard. At night two men patrolled the compound. All natives who could be trusted in a pinch were divided into two groups, with one always ready on call.

All these defensive preparations tended to interfere with the normal trading activities, but that did not matter, as trading had abruptly come to a halt, for the throbbing drums had carried the news of the slaughter at Jenkins Landing all along this part of the river, and the local tribes were simply waiting to see what would happen next.

A few days later a small native boat glided in to the dock and a familiar gaunt figure in wrinkled whites climbed out on the planking. Reverend Hoskins! Terry hurried down to meet him, and drew the missionary aside for a few words in private.

"I'm glad you're here! Matter of fact, I was just going to send Tembo up to the mission for you. You'd better stay here with us till this thing blows over."

"Why?" Hoskins asked quietly, smiling his quizzical smile. Terry gaped at him.

"Haven't you heard of what happened up at Jenkins Landing?"

"Oh, yes, I've heard, but I don't think DuBois is likely to bother me. After all, there is nothing to loot at the mission."

"That's not the point. DuBois is a maniac, he's brutal and utterly ruthless. He is quite capable of sacking the mission, just to give his followers a chance to vent a little of their blood-lust."

"Then there's all the more reason why I should stay at my post." Hoskins pulled off his battered helmet and wiped the sweat from the bald spot on top of his head. His scraggly gray hair was all awry, and his heavy eyebrows were tilted questioningly. "I can't desert my native workers and converts just because there may be a little danger, Terry. Thanks just the same."

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THE *M'kuba* was due back at Kombo on her return trip on Thursday, and it began to look as though things would remain quiet until then. That was the main thing Terry was hoping for. Once he got Kay and her maid safely on board the steamer, his main worry would be over. The rest of them at Kombo could take their chances.

On Tuesday night, after dinner, Terry and Kay were out on the veranda of the main bungalow alone for a while. A fitful breeze kept the mosquitoes away. A rising moon flooded the compound with a pale light, and touched the waters of the river with murky silver, but the two of them sat in the deep shadow under the veranda roof.

"Well," Kay said, after a long pause, "tomorrow Gretchen and I start packing to go home."

Terry looked down at her curiously. In the deep gloom her face was only a pale blur.

"You're sorry?" he said.

"Shouldn't I be?"

"I should think you'd be glad to get away."

"In lots of ways, of course, I will be. I've been frightened by all this talk of Blackie DuBois—really scared to death, though I've tried to hide it. I guess I'm not the pioneer type. And I know you'll feel much better to have me out of the way. I've probably been an awful pain in the neck around here."

"You have no idea how much it has meant to me to have you here these two weeks," Terry said. "After all, it's been years since I've exchanged a dozen words with a girl of my own kind. I've changed my ideas on several things."

"What, for instance?"

"Plans for the future, for one. I happen to have a gold claim way down in the Transvaal which I've farmed out to a big mining concern, and it's paying me a nice income, deposited in a London bank every month. But that hasn't meant much. I've had the idea that all I really wanted was adventure and action and change of scene. The rolling stone that gathers no moss; the tumble-weed—you know what I mean?"

"I don't think you were happy," she said.

"I wasn't, but I didn't know why. So I kept on drifting, following the off trails of the earth, and rapidly getting myself nowhere. Not even caring. In the end I would probably have ended up a typical old tropical tramp, like Suva Donlon, and like scores of others between Cairo and the Cape. Now I've changed my mind, and I think I'll go back home and see if I can't make something a little more important out of life. Knowing you has helped me, Kay."

"I'm glad," she said simply. "Y'know, it's funny how adaptable the human mind is! Here am I, Kay Barton, who never did anything unconventional in my life until I came out here to Africa. At the moment, this life at Kombo seems very real and natural; it seems the normal place to be and the normal way to be living. Even *that*!" She gestured toward the distant figure of a sentry walking his beat along the borders of the compound. The moonlight touched the barrel of his rifle so that it lay across his shoulder like a pale ribbon of silver. Behind him, from somewhere deep in the jungle beyond the stockade, there sounded a faint throbbing of distant drums.

"In a few weeks I'll be back home, and all this will be a dream," the girl continued after a moment. "It will be hard to realize that I once wore a sun-helmet and tried to explain my wants in sign language to servants who spoke only Swahili, that I traveled up the muddy stream of the Congo and the Arubi on the rusty *M'kuba*—or that I ever sat here talking with you in a guarded stockade, while sentries pa-

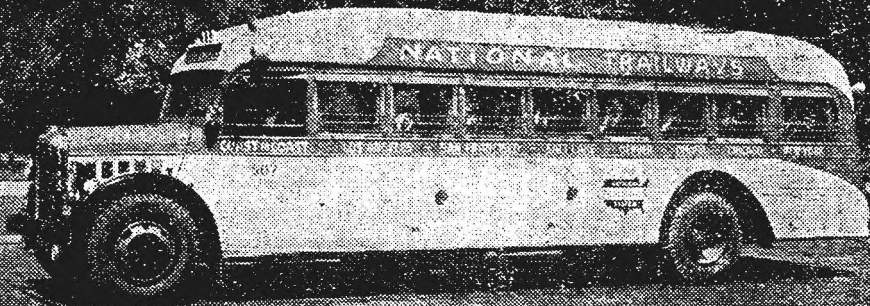
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trolled the grounds and drums beat secret messages in the jungle. It will all fade soon enough, once I return to the orderly little ways that were my life before, but at the moment all this seems very natural and right."

