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Short Stories

December 10th

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by

ERLE STANLEY
GARDNER

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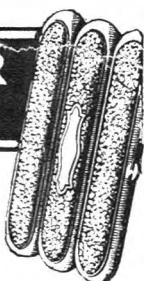
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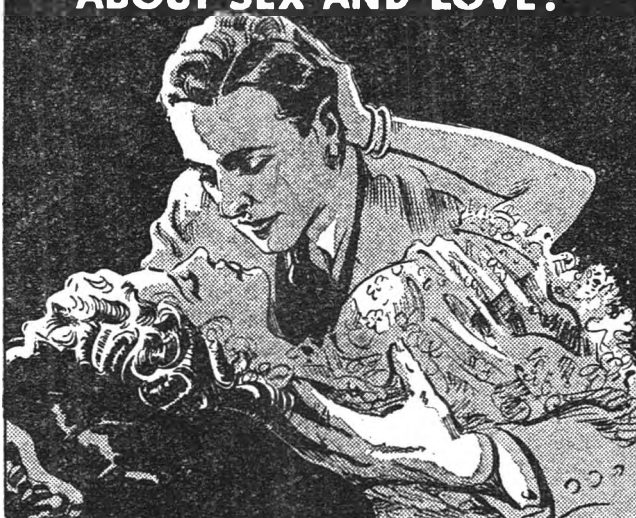
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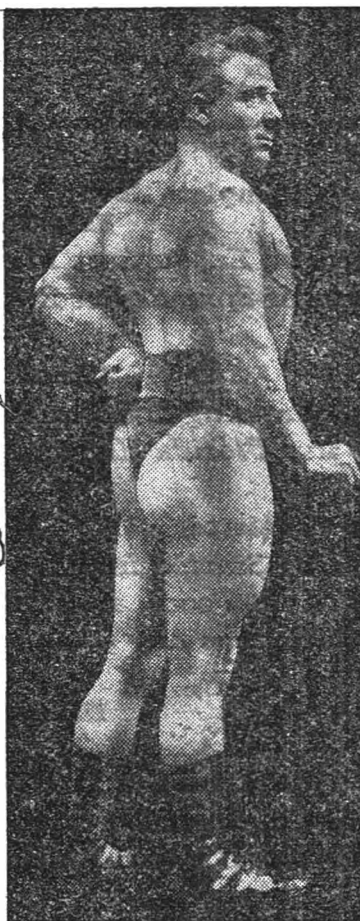


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HARRY E. MAULE, *EDITOR*

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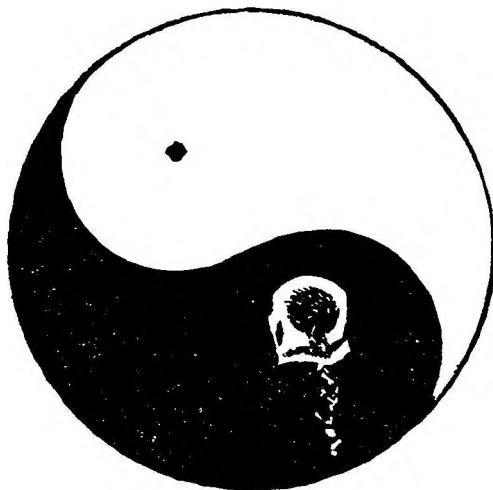
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By
**ERLE
STANLEY
GARDNER**



*Author of
"Lawless Waters,"
"Dominoes of
Death," etc.*

THE BLACK EGG

I

THE big junk crept across the bay, a fitful breeze pushing against the big sail.

Back of the high stern and slightly to one side, lay Kowloon, the City of Nine Dragons. Over the bow lay the Peak of Hongkong.

It was hot, with a close, insufferable heat which precedes the dread typhoon.

The buildings of Hongkong seemed etched in the bright sunlight, burnt against the green background of the high mountains which rose abruptly behind the city. On the Bund, where each room in the native buildings had its individual balcony, lest the occupants should swelter when the wind shifted behind the Peak and the air grew dead, Chinese swarmed about in frenzied activity, an activity which was barely visible to the two men who sat on the high stern of the junk.

One of these men was Chinese. He sat cross-legged upon a piece of matting, puffing at a long-handled pipe, the metal bowl of which contained *sook yen*, a villainous Chinese tobacco with an oily content that is so strong only an Oriental tongue can stand it. The other man was white, but his skin was bronzed by exposure to the

tropical suns until he might have passed for Chinese. He too sat cross-legged and puffed at a cigarette.

Slowly, the junk crept forward.

Both of these men were in a frenzy of haste, yet nothing in their attitude indicated it. There was no quick, nervous pacing of the deck, no anxious shifting of the eyes to see just how much progress the junk was making.

Both of these men had lived long in the Orient. They had learned the lesson of the tropics that impatience but consumes the vital forces, without giving in return a corresponding advantage. No amount of pacing, no restless motions would have freshened the wind by so much as a puff. The junk would get to Hongkong when the gods willed it would get to Hongkong, and, in the meantime, there was need to conserve energy for work to be begun in Hongkong.

Bill Fenton exhaled a great cloud of cigarette smoke in twin streams from appreciative nostrils, turned almost casually to Fong Tie.

"When," he asked, "was he first taken sick?"

Fong Tie thrust a pinch of the oily tobacco into the hot metal bowl. His lips twisted about the stained ivory mouthpiece

of the pipe. He held the tobacco to the flickering flame of a peanut oil lamp, puffed out white clouds of a smoke so rich and oily that it seemed hardly to mix with the air, but to remain in long streamers, wrapped in a greasy coating. He did not answer the question until the second puff.

"He was," he said, speaking in Cantonese, "taken with The Sickness for more than three hours before he recognized what it was. Then he sent me to bring you."

"He knows now the nature of this sickness?" asked Fenton.

"He knows now," said Fong Tie. "He does not know the nature of the poison. He knows that it is a poison and that nothing can stop its progress."

Fenton raised a speculative eye to the brassy bowl of the heavens. The intense heat seemed to set the entire atmosphere vibrating with quivering torture, as though

it had all been a part of some huge cymbal vibrating with pulsations of noise.

The junk inched in toward the Bund.

FONG TIE took the pipe from his mouth, muttered an order. The order was instantly repeated by a man who stood just below that high first deck. Naked feet pattered about the teakwood deck. The sail swung slightly around. The big rudder creaked.

Fong Tie got to his feet, tapped the ashes from his pipe.

"We go," he said, "to the Sin Sahng."

He used the term which is applied to Master or Teacher by the Chinese and which means, literally, "First Born." It is a mark of the highest honor when it is used toward others than a total stranger, although so great is the innate courtesy of the Chinese that the title is readily

"We're Fighting a Chinese Secret Society. We're Fighting a Bunch of Fanatics. If You Know China —You Know What That Means."



enough bestowed upon an utter stranger. At that time it is as meaningless as the salutation of "Mister" in our language. It is a custom which gives great deference to all strangers. Used, however, toward one with whom one is familiar, it means a tribute of respect, the acknowledgment of wisdom.

"The Sin Sahng will have arranged for rickshaws?" asked Fenton.

"All is arranged," said Fong Tie.

The huge junk moved slowly toward its mooring place. The waterfront, literally swarming with thousands of junks and sampans, presented a scene of hectic, disorganized activity, but the swift eye of Fong Tie speedily detected a sampan whose owner was open to the making of an honest dollar. He raised his voice in a summons and the owner of the sampan swung on the sculling oar, sending the light craft darting through the confusion of the waterfront with the unerring speed of a duck whirling about and racing toward some choice tidbit which has been tossed upon the water.

SO GREAT was Fong Tie's haste that there was no period of bargaining. He virtually lost face by stepping at once into the sampan. That much of a concession he made to his hurry, and, because the boatman lost respect for a man who would pay too high a price, he was, perhaps, a few seconds slower in getting his human freight to the Bund.

The men entered waiting rickshaws. These rickshaws had, in the upper right-hand corner of the seat, the conventional black feather duster which indicates they are the property of men of wealth, men who can afford to hire their own rickshaws and who do not deign to ride in public equipage.

The lean-flanked runners leaned to the shafts, cleared the streets by short, grunting cries.

"Make way!" they shouted. "Make way for the Lords of Wisdom who are upon business of the Master."

Hongkong divides itself mainly into two parts—that which is reserved for the tourists and that where the native lives his life.

Tourists entering the port on the big liners, for the most part following a well trodden tourist pathway around the world, look slightly askance at the screaming activities of the natives and proceed at once to the Hongkong Hotel, where they sally forth, in between whiskey and sodas, upon decorous shopping trips. They have, perhaps, a vague sense of that which lies back of the streets which are given over to foreign trade, but they do not seek a close acquaintance.

The fringes of that which is the real China lurk just beyond the side streets and leer at the frightened tourist with inscrutable eyes.

The tourist senses the jeering spirit of China—a jeering which is born from the recognition of a seeming injustice.

These fat, paunchy whites, attired in their sweltering garments, strolling through the streets with every evidence of wealth, could no more compete in the hand-to-hand struggle for existence with these half-naked coolies than a caged canary could rustle for its living if liberated in a hawk-infested country.

Yet these coolies are half-starved, working until late hours in order to get a few meager handfuls of rice, while the over-fed tourists, their jowls red with the excessive blood pressure engendered by the eating of meaty dishes in the tropics, have wealth beyond the wildest dreams of the coolies who struggle so interminably for a bare existence.

Small wonder that there is a sharp line of demarkation, that the China which is known by the tourist is not China at all, but only a neutral territory which exists in order that the tourist may be fleeced of some of his surplus wealth.

THE rickshaws in which Fenton and his companion rode passed speedily through this neutral territory and soon

wound and twisted through the tortuous streets of the Chinese city.

Myriad smells assailed the nostrils. Sharp cries smote the ears. Men hurried about in the activities of a keenly competitive existence, their cries as shrill as those of wheeling seagulls circling behind a boat.

The coolies turned down a narrow side street which was even more smelly than the other streets, paused before a doorway in a disreputable building flanked on either side by buildings which were equally disreputable. The mark of poverty was stamped upon the place, as well as upon the adjoining buildings. Dirt and filth cluttered the streets. Sagging roofs, in a state of disrepair, announced the poverty of the owners.

One of the coolies gave a shrill cry.

The door of the center building swung open. The rickshaws passed inside.