"And you'll soon forget you ever knew a river bum named Terry McLane."

"I'll never forget you, Terry."

"Oh, yes you will, Bright Eyes! And you won't be the first woman who ever succeeded in forgetting me. Why else do you suppose I lost myself in the wilds of Africa in the first place?"

He stood up and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "We'd better go inside; the wind has dropped and the mosquitoes will be eating us alive in a minute!"

Treachery—and the Savage Attack

JOHN DOBBS came back to Kombo just before noon on Wednesday, coming downriver in a native boat with four paddlers. There was a bandage on his left hand and forearm. Two of the men lifted a heavy case full of scientific specimens up onto the dock, the fruit of his work in the interior. Kay came to greet him with outstretched hand.

"Glad to see you back, John. You're just in time. I'm leaving for Bopola on the *M'kuba* tomorrow."

"Really? Then it's a lucky break for me I didn't delay a day or so more. Matter of fact, I'll probably go down on the steamer with you."

"That will be swell!" she said. "I'll be glad of the company."

Terry McLane greeted the returned traveler with less cordiality, but he managed a smile as they shook hands. Of course, he told himself, it wasn't jealousy over Kay that made him cool toward Dobbs. It was simply that he had disliked the man from the beginning, with instinctive distrust.

"What happened to your hand?" Terry asked.

"I cut it on the edge of a tin can. Just a scratch, but the thing got infected."

"Better let me take a look at it."

"No, it's all right now. Thanks just the same."

"See any sign of the trouble around Jenkins Landing?"

"No, but my boatmen told me about it. Horrible mess."

They all ate lunch in the main bungalow, as usual. Dobbs and Kay did most of the talking, discussing his bug-hunting exploits in the interior. For a man who claimed never to have been in Africa before, Terry reflected, Dobbs seemed to have taken care of himself pretty well in the bush. Terry's glance dwelt thoughtfully on the man's bandaged left hand. Then he pulled out his pipe, fumbled in his pockets a moment, and asked Dobbs for some pipe tobacco.

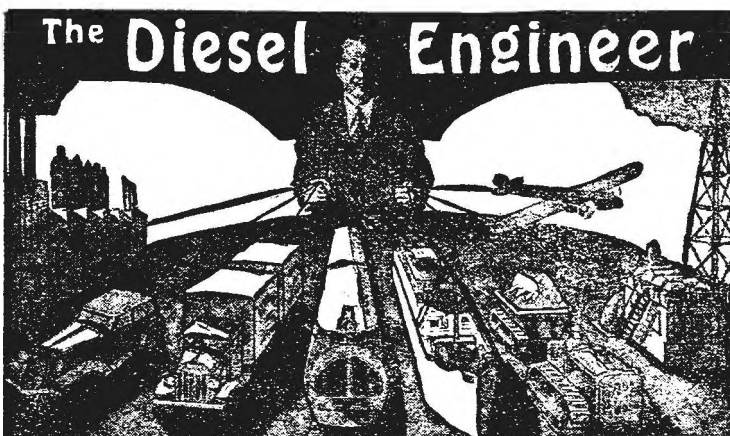
Dobbs absently reached into his pocket and handed over a tin of tobacco. Terry filled his pipe and returned the can. He pushed aside his plate with a hasty apology, and went out, taking the path that led down toward the dock.

Once around the corner of the bungalow, Terry halted abruptly and glanced around. The deserted compound droused in the scorching noonday sun, except for the sentry at the gate, who sat on a stool under the shade of a rag of awning and peered out his loop-hole. Then, moving with stealthy swiftness, Terry darted around to the back of the adjoining bungalow and entered by the rear door. Cuchimbo was there and stared at him with mouth agape, but Terry hissed a warning to the old man to keep silence.

The bedrooms all opened off a sort of central hall. Terry went to the room assigned to Dobbs and stepped inside.

DOBBS' luggage was still piled in one corner. All the pieces were locked. Selecting a big leather and canvas suitcase, Terry laid it on the cot, took his knife from his pocket and cut the bag open. One thing that had happened, one little slip on Dobbs' part, had convinced him that such drastic measures were justified. If his suspicions proved to be wrong, he would have to apologize and make what restitution he could.

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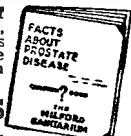
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On top of the bag were some pieces of soiled clothes. Then two heavy automatics with half a dozen loaded clips apiece. Not quite the equipment for a man who claimed to be a peaceful scientist! Then, in the bottom of the bag, he came upon three small sacks of gold dust and an old leather wallet.