Once inside, the camouflage of the poverty-stricken buildings became apparent. They were not buildings at all, but



false fronts put up to mask a spacious courtyard, well-kept and luxurious.

A Sikh guard, with a turban, a glossy, black beard and bright colored blouse, stood guard at the gates.

The rickshaw coolies dropped the shafts to the ground. Fenton and Fong Tie ascended a flight of stairs. In the back of the house could be heard the wailing of a woman.

A Chinese slave girl waited at the head of the stairs. She surveyed them with an expressionless countenance, guided them down a corridor, stood to one side as Fong Tie entered through a circular door.

The bedroom was typically Chinese.

Doors and windows were so arranged that no two doors were in a straight line. The room was, moreover, broken by ornamental screens. In this way, the Chinese occupant protected himself from the Homeless Ghosts, which, it is well known, can only travel in straight lines of unimpeded progress.

A HACKING cough was followed by the sound of rustling garments as a body moved restlessly upon a strip of polished bamboo which was far cooler than any sheet could have been.

Outside, the oppressive typhoon heat weighed down upon the building as a smothering blanket, prevented air from circulating through the open windows.

Bill Fenton stepped to the side of the bed, looked down at a tall, thin figure with cheeks that were flushed with fever, eyes that were unnaturally bright.

"Sin Sahng," he said.

The man looked up, tried to raise slender, tapering hands from the bed, and failed. The long, thin fingers, with the pointed, yellow nails, made an almost imperceptible gesture. Then the hand dropped back to the bed.

Fenton leaned forward, in order to get the words that were seeping from the lips of the dying man.

The words came in Cantonese, spoken in a voice that was all but inaudible.

"You have come . . . it is well. . . . Do not interrupt me. I go to join my ancestors. They have long been waiting."

The voice trailed away into silence. The man seemed to be gathering every ounce of strength for a last supreme effort.

"In Macau there is a man. His name is Sig-wik. He is a white man. He has the name of a white man. He looks for one who can tell him of China——"

Spasmodic coughing wracked the frail frame.

Twice the man tried to speak. Twice words failed him. Then, once more, he recruited his strength to the point where it was possible for him to speak.

"You are to go to this man. Do not forget his name. Sig-wik. It is different, as you say it. Those are the way my ears hear it. It is the name of a white man. You, I know, can be trusted.

"There is evil abroad and evil that spreads by night, as dark water spreads from a devil fish. It is the evil of the Black Egg."

The man heaved a tremulous sigh.

Bill Fenton, leaning forward, his forehead furrowed in concentration, lest he should miss the significance of any word, repeated slowly and in the form of an interrogation, "The Black Egg? What is the Black Egg?"

"The Black Egg," said the dying man, "is——"

Coughing interrupted him. He tried to speak, and his laboring lungs refused to do other than cough, so violently they used up every bit of energy in the wasted frame.

When the coughing subsided, the man who lay on the cot tried to speak again. His breathing was labored and rapid, but the lungs moved as though they were partially paralyzed. The breathing was very shallow. It was necessary for the lungs to make up in rapidity of respiration what they lacked in air capacity and a man could not get sufficient reserve air stored up to enable him to articulate.

The face showed anguish as he tried to convey his meaning, knowing that the end was near.

The breathing seemed now almost in his throat and was extremely rapid—a peculiar harsh rattle was audible.

The man fought for one deep breath, finally managed to get just enough reserve air to articulate one word.

"Yin," he said.

The effort was too great. The pupils of the eyes seemed to dilate and narrow. The rattle in the throat intensified. The breathing suddenly stopped. The eyelids fluttered and lay closed.

Fenton knelt by the side of the bed for a matter of ten seconds. Then the voice of Fong Tie urged him to action.

"It is," said the Chinese, "unseemly to mourn one who has joined his ancestors, when there is work to be done." Fenton got to his feet, and crossed to the window. The first faint gusts of typhoon wind were rippling the surface of the water.

"The steamers," he said slowly, "will have cancelled their sailings to Macau because of the typhoon."

His eyes met those of Fong Tie, and Fong Tie moved toward the door.

"My junk," he said, "will ride the typhoon to Macau."

II

BILL FENTON, holding the light rubberized coat about him, fought his way into the typhoon wind. Rain streaked down in driving sheets. The wind blew in gusts. Drops of perspiration mingled with the rain drops and coursed down Bill Fenton's face.

Out beyond the Praia Grande Road, the waters of the bay were lashed to a churning frenzy. The junks, which usually rode at anchor, had vanished as by magic. The bay was like some boiling cauldron, the waters seriously agitated.

Disorganized gusts of wind, swooping down from the heavens, pushed up walls of water that were promptly leveled by other gusts of wind, the tops of the waves being cut off as cleanly as though they had been slashed with a knife.

The doors of the Hotel Riviera, which faced to the north and east, had been boarded up. After awhile, when the counter-clockwise sweep of the typhoon had moved the wind through another quarter circle, the doors on the southeast side would be boarded up. At present, however, they were open.

Fenton braced himself against the sweep of the wind, the lash of the rain, and fought his way into the hotel.

It was dark inside the four walls of the building. The wind had long since ripped out the wires which supplied the city of Macau with electricity. The lobby was vir-

tually deserted. The blur of a white coat moved indistinctly in the half light back of the counter where the register reposed.

Fenton opened the rubberized coat, shook water from it. Beneath the protection of the coat, his suit of Shantung Pongee hung wet and limp, as drenched in perspiration as though it had been exposed to the rain itself. Perspiration streamed from Fenton's body.

He fished a card from his pocket, handed it to the Chinese clerk.

"Stanley Sedgewick," he said.

The face of the Chinese clerk showed a faint flicker of expression, then became utterly impassive. He walked from behind the desk and nodded to Fenton to follow him. He climbed a broad flight of stairs, walked down an uncarpeted corridor, paused before a door, knocked twice, hesitated, then knocked once more. The door opened a crack. The clerk pushed Fenton's card through the crack. The door closed.

THERE was a moment of silence, then the clerk turned.

"Good-by," he said, and walked back down the corridor.

Fenton remained in the corridor, waiting and frowning. He was morally certain that the Stanley Sedgewick who had requested an appointment with him was none other than the "Sig-wik" that had been referred to by the dying Chinese, and Bill Fenton knew that he must play his cards carefully. If Sedgewick knew that Fenton eagerly desired to undertake such mission as might be offered, Sedgewick would probably become suspicious and make no offer at all. Fenton's course was, therefore, to appear not too eager, yet play his cards in such a manner that employment would virtually be forced upon him.

From behind the door he could hear the sounds of rustling motion. Abruptly the door opened.

A broad-shouldered man blocked the threshold. He held Bill Fenton's card in

his left hand, and his right hand dropped to the depths of a jacket pocket.

"You're Fenton?" he asked.

Bill Fenton's voice showed irritation.

"Obviously," he retorted.

The man stood slightly to one side. His right hand remained in his jacket pocket.

"Come in," he said.

Bill Fenton walked past the silent menace of that concealed right hand. He entered a huge room and had the confused sense of crowded humans packed together in silent companionship for moral support. His eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness.

HE CAUGHT a swirl of motion. A woman's trim figure materialized in front of him. She said, "Uncle Stanley, I'm going to leave you."

A man's voice boomed authoritative answer.

"Please don't, Anita."

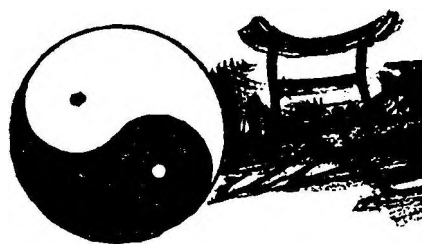
"But, uncle, I'm not afraid of a typhoon. I've been through hundreds of them."

"It isn't the typhoon, Anita."

"What is it, then?"

"I can't explain. Please stay."

The young woman stood, undecided. The owner of the authoritative voice



pushed forward. Fenton saw the outstretched hand.

"Fenton?"

"Yes."

"I'm Sedgewick, very much at your service. Pardon the informality all around. You understand our plans were upset by the typhoon. I'm sorry there's no light."

"None anywhere in the city," Fenton said.

His eyes made out the other man's features. He was tall, some four inches taller than Fenton. He was broad, without inclining too greatly to fat. There was something heavy, solid and substantial about him.

"I hardly expected you to call."

"This was the time you set in your message."

"Yes, but the typhoon, you know—However, permit me—Anita, may I present Mr. Fenton. Mr. Fenton, Miss Sedgewick, my niece."

Fenton bowed. He saw her shoulder move, and extended his hand. It was gripped by firm, cool fingers.

"Mr. Wood," said Sedgewick, indicating the man whose right hand was concealed in his jacket pocket.

Wood bowed. The right hand remained in the jacket pocket.

"Mr. Parr," Sedgewick went on.

A tall, thin Britisher stepped forward and bowed.

"Mr. Simms."

Simms was older, in his early fifties. He shook hands, and the palm was moist. Black eyes peered speculatively from beneath bushy brows that were tinged with gray.

"Been hearing about you ever since I came to China, Fenton," he said. "Mighty glad to know you."

"You've been here some time?" Fenton asked.

"Off and on," said Simms noncommittally, "not long."

There was a moment of strained silence.

Fenton gathered that these people were huddled together for protection against some menace. Newcomers might have sought each other's company to wait out the typhoon, but these were not newcomers. The way they wore their clothes, their very bearing—a hundred little insignificant things proclaimed them as knowing something of their China.

Simms turned to Sedgewick.

"Well," he said, "you'll be talking business with Mr. Fenton, so I'll run along."

Sedgewick made no effort to detain him.

"Be seeing you," he said.

Simms pushed toward the door.

"Cheerio," he observed. "Glad I met you, Fenton."

He opened the door and closed it behind him.

WHEN the door had closed, Wood, for the first time, took his right hand from the side pocket of his jacket.

"Sit down," said Sedgewick. "I've got some ice. Whiskey and soda, Fenton?"

"No thanks," Fenton said.

He slowly removed his coat. Sedgewick took it, hung the dripping garment on a hook by the door.

Sedgewick waved his hand in an inclusive gesture.

"Will everyone," he asked, "please be seated."

The manner in which they accepted his invitation indicated a deferential desire to please. It was as though the big man had established a precedent of iron-willed domination.