The gold-dust alone almost clinched the case. It was not anything a man in Dobbs' position could have come by honestly, and Terry was willing to bet his life that it was part of the loot of Jenkins Landing. Hastily opening the wallet, he saw several old letters bearing the name of Walter Ryerson.

At a faint sound behind him, Terry dropped the wallet and spun around. Standing in the doorway, his hands on his hips and his usually suave face contorted with rage, was John Dobbs.

"What's the idea, McLane?" he snarled.

"Just that you made a slip at lunch when you passed me that tobacco can. It bore the stamp that Durstin, up at Jenkins Landing, used to put on his trade goods. You dirty rat!"

Thinking it over afterward, Terry realized that he was inexcusably careless in that encounter with Dobbs. His gun was at his hip and he should have gone for it, but in his angry eagerness to hurl what he had learned in the other man's teeth he forgot caution. Suddenly he found himself staring into the muzzle of a gun Dobbs had drawn from a holster under his left shoulder.

"Put 'em up and keep 'em there!" Dobbs snarled. "And if you open your trap, I'll drill you where you stand! Turn around and face the cot. *Pesi-pesi!*"

The mask had dropped at last. The suavity Dobbs had adopted while playing the part of a wandering scientist was gone, and his voice was hard and rasping. The last word he had spoken had even been in native dialect, the urgent Swahili command for haste.

Terry was helpless. He felt Dobbs pull his gun from its holster and toss it on the cot. One part of Terry's mind was filled with a raging anger at himself for having

been taken in this way, after discovering that Dobbs was in league with the outlaws as he had suspected; but the other part of his brain was coolly weighing chances and probabilities. His own life probably hung by a thread at this moment.

"Turn around!" Dobbs commanded, and even as he turned, Terry made his decision.

His hands were still in the air, and as he turned, Dobbs' gun was a scant twelve inches from his stomach. Terry's right hand swept downward and outward in one lightning motion. He was gambling on the element of surprise, and on the quickness of his hand—and he thought he might as well die this way as be killed in cold blood. The outlaw snarled and pulled the trigger, but Terry's flying hand had already struck the gun out of the way, so that the bullet just missed him and crashed into the wall behind.

FOR an instant they struggled in silence, Dobbs still holding the gun and Terry gripping his wrist. Then Terry crooked his leg behind the other man's knee and they both fell to the floor, rolling over and over in a tense struggle, still fighting for the gun.

Terry knew that he had only to hold on until help came, for the sound of the shot was sure to attract others. Even now he could hear the sound of running feet and the bang of the outer door. Then Tembo appeared. Taking in the situation at a glance, the big Wunguba twisted the gun from Dobbs' hand and pulled the outlaw upright, holding him writhing, but helpless. Cuchimbo also came running in, a long knife swinging free in his hand.

"Good boy, Tembo!" Terry panted, and to Cuchimbo he said: "Put down your knife and take that strap and tie his hands behind him!"

The others came then, startled and puzzled, while Dobbs stood sullen and silent under the guard of Tembo. He refused to answer any questions, but Suva Donlon went through the papers in the wallet and finally found a faded police notice.

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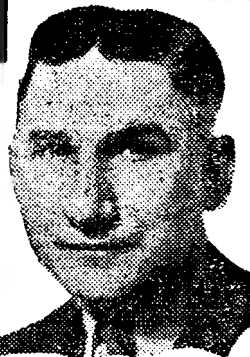
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"Here we are," he said. "One Walter Ryerson, wanted for murder by the Hong-Kong police for seven years."

The wooden case supposed to hold scientific specimens and data was broken open, and found to contain an old style sub-machine gun with several drums of cartridges. Terry's face grew grim, his eyes cold as winter.

"So you meant to use this on us from inside, while DuBois and your other pals attacked us from outside the stockade!" he said slowly. "Dobbs, we ought to lynch you!"

"I can get a good coil of rope in thirty seconds!" Donlon said eagerly. Terry shook his head.

"No. Take him over to one of those unused huts across the compound and tie him to the center post, and leave a man on guard."

Terry called the other two white men of Kombo into the office for a council of war. He silently set out a bottle of whisky and three glasses, pouring a stiff slug for each. They were likely to need it in the next twenty-four hours! Suva Donlon raised his glass.

"And here's to the next that dies!" he said with grim humor.

For an instant Terry studied the two men who sat across the bare table from him. Old Suva was leaning his elbows on the table and sucking at his pipe as calmly as though he had not a care in the world. No fear of weakness there! Suva Donlon had probably been through so many violent adventures in his checkered career that one more native attack, actual or threatened, could not disturb him very much.