He turned to face Fenton when chairs had been rearranged, and all trace of cordiality had gone from his voice as he started questioning his visitor.

"You won't mind if I ask you a few questions about yourself?"

"Not in the least," said Fenton. And then, unconsciously irritated at something in the other's tone, added, "And if I don't want to answer any of them, I won't."

Sedgewick frowned, then smiled.

"Fair enough," he agreed.

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

"How long have you been in China?"

"For twenty years, at intervals."

"You speak the language?"

"Yes. That is," he said, "I do what the Chinese call '*gong tong wah*.'"

Sedgewick nodded.

"*Sahm Yup?*" he asked.

"*Sahm Yup,*" said Fenton, "and *Say Up.*"

"I understand you can take the disguise

of a Chinese and mingle with them," Sedgewick went on.

"I have done it," Fenton admitted. "I don't like to. It's taking chances—big chances."

"What," asked Sedgewick, "are your general reactions toward China? What is your feeling toward it?"

Fenton spoke frankly.

"I have been through the three stages," he said.

Sedgewick raised his eyebrows in silent interrogation.

"The first stage," Fenton said, "is experienced by virtually all white men who come here. They become afraid of China. It's too big for them, too vast. There are too many human beings. Competition is too keen. There's too much sickness, too much death. Men die like flies. Human life ceases to be precious and becomes one of the cheapest commercial commodities in existence."

Sedgewick nodded slowly.

"Then," Fenton said, "comes the second stage. It's the stage when one becomes accustomed to the surroundings, starts taking them as a matter of course, gets over his fear."

"And the third stage?" Sedgewick asked curiously.

"The third stage," Fenton said, "is when one gets a more complete perspective and learns to fear China all over again. That is a fear that's founded on respect, on the knowledge that anything can happen in China."

Sedgewick nodded his head slowly.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"No," Fenton said. "I received a cablegram from a mutual friend, stating that you wanted to get in touch with me. I know only the name that you're registered under."

"Would it make any difference to you?" Sedgewick asked, "if it should turn out I was rather an important diplomatic personage maintaining an incognito?"

"None whatever," said Fenton.

Sedgewick nodded thoughtfully.

"Very well," he said, "let's get down to business."

III

SEDGEWICK took a pencil from his pocket, opened a notebook, spread the paper firmly in place and drew a figure. The head of that figure was a blunt curve which tapered to a pointed tail, looking something like a crude polywog. He filled this in with shaded lines of the pencil, leaving a white dot for an eye.

Fenton watched him with interest.

"Does that mean anything to you?" Sedgewick asked.

Fenton slowly nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I think it does."

Sedgewick became excited.

He snapped the notebook closed, put it in his pocket, glanced meaningfully at the thin, imperturbable Englishman, who immediately slipped a notebook from his pocket and held a pencil poised in readiness over its pages.

"I am," said Sedgewick, "very much interested."

"Might I," asked Fenton, "have a sheet of paper and a pencil?"

Sedgewick tore a sheet from his notebook, handed it to his visitor. Then, as Fenton smoothed out the paper on a table, Sedgewick suddenly turned to the young woman.

"Anita," he said, "I wonder if you would mind going to your room for a few moments. I have a matter I want to discuss in the strictest confidence."

The men got to their feet as Anita Sedgewick smiled graciously.

"Not at all," she said. "I'll see you before you go, Mr. Fenton."

With quick, light grace, she moved through the half darkness of the room, opened the door and slipped into the corridor.

Sedgewick nodded to Wood, and Wood, his hand once more dropping significantly to the side pocket of his jacket, stood in the doorway and peered down the corridor un-

til there was the sound of a banging door, audible above the shriek of the typhoon wind. Then Wood closed the door of the room, took his hand from his jacket pocket and sat down.

Fenton laughed.

"After all," he said, "there's nothing mysterious about it. You've seen it hundreds of times."

Sedgewick leaned over the table.

"Go ahead," he said.

Fenton drew a circle, divided the circle into two parts by a double curved line. One of the segments he shaded with the pencil, leaving a white dot. In a corresponding position on the white segment, he put a black dot.

Sedgewick gave an exclamation.

"*Yin* and *Yang*," he said.

FENTON nodded.

"You see there," he said, "the whole symbol—the symbol of *Yin* and *Yang*—the Chinese mystic symbol of creation. In the beginning was *Tao*, the Cause, the Reason, the Principle, the Way that cannot be



walked, the Name that cannot be named, the Unknowable. From that, in due course and with various intermediate steps, came the Great Blank, and from the Great Blank, in due course, came *Yin* and *Yang*, which is the diagram of an egg, showing the yolk and the white. It is also indicative of Earth and of Heaven; of Masculine and Feminine."

Sedgewick was breathing hard.

"Yes, yes," he said in a hoarse whisper.

Nor could there be any mistaking the emotional tension of the other men in the room. Wood was crowding forward, his eyes staring. The tall, thin Englishman had started to make notes, but had stopped to stare down at the diagram Fenton had designated.

Fenton looked puzzled.

"I," he said, "see nothing to get particularly excited over. After all, it's a common symbol."

"But it has never been interpreted for us before," Sedgewick said.

Fenton frowned.

Sedgewick stared down at the paper and at the symbol, looking in the half light of the room like two whales—a black whale and a white whale chasing each other's tails and forming a perfect circle.

"I don't understand," Fenton said.

Sedgewick tapped the dark figure with his forefinger.

"I should have known it," he said softly. "*Yin*, the principle of darkness, the symbol of Earth."

"There is," Fenton said with a trace of irritation in his voice, "nothing to get excited about."

"That symbol," Sedgewick said slowly, "was found traced in ink on the hand of a wealthy Chinese in Shanghai, whose throat had been cut from ear to ear. That was two days ago.

"It was also found traced in red upon the handle of a dagger in Peiping. That dagger had been plunged into the heart of a wealthy munitions dealer. That was three days ago.

"Yesterday, a British subject in Canton was found in the middle of the Street of Jade. He had been stabbed in the back. Stuck in his cravat as a tie pin was a jade replica of this symbol.

"Yesterday afternoon at Amoy, a man died from poison. In the pocket of his coat was found an envelope which had been sent to him, addressed in Chinese. The envelope contained only a single sheet of paper on which had been traced this same symbol."

Fenton stared steadily. He remembered now the word "*Yin*" which had been gasped by the dying Chinese at Hongkong.

"Your information," he said, "is most complete."

"You forget," Sedgewick reminded him, "that Macau has telegraphic connections, that there is the radio and the cable."

"And you would have cablegrams delivered to you, dealing with this thing?" Fenton asked.

"In code," Sedgewick said.

FENTON got to his feet, took his light raincoat from the hook, slipped his arms into the sleeves.

"I'm sorry," he said, "this is out of my line."

"You mean you're afraid?" Sedgewick asked.

Fenton shook his head.

"What I meant was," he said, "that I tackle only such things as I can handle with a free hand and a lone hand."

"But you're afraid?" Sedgewick persisted.

Fenton met his eyes.

"Of course I'm afraid," he said angrily. "I know enough about China to be afraid of anything like that, but that's not the reason I'm not going ahead with it."

"What is the reason?"

"Those damned cablegrams," Fenton said, "and your attitude."

"I know something about China, myself," Sedgewick reminded him.

"You don't know enough."

Sedgewick took a quick breath.

"Look here, Fenton," he said, "suppose that I should tell you that this is of vital importance, not only to me but to China, not only to China but to the world? Suppose I should tell you that I have certain evidence, certain secret papers that have been gathered at the expense of much time, effort and expense—papers which I can show you here and now, if you're willing to look. Then what would you say?"

"I would say," Fenton said slowly, "that you were a fool."

Sedgewick stiffened. There was an involuntary gasp from Wood. The tall Englishman let his lips flicker in a fleeting smile.

"Why?" asked Sedgewick.

"To bring such papers to Macau."

"They are," Sedgewick said, "where no one could ever find them."

"Chinese," Fenton remarked, "have a way of loosening tongues."

"A loose tongue," Sedgewick remarked, "can give no knowledge which the mind does not have."

Fenton shrugged his shoulders, turned toward the door. In the doorway he bowed.

"Thanks," he said, "for thinking of me."

Sedgewick took three quick steps toward him. His hand went to the inner pocket of his silk coat, took out an envelope addressed with Chinese characters. From the envelope he took a single sheet of paper. On that sheet of paper had been sketched the black symbol of *Yin*.

"If I told you," he said, "that this was delivered to me yesterday, would it make any difference?"

Fenton stared at it seriously, then shrugged his shoulders and twisted the knob of the door.

"No," he said.

They were standing staring at him as he slammed the door shut and walked rapidly down the corridor.

The typhoon wind howled and moaned about the building. Rain lashed against the windows in sheeted torrents, and in the warm humidity the human skin oozed slimy perspiration.

Standing in the corridor, Fenton's eyes narrowed in thought.

He wanted most desperately to be in this thing. He realized now that it was a far greater thing than had appeared on the surface, but he knew only too well that if he went into it at all, he must handle it in his own way, and in order to do that he must not appear too eager. Slowly he walked down the uncarpeted corridor.

IV

THE typhoon passed speedily on to the north. By four o'clock, the wind had shifted southward. By nine o'clock, it was blowing from the west, and the rain had all but ceased.

Rickshaw coolies, attired in home-made rainsuits, consisting of dried palm leaves, gradually began to put in an appearance. Figures flitted about the streets given over to the *pah-pah jie*.

Signs, which proclaimed to the unsophisticated that the places in front of which they were hung were "Tea and Chatter Houses," conveyed an entirely different meaning to the initiated. Shadowy figures slipped through the lighter showers of rain and ascended the dark stairways. For the opium smoker must be served, and nerves that have been frayed by the roar of a typhoon can best be solaced in the oblivion of the poppy. Only the novice, hopelessly unsophisticated, was fooled by those signs proclaiming that the houses were given over to tea and chatter. Once back of the doorway, which invariably blocked the head of the stairs, one found neither tea nor chatter, but long rows of stalls and darkness, the sweetish smell of opium smoke, the flickering light from peanut oil lamps, the restless sounds of human motion as bodies moved about in an ecstasy of delight upon the polished wood of the opium stalls, to later become motionless in the oblivion of dreams.

Bill Fenton passed the tea and chatter houses, threaded his way along the street of the *pah-pah jie*. He entered one of the principal gambling houses and climbed two flights of stairs, walked through a door and entered a room, in the center of which was an oblong hole some twenty feet long by ten feet wide. About this opening was built a railing, and around the railing was a long table in front of which were stools. Some two dozen individuals were grouped on the stools, leaning over the rail, watching down through the opening.

Light from the opening streamed up on

the faces of the watchers, and Bill Fenton gave a swift glance at the faces, to see if he recognized any of them. He seated himself upon one of the stools. An attendant brought him a plate of melon seeds, some cigarettes, little pieces of sweetmeats, a pad of paper, ruled in squares, a dozen or more squares, each filled with a pencil notation showing the numbers that had been running.

Looking through the opening in the floor, Bill Fenton could see another similar opening on the floor below, and on the floor below that was a table, on which he was looking, a table around which men were grouped. At the head of the table, a man had just raised a metal bowl from a pile of Chinese coins with square holes cut in the center. With a long chop-stick, the man started counting out the coins. When he had segregated four coins, he pushed



them to one side and segregated four more. In this way he slowly diminished the pile in groups of four.

When the last group of four had been removed, there remained three coins. Three, therefore, was the winning number. There was a slight rustle of motion. A man seated at the far end of the oblong opening lowered a basket. Money was piled in the basket. With a deft flip of the wrist, the man raised the basket and tossed it across the well to a Chinese, who gravely took out the money. The basket made other trips, and then the man at the head of the table on the lower floor deposited another bowlful of coins, the bowl being inverted, so that it covered a portion of the pile.

FENTON took a five dollar bill from his pocket, held it so that it attracted the attention of the man with the basket. Almost instantly the basket sailed through the air, and, as though it had been endowed with volition of its own, came to rest in front of Fenton on the little table.

Fenton dropped the bill in the basket, held up three fingers. The man nodded, dropped the basket to the table below, chanting the formula for a play on the three.

Fenton nibbled the sweetmeats and looked around him. The game was interminably slow, judged by Western standards. The Chinese players, however, sat patiently watchful, all but motionless, nibbling occasionally at melon seeds or smoking cigarettes, waiting for a propitious moment to place a bet.

Fenton lit a cigarette, caught a glimpse of someone standing uncertainly in the doorway, then saw the tall form of the Englishman he had met earlier in the day.

Fenton caught Parr's eye, nodded and smiled.

Parr returned the greeting, moved across the floor to Fenton's side.

"Mind if I watch?"

"Not at all," Fenton said. "It's rather tedious, you know, but it's about all there is to while away the time."

Parr looked at him sharply.

"*Fan tan?*" he asked.

"Yes. You know how it's played?"

Parr nodded.

FENTON, leaning over the railing, watched idly the diminishing pile of coins. There still remained a pile some two or three inches in height, a pile that would have baffled the shrewdest of Occidental observers who might try to estimate the number of coins. But one of the Chinese observers leaned forward intently, then raised his right hand, with three fingers extended.

There was a faintly audible sigh from the balcony, but no comments. The man below caught Fenton's eye and nodded.

Fenton smiled back.

This man, recognizing the wealth of the *bak gwicc loe* who had wagered five dollars upon the three, sought to give the first information of a winning number, thereby earning a small tip.

The long chop-stick segregated the coins in groups of four. Number three was the winning number. The basket slid to the table. The Chinese who kept the accounts folded bills into the basket. The man who held the cord shortened it rapidly, gave a quick flip, and the basket sailed across space, to come to rest in front of Bill Fenton.

Fenton picked up the banknotes, smoothed them out, suddenly stopped mid-motion. A note was folded in with the bank notes, a note which was written on a very thin rice paper.

Fenton palmed the note, slipped the bills into his pocket, picked up a melon seed and split it with a deft pressure of his front teeth.

He heard Parr's drawling voice at his shoulder:

"Didn't I see something put in the basket?" he asked. "A note, or something?"

"Did you?" asked Fenton.

"Yes," Parr said, "and I got a glimpse of the character that was on the bottom."

Fenton said nothing, but pushed back his stool, moved a few paces away from the table, stood so that his body concealed his hands from the curious gaze of any of the players. He unfolded the rice paper.

IT WAS written in English, with a pen that traced the characters with the delicacy of a feminine hand.

"*My Dear Mr. Fenton,*" read the note. "*It is so fortunate for you that you have learned so well the lesson of the Orient, that the white man should concern himself only with the things that concern white men, that China is for the Chinese, and that he lives longest who has the least curiosity.*"

There was no signature on the note, but

at the bottom was a black, shaded curve, like a swimming shark, with a white, balciful eye—the symbol of *Yin*.

Fenton heard Parr's audible gasp, then turned to face him.

"Know anything about it?" he asked casually.

"What do you mean?"

"Did you know I was going to get that note?"

"Certainly not."

"You were instrumental in seeing that it was delivered?"

"Of course not. What the devil are you getting at?"

Fenton took Parr's arm in his hand. The fingers gripped the Britisher's elbow as though they had been talons of steel.

"Come on," Fenton said, "we're going places and talk."

"But, I say . . ." Parr protested. "I don't want——"

Fenton pushed him toward the doorway. Beyond that doorway were stairs, a lounging room, and back of that a room where a dice game was going on. The waning typhoon had discouraged many of the players. There was a vacant corner in the lounging room. Fenton pushed Parr into this corner. There was no longer anything leisurely about him. His body seemed filled to overflowing with vibrant energy. His black, restless eyes bored steadily into the protesting countenance of the Britisher.

"How did you know I was here?" he asked.

"I didn't."

"Why did you come here?"

"For the same reason you did, I presume. I wanted to play, just passing away the time."

"When did you leave the hotel?"

"Look here," Parr said, "I resent this manner of——"

Fenton squared his shoulders.

"Forget it," he said. "It may be important as hell. When did you leave the hotel?"

"About half an hour ago."

"By rickshaw?"

"Yes."

"Who was left in the hotel?"

"Stanley Sedgewick, Oscar Wood, his bodyguard, Anita Sedgewick, his niece, and Ming Toy, a Chinese servant who watches generally over the native service."

"Who is this man, Simms?"

"I don't know too much about him. He's inclined to be friendly—acts as though he's a tourist—but sometimes I think he knows his China better than he lets on. He came on the boat with us from Shanghai to Hongkong and got acquainted."

"Interested in Miss Sedgewick?"

"I don't think so."

"Who is Wood?"

"A bodyguard."

"That isn't telling me anything you haven't said before. Who is he? Where did he come from? How long has he been with Sedgewick?"

"Some three or four months. He had the highest references."

"What are his qualifications for the job?"

"He was bodyguard for one of the big gangsters in the States."

"Why did Sedgewick think he needed a bodyguard?"

"That's his business."

"Who is Sedgewick?"

"That, also, is his business."

"Is Sedgewick his right name?"

"That, I think, is something I would prefer not to answer."

"What is he doing in China?"

"Look here," Parr said, "those are questions I can't answer, but I see no harm in reminding you that you had your chance to come in on this thing and you turned it down. What I'm trying to find out is how this beggar knew that you had turned it down, and——"

"Come on," Fenton said, "we're going back to the hotel."

"Why? Do you think something's happened?"

"I'm going to find out."

"You're going to take an interest in it, then?"

"Perhaps. Look here, Parr, you're not telling me the truth. You didn't come drifting in here just idly. You knew I was here."

"'Pon my honor, I didn't, old chap, but I will admit this: I looked around through a couple of the principal gambling places. I was hoping I'd find you."

Fenton relaxed slightly.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I wanted to tell you something."

"What?"

"Sedgewick," Parr said, "has placed his niece in a very peculiar position."

"In what way?"

"Sedgewick is carrying on some important political intrigue. His niece knows nothing about it. Sedgewick has some papers which are very valuable, indeed. He has concealed them in the personal belongings of Anita Sedgewick."

"She knows where they are?"

"No, that's where the old man thinks he's been diabolically clever. She doesn't have any idea that she's carrying them around in her bags."

"Who does?"

"I think the Chinese, Ming Toy, does."

"We'll get rickshaws," Fenton said.

"But really, old chap, I don't see why you should get so damnably excited. It isn't——"

FENTON interrupted with short, savage sentences that he snapped out with the rapid-fire delivery of a machine gun.

"Let's suppose there's some secret organization that's headed by a man who has taken the symbol of *Yin*. We may also concede that man knows of me. We can go farther, and suppose that he knows I turned down Sedgewick's offer this afternoon.

"That doesn't mean anything. It's no reason why he should send me a note of this kind. Anyone who knows my temperament knows that this kind of a note would make me throw in with Sedgewick. I've got a position to maintain in China. I

can't let some Chinese bandit leader put me in the position of being afraid of him. I can't even let him seem to put me in that position. My missions in China are dangerous. They have been highly lucrative because they've been successful. They won't be successful in the future if the Chinese think I'm afraid.

"I don't think Sedgewick is a fool. I think he realizes all of these things. I think he wrote this note, or knew about it. I think he did it in order to make me indig-



nant and cause me to join forces with him. The note is written on rice paper. It's written with a fountain-pen, however. I doubt very much if the writing was done by a Chinese. Therefore, let us assume the note was written by Sedgewick.

"It's the delivery of the note that concerns me. It was delivered through some Chinese who had access to the *fan tan* table. When you know the routine of these Chinese gambling houses as well as I do, you will understand what that means. Therefore, some person in Sedgewick's employ was authorized to deliver that note to me under unusual circumstances. That person managed to get the note delivered in the manner which you saw. That means the person has far more power with the Chinese than he should have. Does that mean anything to you?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Parr said slowly, "You mean that someone in Sedgewick's employ must have sold him out? That the delivery was *too* efficient?"

"Exactly."

"And you were suspecting me?"

Fenton squared his shoulders, stared steadily at the tall, slim Englishman.

"Certainly," he said. "I am suspecting

everybody. I still suspect you. In a matter of this kind I trust no one."

Parr's face darkened.

"As far as I'm concerned," he said, "you can——"

He checked himself, took a deep breath and then smiled. "Well," he said, "I don't know but what you're right. I guess you should suspect everyone until you know who the guilty one is. That's the safest way."

Fenton nodded.

"Come on," he said, "we're going to the hotel. You'll go in the first rickshaw. Don't make any sudden moves."

"Bad as all that?" asked Parr, with an attempt at levity.