Walter Turle was a problem. His face was so pale that the hollows under his eyes seemed almost black, and his fingers were trembling so badly that he took his glass in both hands. He drained the liquor almost at a gulp. Terry was worried, for he would have to depend on Turle a good deal in the coming emergency, and he had no faith in him. The younger man suddenly looked up, and grinned as he met Terry's eye.

"Listen!" he said. "I know what you're

thinking. Don't worry about me. I've sort of gone to pieces lately—you know it and I know it, but it was only the loneliness and the damn monotony that got me. I'll be all right in a scrap like this."

"By George, Turle, I believe you!" Terry said. "Shake!"

FOR a minute there was silence. The others were waiting for Terry to speak, and he was drawing designs on the bare table-top with the moisture from his glass. At last he looked up.

"Dobbs, or Ryerson, or whatever his name may be, is evidently working with Blackie DuBois and probably looks the ground over for him first," he said. "What do you think we can expect next?"

"An attack in force," Donlon answered promptly, and Turle nodded. Terry sighed.

"I'm afraid you're right. I had hoped the *M'kuba* would get here and take the women away before anything broke, but we can't do anything about that. They may come after us this afternoon, they may come tomorrow, but my guess is that Du Bois eluded the military expedition and will strike at Kombo quickly, before the soldiers can come downriver again. We'll have to be prepared—as well as we can."

"This compound is a big place to defend with only a few men."

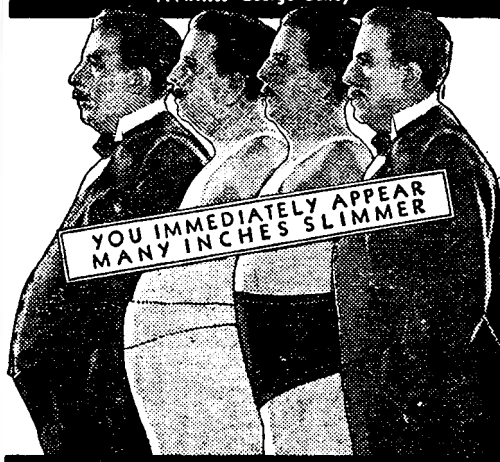
"You're telling me! Thank God Pierre Manet left us those four soldiers! Well, this is the plan. We'll try to hold the warehouse, if they break inside the stockade. All the valuable goods are there anyway, and its galvanized iron roof and walls will at least keep us free from the fear of having the place set on fire."

"Those walls are too thin to stop bullets."

"I realize that, so we'll try to hold the stockade as long as we can. We'll divide everybody, soldiers and natives, into two groups, with one of you in command of each of them. Luckily there's a moon tonight. We'll get some big piles of wood ready for fires to give us extra light. Suva, you take the first watch, and distribute your men along the stockade as well as you can. Walt, have your men make a

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of his tribe, with a pair of black ostrich plumes in his headdress.

After about fifteen or twenty minutes the sounds of firing from the direction of the mission died away.

"I don't believe Tim Hoskins had a gun in the place. He was a funny guy that way," Donlon said, unconsciously using the past tense. "But his converts must have defended the mission with their own weapons for a while. Those guns we heard must have been DuBois' gang. Quite a few of them, too. Well—it's all over now!"

The drums had been strangely silent most of the day. Now, all at once, they broke out in a new throbbing thunder.

"Just to remind us that our turn is next!" Terry muttered, glancing at the now sinking sun. The throb of the drums rose and fell, it quickened and it slowed, but it never ceased.

When all preparations were made and nothing remained but to await developments, Kombo settled down to a period of alert watchfulness. Two Belgian soldiers leaned against the timbers of the stockade as they peered out their loop-holes on either side the gate. The native defenders on duty stood at intervals along the big wall. A few were armed with such rifles as were available, but most had only their own spears and war clubs. Insects droned in the heat, the muddy river slipped endlessly by, ominous drums beat in the dark heart of the jungle, and the defenders of the trading post awaited the next move of their still unseen foemen.

Entering the central bungalow to get a pair of field-glasses, Terry found Kay Barton sitting at the table writing up the last of her notes. She looked up with a nervous smile.

"It's just my orderly mind," she said; "getting the last of my report in order. Any sign of them yet?"

"No sign. Of course I still hope they won't come here at all, or else that they'll be scared away when they see how well prepared we are. But if there is any real trouble, I want you to take Gretchen and go to the warehouse at the first shot. You'll be safest there."



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"But I want to do my part—"

"Your part will come soon enough, if there's a real scrap. There'll be wounds to be looked after."

"But—"

"Listen, Kay! Please do as I ask you!" Terry said. "I haven't time to argue!"

THE time seemed to drag interminably as the sun crept lower toward the rim of the jungle. Except for the steady throbbing of the drums, which had accelerated to a slightly higher pitch, a tense silence brooded over Kombo. They were all waiting, waiting. The suspense affected the defenders according to their various natures. Some, like Walter Turle, shifted restlessly and fingered their weapons, impatient for any kind of action that would relieve the tension. Others were calmer, and old Suva Donlon was impassive and still as he leaned against the stockade by one of the loop-holes, a thin trail of smoke rising from the bowl of his battered pipe.

The storm broke with all the suddenness of a thunder-clap. One instant, nothing showed in the strip of cleared land between the stockade and the jungle—the next, a horde of yelling natives poured out of the underbrush and swept toward the gate of Kombo. The attack had begun!

Terry McLane, at a loop-hole near the gate, pulled a whistle from his pocket and blew the long blast that was the signal to bring every man in the station to his post. Then he flung his rifle to his shoulder and fired, knocking over a big black who was bounding forward in long strides, a light assegai poised for hurling. The dull crash of Terry's heavy elephant gun ripped across the compound, and was followed by a ragged volley where the military rifles of the Belgians merged with the lighter reports of the sporting rifles the others carried.

Scarlet flashes stabbed out from half a dozen points along the edge of the jungle, and bullets thudded into the timbers of the stockade. Those of the outlaws who had firearms were keeping themselves as well hidden as possible, leaving their more lightly armed comrades to press the as-

sault. One or two of the renegades must have been armed with ancient Arab trade guns, for the puffs of black powder burst out against the green of the jungle like some unhealthy sort of blossoms.

The wild yelling of the assailants was answered by the shouts of the native defenders, as their blood warmed to the fever of battle. They leaped on top of boxes and casks to loose their arrows over the stockade. Meanwhile, a compact group of outlaws, carrying a heavy log, rushed for the gate, and the rifle-fire of the defenders quickened to meet this new threat.

Stepping back from his loop-hole as he snapped open the breech of his rifle and fumbled in his pocket for more cartridges, Terry took a quick glance around him. In the twilight the compound of Kombo swam in a faint haze, while the hot air grew rank with the stench of smokeless powder. Arrows dotted the top of the stockade like the quills of a porcupine; other arrows were dropping inside, but were missing the defenders, who were too close to the barrier. One of the native hunters had been shot through the head and lay sprawled in the dust. The Belgian soldier nearest Terry suddenly dropped his rifle and staggered back, both hands clutching his throat, with the butt and feathers of a small arrow visible between his fingers.

Then Terry saw Kay. She stood at a loop-hole in the far corner of the stockade, sighting the rifle of the native hunter who had been killed. Her loosened hair lay against the wooden stock, and her shoulder jumped from the recoil as she fired. He shouted to her, but his voice could not carry above the noise of the fighting and he could not spare the time to go after her now. He leaped back to his loop-hole and lined up his sights on the chest of the nearest of the charging outlaws.

THAT first, wild frontal attack almost succeeded. A little more push, and it might have carried through by sheer speed and suddenness and press of numbers. For one instant the group with the log actually reached the gate, while at three or four other points scowling black faces suddenly

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appeared above the top of the stockade, as men mounted on the shoulders of their comrades.

Big Tembo skewered one man with his long assegai and then leaped up on a box, so that he stood waist high above the top of the barrier, while his terrible weapon played against the swarming attackers like summer lightning.

Walter Turle had gone berserk, laughing like a maniac and swinging his empty rifle around his head as he leaped to another danger point.

Twice the gate itself shook under heavy blows of the battering ram, while the defenders at the nearest loop-holes fired and reloaded and fired again, till their rifles grew hot to the touch.

Then the attack faded away as swiftly as it had begun. One instant a surging wave of black-skinned outlaws was pounding against the stockade, the next instant the wave had broken and ebbed back to the jungle in red ruin, while sprawling bodies were scattered thickly on the dusty and trampled grass.

Terry stepped back, dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground, and wiped the sweat from his forehead with one blackened hand.

"That was a close call!" he muttered to Suva Donlon, who stood nearby, methodically reloading the magazine of his Winchester.

"Aye. Too close for comfort."

"Think they'll come back?"

"No doubt of it—hear the drums! But it'll be an hour or so till they work themselves up to it again."

Though the loss of the defenders had been slight in comparison with that of the renegades, it was serious when their small numbers were considered. One of the Belgians had been killed, as had one of Terry's native hunters and two other natives. Four others, quite seriously wounded, were carried away to the warehouse. The wounds of the others who had been hit were comparatively slight and did not incapacitate them. Terry divided the surviving men into two equal groups, left Turle's watch on guard, and sent

Donlon's off to the shed to get some rest.

It was almost dark as the three white men stood together near a corner of the stockade for a moment, leaning on their rifles. Suddenly something arched through the air near them, a roundish object hurled over the stockade. It struck nearby and rolled almost to their feet—the severed head of a white man—a man with straggly gray hair!

"Poor Hoskins!" Terry said hoarsely. "I was afraid of that! You were right, Suva—they'll certainly be back at us again, after DuBois whips his blacks up to another frenzy.

"Let's go and see if we can get some information out of that rat who calls himself Dobbs."