"As bad as all that," Fenton said, and did not smile.

THE rain had ceased. There was still a wind which blew wisps of tortured clouds across the clearing heavens. Rickshaw coolies, running in bare feet and light pantaloons, padded through the wet streets.

Bill Fenton stood for a moment in the doorway of the gambling house.

"*Chaih wie!*" he called.

Two rickshaws dashed down the street, with the bare feet of the sprinting coolies pounding the wet pavement. A third rickshaw that had rounded the corner, seeing itself out-distanced, slowed to a sulky stop. Parr entered the first rickshaw. Fenton climbed in the second one.

"I say," Parr said in a last note of friendly warning, "you're going to feel pretty cheap when you try to explain this to Sedgewick. You're virtually escorting me back by force, you know."

"Yes," said Fenton shortly, "I know."

The rickshaws padded through the warm stillness of the tropical night.

The Hotel Riviera had blossomed into nocturnal activity following the enforced idleness engendered by the raging typhoon. Lights had been re-connected and blazed from the building. A group of rickshaw coolies squatted on the shafts of their vehicles, waiting for passengers. Already, an

adventurous junk or two had started to crawl back to the junk anchorage out in the Praia Grande Bay.

Parr made no move to pay the rickshaw boys, letting Fenton settle for both accounts. There was an air of cold hostility about the tall Englishman as he led the way across the lobby.

Anita Sedgewick was seated at a small table, a cigarette between her fingers, a cordial glass on the table in front of her. Across the table from her sat George Simms, his face wreathed in smiles.

Anita Sedgewick caught Parr's eyes, then her glance shifted to Fenton. She made a welcoming gesture with the hand that contained the cigarette.

"And how did the typhoon treat you, Mr. Fenton?" she called.

Simms got to his feet, smiled graciously and said jovially, "Can't say that I like this China of yours, Fenton. There's too much wind."

Fenton stood by the table, smiling with his lips, his eyes hard, glittering and watchful.

"Is your uncle in, Miss Sedgewick?"

"Yes, he's upstairs."

"Is anyone with him?"

"Yes, Oscar Wood, and, I think, Ming Toy."

SHE turned back to Parr and said, "What happened to you, Richard? You were starting out to woo the Goddess of Chance I thought."

Parr made a grimace.

"Your friend, Mr. Fenton, thought I should return with him," he said.

Fenton nodded, said formally, "if you'll excuse us, please," and turned toward the stairs.

"Come on, Parr."

The tall Britisher hesitated for a moment, then, shrugging his shoulders as though he had decided to accept an embarrassing situation in a whimsical manner, strode after Fenton.

They climbed the stairs, and Fenton led the way to the room.

"Just a moment," Parr said, "you'd better let me do this. You might collect a bullet in your guts."

He knocked on the door.

"Oh, Mr. Sedgewick," he called.

There was no answer.

"I say, in there," Parr said, "why so bally secretive?"

His knuckles pounded heavily on the door.

There was no answer. He frowned, turned the knob. The door opened readily.

Parr was the first one in the room. He almost knocked Fenton over as he recoiled with an involuntary backward leap.

The room was in disorder. Baggage had been opened, garments thrown about the floor. Drawers had been pulled from the dressers, their contents dumped in an indiscriminate pile.

In the center of the room, his arms and legs twisted in a grotesque posture, lay Oscar Wood. His face was dark. The neck seemed peculiarly swollen.

Fenton pushed Parr to one side, ran to the body of the man on the floor. He knelt beside it, felt the wrist, then pulled a knife from his pocket. He touched the folds of purple flesh of the neck at a point where they seemed to part in the middle and fold over on either side.

The blade of Fenton's knife slid into the overhanging fold of skin as delicately as though it had been the knife of a surgeon. There was a sharp snapping sound, and a colorless thong seemed to leap away from the neck.

"Strangler's silk," said Fenton. "This thing only happened a few minutes ago. We may be able to do something by artificial respiration."

The face of the big bodyguard was a dark hue similar to that of putty, but as Fenton labored over him, working with his hands, manipulating the shoulders, diaphragm, chest and arms, the color gradually became less purplish.

"I believe he's coming around," Fenton said. "Would you mind running down

and calling Miss Sedgewick? Ask her to come up right away."

"Should she see this?" asked Parr.

"Hell," Fenton said, "she isn't an infant, you know."

PARR hesitated a moment, then left the room. Fenton continued to work over the unconscious man, applying all of the tricks of artificial respiration that he had learned in the Orient. He was still working frantically when Parr opened the door once more and said in a strained voice, "Look here, Fenton, there's something radically wrong here. Stanley Sedgewick seems to have disappeared, and the minute we came upstairs Simms said something to Miss Anita and the pair of them left the hotel. The unfinished cordial glasses are still on the table. One of the rickshaw men saw them go out.

"On the way up I looked in her room to call Ming Toy, and he's lying on the floor, unconscious. He's still breathing, but he's had an awful wallop on the head. There's one of those black polywog things on his forehead."

Fenton paused for a moment in his work, opened the limp hands of the man on the floor.

On each of the palms, apparently stamped with some form of waterproof black ink, was the peculiar curved figure—the symbol of *Yin*—the night-side force of creation—the figure that was symbolic of the earth, of cunning and trickery.

"Watch me," Fenton called. "Watch carefully what I'm doing. Do you see just how I'm manipulating the shoulders and then pushing on the lower part of the chest?"

"Yes," Parr said.

"Get down here and do it, and don't stop, no matter what happens."

Fenton jumped to his feet. Parr knelt on the floor.

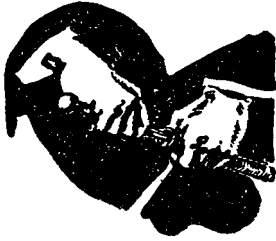
"No, no," Fenton said. "Don't push down on the shoulders. Push up, and act as though you were trying to bring the shoulder blades together back under the

neck. That's right. Now raise the body with your hands. Now push on the diaphragm. Now work on the arms the way I showed you. That's better—stay with it."

Fenton whirled, stood for a moment, looking about the chaotic confusion of the room, trying to find something that would serve as a weapon.

His eyes lit on a cane, which, to the uneducated eyes was merely a solid, substantial cane. There was, however, a metallic ring circling the upper portion of the cane. It is this ring that is a trade mark of the sword canes made on the Street of the Metal Workers in Peiping.

Fenton picked up the cane, pulled sharply. The cane parted, and a blade of



finest hand-forged steel leaped out of the scabbard to glitter in the light of the room.

Fenton nodded, thrust the cane back into the scabbard, ran through the door, down the corridor, and plunged down the steps two at a time.

One of the rickshaw boys gave him the information that he wanted.

FENTON barked swift orders. Two coolies dropped their rickshaws, dashed forward. Fenton entered a third rickshaw. The man in the shafts gave a quick guttural. Two men leaned their weight against the back of the rickshaw, one on either side. The vehicle started with a lurch.

Save on those few wide streets in the Chinese cities where automobiles can travel, this is the fastest form of transportation known to the Orient, a light rubber-

tired rickshaw, with a thin-waisted, deep-chested coolie in the shafts, two men on either side of the vehicle at the rear, the three running at top speed, sending the rickshaw forward by the impetus of their combined efforts, ready to fling their weight back should it become necessary to make a sudden stop.

They made but little noise, rushing along through the warm night. The rubber-tired wheels of the rickshaw slid smoothly along the pavements. The bare feet of the runners sounded merely as a rhythmic patting. The coolies kept step, running on their toes, as sprinters run.

Short, sharp jolts ran through the rickshaw as the wheels ran over bits of tree branches that had been blown down by the high wind, but already the Chinese scavengers were at work. Men, women and children crouched about the road, picking up bits of wood, dropping them into baskets, fighting for every smallest bit of fuel.

Once or twice the flying rickshaw almost ran over some of these scavenger parties, but the running men, with sharp cries of *Wah, Wie, Ho!*, dispersed the crouched figures, sending them scampering for shelter as the rickshaw loomed up out of the night, traveling at unexpected speed, and swept on into the hot darkness with only the patter of bare feet to mark its passage.

ABRUPTLY the rickshaw veered. The man in front grunted an unintelligible command, leaned back on the shafts. The men on the rear pulled back. The rickshaw canted sharply up in the air, then slowly slid to a stop.

"Massa," said the rickshaw coolie in front, "rickshaw smash-up, top-side."

Over to the right, and dragged up to the top of a wall which surrounded a wayside shrine, was a battered rickshaw. One of the wheels, however, was still slowly spinning.

Fenton jumped from the rickshaw, charged toward the wall.

Voices sounded in the excited babble of a Chinese mob. Brown hands clutched

over the wall at the white man. Men garbed in the nondescript shirt and pantaloons of the coolie class, or, in many instances, naked from the waist up, swarmed over the wall like rats.

Back of the wall a woman screamed; a man cursed. There was the thud of blows, the sound of a struggle.

Fenton whipped out the glittering steel of the sword blade.

Instinctively, Fenton masked his knowledge of Chinese, shouting in pidgin-English, "Go back! You men plenty bring one piecee missy, one piecee massa. You no bring, I kill."

For a moment the whirling blade had its effect. The prestige of the white man, the aggressive domination of one who comes of a race of fighters, confronting a race whose creed for centuries has been that of passive resistance, held the mob steady.

A voice from behind the wall called out in purest Contonese, "Scum, earthworms, do the bidding of the Supreme Master of the Dark Egg! His commands have been pressed upon you and you have taken oath that you will fail him not. To fail is surely to die. The evil gods of darkness await to do his bidding if you but falter."

The words might have been an electric spur jabbing each one of the men simultaneously. They came forward in a horde.

Back of the wall, the woman screamed again.

The rickshaw coolies had long since taken to their heels, abandoning the vehicle, running as fast as they could pelt down the highway, emitting from time to time shrill cries of terror.

Trained runners were these, and they ran with the speed of a startled rabbit, leaving Fenton alone to face the angry mob, and Fenton realized instantly that this was no ordinary Chinese mob. These men were actuated by some fanatical belief. Their numbers gave them courage. They rushed in upon the flashing blade.

Twice the blade bit out, and the steel

grew red to the handle. Two men fell screaming to the ground. A third lunged forward, under the point of the blade. Fenton's left fist slashed upward with a terrific upper-cut. He felt the numbing impact of jarring shock up his arm as the man catapulted backwards, struck his head on the pavement.