AS they came to the hut where the prisoner had been confined, Terry noticed that there was no guard outside. Turle was a little in the lead, and the others hurried forward at his shout as he peered in the door. Dobbs was gone. The native who had guarded him lay on the earthen floor in a pool of blood.

"Gone!" Terry said bitterly. "Got free in some way, killed the guard, and probably escaped over the stockade in the confusion of the fight. Well, that's one more rifle we'll have against us the next time!"

It was not for ten or fifteen minutes that Terry missed Kay. He had meant to chide her for exposing herself on the firing line, but he was very busy. At last, with his various arrangements completed, he started to look for her. He was not alarmed at first, but as he went from place to place in the dark compound without finding any trace of the girl—and without finding anyone who had seen her since the end of the assault on the gate—he grew worried.

He called Turle, and together they went from one end of the compound to the other with a flashlight, calling the girl's name from time to time—but still there was no trace of her. Panic began to grip Terry.

"Good Lord!" he muttered to Turle as they paused helplessly in the center of the compound. "What can have happened to her?"

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"Do you suppose that Dobbs—in some way—?"

"I don't see how he could have carried her off, even if he hid in one of the huts until after dark, instead of escaping over the stockade during the fight."

There was a minute's silence, and then suddenly Turle gripped the other man's arm.

"The dock, Terry!" he said hoarsely. "It hasn't been watched since the attack came from the landward side. There were two small boats there, and—"

Without a word, Terry spun on his heel and ran toward the river. Turle followed a few feet behind him. The boots of the two men rang loudly on the planking. Then the beam of Terry's flashlight swept the edge of the pier—and revealed only one small native boat floating alongside.

"That's what happened all right!" Turle said, squatting on his heels and examining a piece of rope that had been hastily cut when the other boat was taken. "He must have hidden in one of the bungalows, and then after the fight he forced the girl go with him and escaped by boat. Look—here's Kay's scarf on the dock! She must have dropped it to show us where she'd been taken."

"Yes," Terry muttered. "Yes, I see it."

"She was probably gagged when he carried her away."

A lot of things went through Terry McCleary's mind as he stood there in the darkness, with the old Arubi lapping softly at the piles beneath his feet. He knew now that he loved Kay Barton, and that now life was quite empty, and nothing mattered except the urgent need to look for her at once.

"Listen, Walter," he said abruptly, "I'm going to leave Donlon in command of the station, to defend it as best he can, while I take Tembo and go after Kay. DuBois and Dobbs probably intend to hold the girl for ransom and are keeping her at their main camp—wherever that may be."

"Right!" Turle said. "I'll go with you."

"No. A few of us will have a better chance than a larger group would."

"Three will be a lot better than two, and

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one more rifle won't make much difference here. I'll tag along."

"All right, then." Terry's voice was still toneless. "All right, let's go!"

"Instead of slipping over the stockade, we'd better take that other boat and drop down the river a ways and try to come at them from the rear."

"Good idea!"

THE three of them stole out of the embattled stockade of Kombo five minutes later, after a hasty conference with Donlon. The old trader was on the dock as they climbed into their boat, and he leaned down to shake hands with Terry.

"Bring her back, boy!" he whispered. "I'll hang on here somehow. Don't worry about us!" Then he shoved the boat off.

Tembo crouched in the bow, motionless and watchful. Turle squatted amidships, his rifle across his knees. In the stern, Terry cautiously dipped his paddle and held the nose of the boat pointed downstream. Already she was beginning to feel the tug of the current.

Without a sound, like a drifting shadow, the boat glided off on the smooth face of the Arubi. The lights of Kombo fell away, drew steadily astern, and the ceaseless drums on shore echoed eerily out across the waters.

A thin mist shrouded the face of the river, and the moonlight gave it a silver tinge that made distances deceptive. There was, of course, a possibility of their being seen from the bank, but they had to take that chance.

The current carried them around the first bend, and Kombo was blotted from sight by the dark rampart of the river bank. Terry began to use his paddle to increase their speed of movement, dipping and withdrawing it very carefully to avoid any splash. There was only the faint drip of water from the blade as he swung his paddle forward for each new stroke, and a low murmur of ripples beneath the bow as their speed increased. Once a giant bat veered low toward them, then swept away again, his leathery wings black against the moon.

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At last, estimating that they were over half a mile below the station, Terry hissed warningly to Tembo and swung the bow of the boat in toward the shore. The big Wunguba laid aside his *assegai* and picked up a paddle. In the moonlight they could see him turning his head from side to side as he examined the dark shore before them, and he seemed to be sniffing the breeze like a dog.

"N'dio, bwana—it is good!" he whispered.

They climbed up on the bank and made the boat fast to a projecting root. There was no telling whether they would need it again on their retreat. Then, in single file, with Tembo in the lead, they moved stealthily off into the jungle. They worked upriver and inland on a long slant, hoping to strike a point on line with Kombo where the outlaws most likely had their camp.

IT was slow going, pushing their way through the dense jungle underbrush. Now and then a pale shaft of moonlight struck down through some gap in the foliage above, but for the rest they were in almost complete blackness. Brambles and thorns tore at them, creepers blocked their path. The need for silence made it all the more difficult to achieve any speed. Then Tembo found a narrow trail leading in the desired direction, and the going became easier.

Terry had to leave this part of the expedition entirely to Tembo's judgment. With his keener senses and native instincts, the big Wunguba was far better equipped than any white man for picking an accurate and undetected way through the jungle.

Steadily they stole ahead. The drums seemed closer now, and an intermittent crackle of rifle-fire from the direction of Kombo showed that the siege was still in progress. Suddenly, as they came to a comparatively open spot in the dense vegetation, Tembo halted and pointed ahead. In the sky to the left was a red glow, a steadily mounting glare that could mean only one thing. Fire!

The three of them stood close together,

peering at that lurid radiance that was staining half the sky. For a moment Terry was worried, then he realized that the renegades could not have carried the station yet.

"What is it?" Turle whispered. "They can't have taken the stockade yet! There hasn't been much firing—"

"Probably that cluster of native huts outside the compound."

"That must be it."

"Damn fools!" Terry muttered. "They just couldn't resist the temptation to destroy something! That glare will give Donlon good visibility and make his defense easier as long as the huts burn."

They went on again, moving more cautiously now, with frequent halts. Tembo was still in the lead. Abruptly he halted. He happened to be in a patch of moonlight, and they could see him crouching and bent forward, with his long *assegai* ready and one arm flung out in a gesture of caution. Then, leaving the two white men standing where they were, he stole away into the blackness.

Minutes passed. Terry could hear Turle's panting breathing beside him, and the sounds of desultory fighting around Kombo, and the endless thunder of the drums, which were now very close ahead. Nothing moved about them. He was beginning to grow restless when Tembo reappeared.

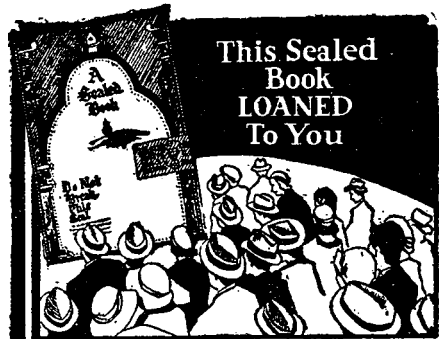
The big native came back as silently as though he had simply materialized out of the shadows.

"There was a sentry, *bwana*," he whispered. "He died." In the moonlight they could see dark stains on the long blade of his *assegai*.

"What about the camp?"

"It is just ahead, *bwana*. A white man with a heavy beard, and the man we held prisoner, and the girl, and many natives."

When they had crept ahead another two hundred yards or so, they caught sight of the glow of a small fire through the trees. There did not seem to be any more sentries on this side. Probably the renegades never looked for any trouble from that direction, from downriver. The progress of the three interlopers was now a slow and laborious



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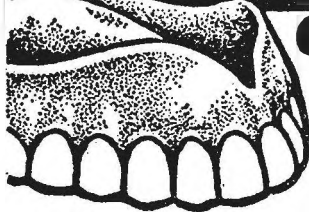
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crawling, but at last they lay hid in a patch of shadow and peered through a screen of ferns and creepers at the scene before them.

TWO fires burned in a wide clearing. The place was swarming with natives. Many of them, who carried a variegated assortment of old-fashioned firearms, were obviously outlaws, while others were simply local natives, with their primitive weapons, who had been tempted to join DuBois by the hope of rich loot to be found at Kombo.

A big-thewed white man with a shaggy black beard, a man with crossed cartridge belts on his chest and a heavy revolver on either hip, was standing on a pile of duffie as he snarled at his followers in fluent Swahili. Blackie DuBois! There was no mistaking the man, with his heavy brows and his scarred face, from the description that had been broadcast by the French authorities in the Middle Congo. Terry's finger itched for the trigger of his rifle. It would be a public service to put a bullet between the renegade's eyes, but it would also be suicide, and his errand was to find Kay Barton.

DuBois was haranguing his motley followers, working them up to the pitch of another attack in force on the stockade of Kombo. Their dark, scarred faces were alight with savage ferocity, worked up to a frenzy by the throbbing drums and the chanting witch doctors. Then DuBois waved them forward, shaking his rifle in the air and jumping ahead to lead them. The yelling horde poured out of the clearing and went crashing through the underbrush toward Kombo.

Then, as the mass of the outlaws drained out of the clearing, Terry for the first time saw Kay. She stood with her back against a small sapling close to the near side of the clearing. Her crossed wrists were tied behind her back, and she was fastened to the sapling by cords about her throat and ankles. With eyes closed and head thrown back against the trunk of the sapling, she drooped wearily in her bonds.