The right hand swished the sword blade about in a whirling arc.

The men who faced Fenton's blade, recognizing its menace, pushed backward, clearing a semi-circle about Fenton. Those in the rear of the mob pushed forward, giving a swirling motion to the crowd as the pressure of those behind was counteracted by the pushing backward of those in the front ranks.

The pressure from the rear increased.

Someone called a taunt.

The semi-circle of men jostled about. A man was pushed forward. The impetus of those in the rear swept the front row forward.

Fenton lunged with his sword cane.

The Chinese rushed.

Once more, Fenton thrust out his blade, and the inert body of the man who was impaled upon the sword was pushed forward by the weight of those behind him so that it was impossible for Fenton to withdraw the weapon. He let go his hold of the handle, lashed about with his fists. A veritable wall of men swarmed over him. He could feel the oppressive contact of sweating bodies. The smell of sour perspiration was in his nostrils. Jabbering voices were in his ears. Gouging fingers clutched at his eyes and throat. Men swarmed to his shoulders, climbed even to his head.

He toppled, staggered about, trying to keep his feet. The sheer weight of numbers pressed him to the ground. Feet kicked at him, bare feet with stiff toes that dug into his sides. A bare foot pressed down on his face. Something struck his head.

Dimly, as though from a great distance, he could hear a voice shouting in Chinese,

ordering the men to take their prisoners and flee. Fenton dimly realized a responsibility which weighed upon him. He worked his arms up so that they protected his face, doubled himself into a ball.

Feet trampled him. He heard once more the sound of orders, then something heavy and hard crashed against his skull. He felt as though a photographer had somehow managed to take a flashlight exposure of the interior of his brain.

Blackness rushed down upon him, sucking him into the well of oblivion.

V

BILL FENTON retched and moaned.

He was conscious of fingers at his throat, at the back of his neck, exploring fingers that went down his arms and legs, feeling for broken bones. He was conscious also of a nausea which gripped at the pit of his stomach. As his senses returned, he became aware of a tall form bending over him, became conscious of acute pains and aches in his muscles.

"No bones broken."

It was the voice of Richard Parr, the Britisher, speaking, apparently, more to himself than to Fenton.

Fenton retched once more, made shift to sit up. Parr's hands pulled at his shoulders, assisted him to a sitting position.

"Where's the girl?" asked Fenton, his voice thick.

"You mean Miss Anita?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. I found the smashed rickshaws. One of the coolies tipped me off to what had happened. I came on the run."

"How about Wood?"

"He came around all right. His throat's sore. He can hardly talk, but we got him in time."

"And the Chinese?"

"You mean Ming Toy?"

"Yes."

"All right. He's with me."

A figure moved a step forward in the

darkness. Fenton got a glimpse of a man who stood with shoulders humped slightly drooping, a man who stood silent as a graven image, after the manner of a dignified Chinese philosopher.

"She was here," Fenton said. "A mob had her. We must get after them."

"The Portuguese police are all excited," Parr reported. "They're running around in circles. I wouldn't go back to the hotel if I could avoid it. They'll grab you as a witness, and we've got work to do."

"You slipped away?" Fenton asked, struggling to his feet, standing for a moment while the entire world seemed to rock, as though shaken by some earthquake, and hearing Parr's voice coming to him, apparently over a great chasm of darkness, as the Britisher said, "Yes, Ming Toy and I got out of the rear door."

Fenton leaned against the wall, took in deep breaths of night air.

"I think Simms must have decoyed her into the hands of the mob," he said. "The



mob was here, waiting. They carried her away. It couldn't have been accidental."

"Simms, eh?" said Parr grimly.

Ming Toy came pushing forward.

"Massa," he said.

Parr apparently did not hear him. It was Fenton who gave the permission to speak.

"What is it, Ming Toy?"

"I look around," the Chinese said. "Some men get cut up. I find plenty big knife belong massa. Plenty much blood come. Cut 'em up. Two piecee men allee same dead. Two piecee plenty bad men. I find this on one piecee man."

He unfolded a bit of thin paper, handed it to Parr.

Parr struck a match. By the flickering light could be seen Chinese characters, and below those Chinese characters, the seal of the Dark Egg—the symbol of *Yin*.

"Can you read it?" Parr asked, striking another match.

FENTON nodded and groaned as the all but involuntary motion of his head jerked his neck muscles and seemed to jar his brain loose within his skull. After a moment his eyes focused. He read the Chinese characters.

"Ever hear of the Triad society or the *Ko-lo-wui*, or the *Kuch'eng*?"

"No," Parr said. "What are they?"

"Very powerful Chinese secret societies. They have a peculiar way of drafting candidates for initiation. These societies have caused most of the real serious trouble in China. The Boxers were similar."

"Well," Parr said, "what about it?"

"This is a notice," Fenton said slowly, "that the bearer has been drafted as a candidate for the following of the Lord of the Black Egg, that he is to present himself tonight at *Tum Jie* for initiation into the secret ceremonies and to take the oath of allegiance, that he will come to the building which is to the south of the Dragon's Citadel."

"That," Parr said, "doesn't do us very much good. It shows we're dealing with a secret society and that the head of it is known as the Lord of the Black Egg."

"It shows," Fenton said, his mind clearing rapidly, his speech growing more incisive, "that this mysterious head of the clan is going to be at *Tum Jie* tonight. That means that the prisoners will doubtless be taken to him."

"Then we can get the authorities," Parr said, "and——"

"Wait a minute," Fenton interrupted, "you're forgetting something. Macau is Portuguese. When we leave the Portuguese settlement, we're in China. That's why *Tum Jie* is such a hangout for pirates."

Fenton whirled to Ming Toy, started barking questions at him in Chinese.

"How long have you served the master who is gone?"

"I have served the *Nouey Jie*, his niece," said Ming Toy, "not the man himself."

"How long?"

"Five years."

"Do you know this man who uses the sacred symbol of *Yin*?"

"I know that there is much talk among the Chinese that a man comes, who is sent by Heaven to drive the foreigners from the country; that the Japanese are to be driven back beyond Manchuria; that the British are to leave Hongkong; that the international settlements in Shanghai are to be abolished; that China will once more be governed by Chinese."

"And how is this to be accomplished?"

"I do not know. The master will remember that I speak only of that which has come to my ears."

"And the sign of this is the dark sign of *Yin*?"

"The sign of that is the sign of the Earth, the thing that is to engulf those who invade China."

"Do you know the Dragon's Citadel in *Tum Jie*?"

"It is a rock on the hillside. I have heard the *Feng Shui* describe it in fixing the place for the burial of the dead."

STILL speaking in Chinese, Fenton gave an order.

"Bring me," he said, "the clothes from the body of the man who possessed this paper."

The Chinese turned and vanished into the darkness.

"What's the pow-wow?" Parr asked.

Fenton spoke swiftly.

"Somewhere in your crowd," he said, "there's a traitor. Sedgewick in some way has uncovered something that is inimical to the interests of this Chinese secret society—that something is going to make a lot of trouble. Sedgewick has been either killed or kidnapped, or both. His niece was captured. They had ample opportunity to kill her. They didn't want to kill

her. That means they want her alive, and that means——”

He let his voice trail away into significant silence.

“Torture?” asked Parr in a voice that sounded strained and rasping.

“Yes.”

The tall, thin Britisher seemed to straighten.

“Count me in,” he said.

“We’re fighting a Chinese secret society. We’re fighting a bunch of fanatics. If you know China at all, you know the power of these secret societies; you know what fanaticism does to the Chinese.”

“You mean there’s little chance we’ll win through?” Parr asked.

“Yes.”

The Britisher nodded.

“Deal me in,” he said. “When can we start?”

“On various prior occasions,” Fenton said, “I have disguised myself as Chinese. There’s to be an initiation ceremony into the society of the Lord of the Black Egg. We have here a summons drafting the bearer as a candidate. I am going to disguise myself and take the candidate’s place.”

Parr’s arm gripped Fenton’s shoulder.

“Ripping,” he said. “Sporting of you, old chap, and all that, but I can’t allow it. You don’t know Anita. I know her. I love her. It’s my task. Get me the blighter’s clothes. Give me the paper, and——”

“You don’t speak Chinese?”

“Oh a word here and there,” Parr said casually, “but I can get along all right.”

Fenton laughed.

“You don’t understand,” he said, “I’ve lived among them for twenty years. I’ll probably get caught. You’d be certain to. You’d never even get to *Tum Jie*.”

“Oh, but I say, old chap, if a life has to be sacrificed you know, you’ve no right to——”

“It isn’t a sacrifice,” Fenton said grimly, “it’s a fighting chance.”

Ming Toy appeared from the surround-

ing darkness, moving upon silent feet.

He dropped greasy, sweat-sour clothes to the ground.

“There is,” he said, “but little time,” and he spoke in swift Cantonese, showing that he had divined Fenton’s purpose.

Fenton slipped from his clothes. There was a leather pouch beneath his left armpit. He opened this pouch, took out a small bottle of liquid, a wig of coarse black hair. Swiftly he smeared the liquid over his body, and Ming Toy, kneeling in the darkness, assisted in applying the stain.

Fenton pulled on the sour smelling garments.

Ming Toy dropped to his knees as though carelessly seeking to adjust the bottom of the pantaloons. He reached out until his fingers touched the hem of the garment. He bowed his head and remained for a moment motionless on his knees, fingers clutching the hem of the garment, head bowed.

VI

THE stone house reeked with fumes. Peanut oil lamps, placed at various points of vantage in the upper wall, illuminated the heads of the packed Chinese. These heads were pushed closely together like eggs in an incubator. The yellowish light flickered over the tops of the heads, showed glistening cheek bones, black, glittering eyes. The bodies of the crowded spectators were in shadow.

There was an unnatural sense of tension about the room. It was against human precedent to have so many bodies thrust into such crowded quarters and to have such a complete lack of sound.

There was no coughing, no restless shuffling of bodies. Packed Chinese were jammed against the walls of the building in a sweltering mass of humanity, yet their attention was so riveted on that which was taking place in the center of the stone chamber that they were held motionless in spell-bound concentration.

Rising and falling like wind waves blow-

ing over sand, was a sound which seemed to fill the big room, a peculiar wind noise which was the result of rhythmic breathing in unison.

These men were practicing a group hypnotism, a spiritual intoxication which is brought about by a community of effort. Sometimes it is accomplished by mass singing, sometimes by the repetition of sounds. The order of the Lord of the Black Egg brought it about by uniform breathing.

In the center of the floor was a cleared oblong, perhaps ten feet wide by twenty feet long. At the upper part of this oblong stood a man who waved a bamboo banner slowly back and forth. As it swung to the west, the multitude inhaled. As it swung to the east, they exhaled. And they had done this in unison long enough to make the rhythmic breathing mechanical.

Near the center of the oblong stood the group of candidates who were to be initiated into the mysterious order of *Yin*, the order of the Lord of the Black Egg, the night-side forces that were to be directed purely on a material plane, for the purpose of bringing about physical changes.

THERE were twelve of these candidates, and they stood under an arch of steel and copper, an arch which was composed of drawn swords, held at arms' length by a group of men who wore rich silk robes into which mirrors had been sewed, so that, with every motion, the small mirrors reflected back myriad lights from the peanut oil lamps which flickered from the walls.

The swords on the east side were of copper, those on the west of steel. The candidates stood in single file, with bowed heads.

Each of the twelve candidates held in his hand a mystic symbol. The first six held high in their right hands symbols indicating the sun, the moon, the stars, mountains, the dragon and the pheasant.

The remaining six held in their left hands, and down below the level of the waist, symbols indicating goblets, pond-

weed, flames of fire, grains of rice, an axe, and the mysterious figure which has in the Chinese language a certain peculiar significance, a figure forming a peculiarly shaped cross, with a line enclosing both the top and the bottom, a figure which is said to be double of the character for "self," placed back to back.

The bamboo banner waved back and forth, with the mechanical regularity of a metronome, and every one in the room, including the candidates, breathed regularly in unison.

MASS psychology is an entirely different and more primitive thing than individual psychology. So it is with group hypnotism. And the force of that strange hypnotic bond which was cementing these men together, at the same time it worked them into a frenzy, was indicated by the



glittering of the dark eyes, the foreheads that were beaded with perspiration, the expanded nostrils, the taut lips. It was indicated, also, by some peculiar psychic tension which filled the room as though it had been a blind force, like static electricity, building up in a condenser, ready to finally reach a white-hot spark that would shoot its devastating way toward the goal to which it might be directed.

The file of men holding the swords slid the swords gently along each other, until the rasping of metal on metal could be heard all over the room. Then, at some inaudible signal, the blades parted, the arch was opened, the candidates raised their faces toward the heavens.

For the space of twelve rhythmic breaths they stood, looking through the opened arch, up into the smoky darkness of the room. Then the swords came together once more. The arch closed. Someone snapped out an order, and the sound of the human voice seemed weird and bizarre in the room.

The candidates started a slow scuffle, moving through the arch of copper and steel, forming a circle on the far side.

The swords clashed together. The arch lowered. The men with the mirrored garments formed another circle, which circle presently opened into a crescent, leaving a man standing in the center.

BILL FENTON, disguised as a coolie about to be initiated into the mystic order of *Yin*, held in his hand the symbol of a dragon and was grateful that the room had no more brilliant illumination.

The Chinese in the center of the room began to recite a ritual. He spoke in a sing-song Cantonese.

"Each of the candidates," he said, "has a certain symbol. This is to show you that each candidate standing by himself is a part of a scheme of things. He holds a power which becomes of its greatest value only when it is welded into a uniform action. The sun, the moon, and the stars point out the knowledge of the heavens, a knowledge which is possessed by our Illustrious Master. The mountains indicate the fixity of purpose which must develop character. The dragon denotes the principle of virtue. The various colors of the pheasant all denote some pleasing mental state which must be cultivated. The goblets symbolize purity. The containers are made for a useful purpose. They are to be filled with that which is of use.

"The pondweed is the symbol of the growth of virtue; the fire, of zeal; the rice, of plenty; the hatchet is a symbol of justice in the punishment of vice; and the symbols of the signs for self, turned back to back, indicate that man's nature is dual, that he must forever turn his back upon himself

in order that he may face both the symbol of light and of darkness."

The banner on the bamboo pole, waving back and forth, marking the measure of the breath rhythm, slowly increased in tempo. A gong sounded, and so mellow and deep was the tone that the vibrations seemed to fill the atmosphere of the crowded room without coming from any particular source.

The man who stood in the center of the semi-circle said, "The Great Master desires to give further instructions to the candidates. You who carry the symbol of the sun are to be first."

INSTANTLY two men took their places on either side of the somewhat dazed individual who carried the symbol of the sun. With swords held out in front of him, their points crossed, the men marched toward the farther side of the oblong. As by magic, a passage opened up. The man was escorted through it.

Once more the gong sounded, this time four deeply resonant strokes. The man in the center said, "You of the dragon."

Instantly two men bearing swords took their places on either side of Bill Fenton. The swords were crossed in front of him, and Fenton was escorted through the living lane of packed human beings standing tense and silent, breathing in unison, working themselves to a species of group hypnosis.

The escorts guided Fenton through an obscure doorway, into a room hung with expensive silken tapestries, embroidered with intricate designs. Another door soundlessly opened. The guards dropped to the floor, bowed three times, their foreheads touching the floor. A strangely powerful, vibrant voice said, "You of the dragon enter."

Fenton entered the room.

A door closed behind him. He looked up and found himself facing a man clad in silken robes, embroidered with various symbols, bordered with the dark symbol of *Yin*. The man spoke in formal Chinese: "May I have the honor of borrowing the light of your worthy name?" he asked.

"Fong Gee How," Fenton said.

"You have come to join this order of your own free will?"

Fenton lowered his head, so that there might be some excuse for mumbling the words, and answered the question after the fashion of the Chinese, who use a language which contains no word for "yes."

"I join of my own free will," he said.

"The order which you are joining," said the man, "is that of the Lord of the Black Egg."

Fenton's answer was merely a bow of the head.

The voice became vibrant with fanaticism.

"China has been trapped by greed," he said, "and too much credulity. China was the powerful nation. Its sheer numbers made it invincible. It was civilized long before other countries were a single step removed from savagery. Then we were persuaded that civilization had caught up with us; that civilization had passed us; that the time for physical conflict had passed; that China would be protected by treaty with the great powers.

"China listened.

"The great powers greedily carved from the territory of China that which was to be the most valuable. But the Chinese people are taught not to resist—to yield and to attain victory by yielding.

"China yielded.

"And now comes the next visitation of greed. Japan formulates a Monroe Doctrine of the Orient. She starts to gobble up China, and the other nations who have signed treaties merely turn their backs, leaving China merciless and defenseless.

"If China continues to listen she will be absorbed. If China throws off the shackles of bondage she will be free."

FENTON was strongly tempted to ask a question, but curbed himself. The voice of the man seated on the other side of the teakwood table was as vibrant as the ringing of the deep muted gong.

"If China is to be sacrificed to war, she

must bring to bear the old principle that he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword. We will bring war to every nation. Then Japan will war with Russia. Japan will war with America. Japan will war with England. England will war with France. France will war with Italy. And in that great devastating struggle, China will be forgotten. During that struggle, China will arm herself. At the end, the white race will be all but wiped out. Japan will be but a crippled remnant of her former self. Then China will come into her own."

Fenton raised his eyes, stared into the burning lacquer-black eyes of the man in front of him.

"Your tongue has spoken. My ears listen," he said. "But why does the Lord of the Black Egg tell an ignorant coolie of this?"

"Because," the man said, speaking suddenly in excellent English, "I want you to know, my dear Mr. Fenton, the purposes of our organization."

Fenton stood rigidly motionless for a second or two, his eyes staring into the glittering eyes of the Lord of the Black Egg. He knew only too well the fanaticism of that type of mind, knew only too well the pitch to which the men in that other room were being worked up. He dreaded that inaudible signal which the man would surely give, calling his mob to the kill.

Fenton had been in many tight places. His invariable recipe for extricating himself was to assume the aggressive and do the unexpected with baffling quickness.

He bowed his head.

"There is," he said, "logic in what you say"—and he rushed.

The man on the other side of the table sat motionless, his glittering, black eyes burning with steady hypnotic effect into Fenton's eyes. Fenton pivoted his weight on his right hip, led with a terrific left.

The fist failed to land.

A cord settled about Fenton's neck. He was jerked backward. The impetus of his missed punch swung him around. His

eyes had a glimpse of two men, naked from the waist. One of them carried in his right hand a coiled cord of fine silk. The other held the end of a cord, the noose in the other end of which had settled about Fenton's neck.

Fenton felt the bite of the silken cord, struggled to get to his feet. He heard a mocking laugh.

Lights danced before his eyes. He felt his tongue swelling, felt his eyes bulging from their sockets.

"The Lord of the Black Egg has spoken. The Spirit of *Yin*, the Power of Darkness is abroad in the land." said a voice.

There was a repetition of the laugh.

Fenton lost consciousness.

VII

FENTON regained consciousness with a sensation of ropes biting into his flesh, of a cunningly devised and foul-smelling gag in his lips.

Voices came to his ears, the suave voice of the Lord of the Black Egg, and then the voice of Ming Toy, speaking in Chinese: "When the clock strikes the hour, the spirit of Ming Toy will rejoin its ancestors, but while Ming Toy lives he does not betray those who have befriended him."

There was the unmistakable voice of Richard Parr, sounding perfectly serene and tranquil.

"What does the beggar say, Ming Toy? Is he pronouncing a death sentence?"

It was not Ming Toy who answered, but the vibrant voice of the man who sat across the teakwood table.

"I have big plans for the future of China. Unfortunately, you both interfere with those plans. After all, gentlemen, life is but a fleeting thing. Before the mind can fully orient itself to the phenomena of life, the body is disintegrating."

"Educated at Oxford?" asked Parr casually.

"I was," said the man, with the faintest

trace of irritation in his voice, "explaining to you why you must die."

"The philosophy," said Parr, "is so similar to that of one of our Oxford professors that I wondered if perhaps you hadn't — No offense, old chap, I didn't want to interrupt you. Go ahead with the death sentence."

Fenton was lying on the floor, bound and gagged. He could look under a table and see the legs of Parr and of Ming Toy. Evidently both of them were bound to chairs. There seemed to be no one else in the room.