Seven men remained in the clearing to guard the captive and the gear. Six were

native renegades, who leaned indolently on their weapons. The last was John Dobbs! Carrying his rifle in the hollow of his left arm, Dobbs strolled across the clearing toward the girl.

"Don't look so down-hearted, sister," he said sardonically. "We'll get a good fat ransom for you before long!"

Terry McLane began to push the muzzle of his rifle cautiously out through the underbrush. Then he had a better idea. Turle and himself could account for only two of the men before them at the first volley, and it would still be a very one-sided fight. The thing could be handled in a better way. He touched his two companions and motioned to them to crawl back, away from the clearing.

When they were far enough back to avoid danger of being overheard, Terry hastily whispered his plan to the others. They nodded their understanding and immediately crawled away to the left. Terry returned to his position on the edge of the clearing and settled down to wait.

FIVE minutes went by. Ten. There was heavy firing from the direction of Kombo now, and a sustained yelling. The outlaws were evidently making a fierce attack on the stockade. Terry wondered how Suva Donlon was making out—and then he cautiously rose to his knees, as he heard, the thing he had been waiting for.

From across the clearing sounded a shot, another shot, and a wild shouting. Terry recognized Turle's voice, and Tembo's deep bellow. He knew it was only his two companions making all the noise they could, with Turle shooting blindly as fast as he could work the lever of his Winchester, but to the men in the clearing it sounded like a surprise attack on their camp.

The native outlaws stared at each other blankly. Kay opened her eyes and lifted her head with a new hope. Dobbs bounded across the clearing, his rifle held ready at his hip.

"Come on, you fools!" he shouted to the natives. "Get out of the glow of the firelight! Come on!"

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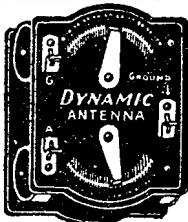
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The clearing was empty, except for the fettered figure of the girl. Terry burst through the screen of creepers and rushed toward her, rifle in one hand and knife in the other. He slashed the cords that held her throat to the sapling, bent down and cut the thongs at her ankles.

"Darling!" she said hoarsely. "I thought that you— *Look out!*"

John Dobbs had reappeared on the far edge of the clearing, and was raising his rifle to his shoulder. From where he crouched, Terry brought up his own rifle in a quick snap-shot. The impact of the heavy bullet spun the renegade halfway around, and as Terry gave him the second barrel, he crumpled forward on his face. Terry flipped two fresh cartridges into the chamber, then gripped the girl by the elbow.

"Come on!" he panted. "Hurry!"

The two of them plunged headlong into the jungle, the girl's hands still tied behind her and Terry supporting her with one arm around her shoulders. When they had put some distance between them and the camp, he stopped and kissed her.

"Terry!" she said softly. "At least free my wrists!"

Terry started to lead the way back by the route he had come with Tembo and Turle, but now a new sound came from the direction of Kombo. The brazen notes of a bugle! The sudden chatter of machine-guns! The soldiers must have returned downriver. Terry gripped the girl's hand and headed straight across toward Kombo.

Some of the native huts were still smoldering outside, and the ruddy glow illumined the scene. Many more bodies were sprawling on the trampled grass, and the gate to the stockade had been battered in, but now the lights of many boats gleamed at the river bank and a solid column of Belgian soldiers was pouring ashore to complete the rout of the outlaws. Blackie DuBois tried to rally his badly frightened men, but a machine-gun coughed again and the renegade leader fell forward in the dust.

Out from the edge of the jungle came a pair of badly wounded men, a blood-stained white man and a limping Wunguba

warrior. Tembo, the less seriously hurt, supported his slighter companion with one arm, while the other hand still gripped his long spear. The whole two feet of its blade was stained with blood. Turle looked at Terry with a weary grin.

"I'm not much good as a storekeeper and working man, but I'm hell on wheels in a fight!" he said—and fainted.

THE whole place was in order in a remarkably short time. While the main body of the Belgian expedition hunted down the surviving outlaws in the nearby jungle, another detachment gathered up the bodies and looked to the wounded, and generally straightened things up around the station. Terry sighed wearily and turned to the girl beside him.

"Well, I guess that's over. The arrival of those soldiers probably saved you a lot of money."

Kay looked at him, a puzzled frown between her eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the trading station—the company—"

She shrugged, a faint smile on her mouth.

"I don't own any part of the Arubi Trading Company," she said.

"What?"

"No. The owner is my uncle, Kenneth Barton. He had put all he had left in this investment, and he was coming out to inspect it when he was taken very ill. Someone had to come, and I wanted the adventure, so I came."

"So you're not rich?"

"Hardly!" she laughed. "Uncle Kenneth has three small daughters. Now that I've had my adventure, I've got to go back to New York and look for a job again."

"You've got a job right now, if you want it," he said. "I told you I was going to settle down and run my gold mine, and try to become a more useful citizen. Want to help me?"

She looked up, then her eyes fell in true feminine fashion.

"Yes, bwana," she said.

The End.

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