The man behind the teakwood table got to his feet with a rustling of the embroid-



ered garments, and Fenton saw that he was tall, as are the Chinese of the North, rather than short and quick moving, as are the Chinese of the South.

He moved with slow dignity to a doorway and vanished. Parr said to Ming Toy, "Well, old man, it looks like the end of the trail."

"Massa no savvy," said Ming Toy in his pidgin-English. "This plenty bad man. He killum."

"Uh huh," said Parr, "heap savvy. But there's no use getting excited about it, Ming Toy. It's tough on you, and I'm no end sorry I got you into it. You see——"

The Chinese once more appeared.

"A little device of my own," he said, "for removing those who stand in the way

of my plans. A dagger, with a very subtle and powerful poison. The smallest scratch with this dagger will bring about a very certain death.

"I can assure you that the poison has been amply tested and that you need have no fear as to its immediate and deadly results.

"All of us make mistakes. This is particularly true of one who builds up an organization and who must delegate much of his work to subordinates.

"As you know, Stanley Sedgewick suspected much of what I was doing. He was a powerful enemy. It was necessary to remove him. In order to put an end to his influence, I not only wished to remove him, but to secure, as well, certain documents which he had.

"You'll pardon me, gentlemen, if I seem to bore you, but I can assure you this is quite important. Mr. Sedgewick had hired a man by the name of Wood, a notorious criminal and gangster, to act as body-guard. Obviously, a criminal is open to bribery. I bribed Mr. Wood to do certain things for me. When those things had been done, I realized that Mr. Wood need not any longer remain on the scene. The last thing that I had him do for me was to arrange that my men might enter Sedgewick's room without any undue commotion. When Wood had done this, he had performed the final act of service of which he was capable.

"You see, in order to reach a complete understanding with Mr. Wood, it was necessary that he come in personal contact with me. He therefore knows the place where I have my private headquarters. I think that he will try to take advantage of this knowledge. You see, I suggested that Mr. Wood might be removed from the scene of our activities. I thought that his spirit would be far more comfortable with his illustrious ancestors. Unfortunately, the men who were to execute my commands failed to make a workmanlike job of it.

"My agents inform me that this man Wood is intent upon exacting vengeance.

He has started a junk and is on his way toward *Tum Jie*. Now, obviously, if I were to have him publicly removed, being an American, there would be a certain amount of investigation which I wouldn't care to have. Therefore, it has occurred to me that one of you might care to remove him for me. In fact, Mr. Parr, I think you would be primarily adapted to do this thing for me."

"Wood, eh?" said Parr. "I hadn't suspected him, and yet I should have. He had, of course, a criminal history."

THE Chinese nodded.

"Yes," he said, "I really thought you were a little bit dull. However, that is all past. My suggestion is this: You will take this poisoned dagger. You will meet Mr. Wood at the junk. Wood will act upon the assumption that you are his friend. He will permit you to approach him closely. As soon as you approach him closely, you will plunge the dagger into his heart."

"And then?" asked Parr.

"Then you will have the opportunity to turn the dagger upon yourself and join your ancestors painlessly. I can assure you that the poison acts very quickly. Even if the thrust should not be fatal, the poison on the blade will take almost instant effect."

"What inducement do you have to offer?" asked Parr.

"It will," said the Chinese, smiling calmly, "be a very easy and painless death."

"And otherwise?" Parr inquired.

"Otherwise the death won't be nearly so painless."

"Perhaps," Parr remarked as casually as though he had been discussing the weather, "we can reach a bargain upon slightly different lines. You have, for instance, Anita Sedgewick in your custody. If she were to be returned alive and well, it might offer an added inducement."

"Unfortunately," said the Chinese, "that is impossible. I have my own plans for Miss Sedgewick's future."

Parr was silent for a moment.

"How do you know," he said, "that I wouldn't take the dagger and escape?"

"One of my men would be pretty close to you—quite close to you," the Lord of the Black Egg said. "We could, of course, instantly remove both of you, but we desire to avoid the notoriety and the subsequent investigation."

Parr yawned.

"I'm afraid I'm not interested, old chap. Sorry."

"Perhaps you don't realize just how painful the process by which you join your ancestors might become."

"Sorry," said Parr in a tone of finality.

"Very well," the Chinese said. "I think I would prefer to do business with your friend, Fenton, anyway. I believe he will listen to reason. I think he knows, perhaps, something of the disagreeable methods by which the spirit can be induced to leave the body. I can assure you that I didn't invent these methods. Some of the more crude ones, such as having a man kneel on ground glass with bare knees, or stripping the skin from his body a bit at a time, are the less subtle methods which have been perfected by a rather clumsy school of executioners. But I have some more refined methods which I think will prove equally effective and yet will, perhaps, be more painful."

"Sorry," said Parr once more. "You can't frighten me, old chap, you know. Really. I'm interested in that education of yours. You must have been at Oxford. And, by the way, how about all of this initiation ritual you hand out to these coolies? Isn't it a bit above their heads?"

THERE was no flicker of expression on the face of the Lord of the Black Egg. But his eyes softened slightly.

"Curious to the last, my dear Parr," he said.

"Curiosity," Parr remarked, "is the first incentive to knowledge."

"It is," the Chinese said slowly, "far better that they do not understand that which I teach than that they understand.

One always stands in awe of that which he cannot comprehend. He looks with contempt upon what he can understand. That is particularly true of these coolies. They have been taught from time immemorial to venerate certain symbols. Those symbols have hitherto been confined exclusively to the use of royalty. By proper use of those symbols——"

"And you've got something there on your robe, something that I'm very much interested in. Would you mind leaning this way just a trifle?"

The man leaned forward.

"I didn't know," he said, "that you were interested. Really, my dear Mr. Parr, if you would only join forces with me, I might have some use for a man who——"

There was the sound of swift motion, the unmistakable *thunk* of bone impacting flesh. The Lord of the Black Egg staggered backwards. The Britisher upset the table, lunged forward. The Chinese struck blindly with the dagger. Parr's fingers clamped about the yellow wrist. There was a twisting wrench, an exclamation of pain. The dagger clattered to the floor.

"Now, you yellow devil," said Parr, "you can——"

FENTON, struggling about on the floor, fighting against the tension of his bonds suddenly realized that another pair of legs were in the room. He heard the strangling cry with which Parr's sentence was finished, and realized that one of the efficient guards had stepped into the room and flung a silk rope about Parr's neck.

Fenton could see Parr jerk backwards, could see him struggling against the strangling cord, then saw ropes tied tightly about his arms and ankles, and heard the voice of the Chinese priest of the Egg giving instructions.

"Careful. Do not kill him. I need him as a servant. He will yet do my bidding. His feet remained bound. He had twisted his hands loose from the bonds. Find the man who tied him and cut off both ears. That will serve as a lesson."

The Lord of the Black Egg walked around the table, to gaze down upon the figure of the Englishman.

Fenton saw the dagger lying on the floor.

The point was dipped in poison he knew. The blade seemed keen as a razor. There was a carved ivory handle in which appeared the design of *Yin*, stained a deep black.

It was all or nothing. Fenton rolled over, rolling on top of the dagger.

He moved an inch at a time, trying to get the blade in the position that he wanted, holding his weight from the floor as much as possible by lifting upward with his neck.

He knew that the slightest scratch with the dagger would bring an instant death. He was under no illusions as to the deadly nature of that poison, for he knew his China.

HIS fingertips twisted the carved ivory haft of the knife, getting the razor edge pointed upward. He strove to part his wrists as far as possible, then settled his weight down upon the knife.

He felt the keen edge cutting through the ropes. He moved slightly, so as to saw the rope. The weight of his body got the knife slightly off center. It started to twist.

Too late, Fenton struggled to catch his weight with the back of his head. The razor-keen edge cut through cord and skin alike. Fenton felt the bite of the blade.

He waited momentarily for the black void of death, and felt no sensation other than the warm blood which trickled down his fingertips.

Fenton pulled with his hands. They were free. He moved slightly to one side.

Parr was putting up a fight against the ropes, against the strangling cord which was cutting into his neck. Ming Toy had lunged forward, pulling the stool on which he sat with him. The man who wielded the silken cord with such deft, expert skill was knotting ropes about Parr's kicking

feet. The Lord of the Black Egg stood slightly to one side, looking down at the struggling man. Once he kicked viciously, knocking Ming Toy to one side. For the rest, he paid no attention whatever to the bound Chinaman who was struggling about as ineffectually as a fish flopping about on the deck of a boat.

FENTON rolled to his hands and knees. He grabbed the dagger, cut the ropes about his ankles, managed to slip off the vile smelling bit of cloth knotted behind his head and held in place by a bamboo stick which had been inserted between his teeth. He snatched up the fatal dagger, and, as he picked it from the floor, he realized why he had not been poisoned. He had cut himself with the upper part of the blade. The lower part of the steel was slightly discolored. Evidently the poison went only some two-thirds of the way up the blade of the dagger.

Fenton lurched to his feet.

The Lord of the Black Egg gave a cry.

The strangler gave a wild leap which would have done credit to a startled deer.

Fenton lunged forward, and as he lunged, Ming Toy kicked out with his bound feet. The kick was just a blind lunge, intended to hit the strangler, but instead, the feet tripped Fenton. He stumbled forward.

He heard the sound of a peculiar cry behind him, then saw the strangler whip a cord of silk from about his waist.

One of the peanut oil lamps dashed to the floor, and there remained a single sputtering lamp.

FENTON struck with the edge of the dagger at the hissing silk cord. He was still off balance, his left knee on the floor. The silk cord, speeding for his throat, caught the razor-keen edge of the dagger. Fenton lunged forward. His left fist shot out. The strangler staggered back under the impetus of the blow.

Fenton gave a swift look over his shoulder.

The Lord of the Black Egg had slipped an automatic from his sleeve, while the strangler had staggered back under Fenton's blow, but had not gone down. The single remaining lamp was within reach of Fenton's arm. He swept his hand, dashing the lamp from its niche to the floor.

The lamp sputtered as it fell. Glass crashed. Black darkness settled upon the room.

A single shot crashed. Then the voice of the Lord of the Black Egg issued a swift order:

"Use the weapon which makes no noise. Do not let them leave this room alive."

Fenton moved slowly, careful to make no noise, feeling for the wall with the tips of his fingers, inching toward the doorway.

A low, mocking laugh filled the darkness. He heard the sound of swift motion and instinctively flung out his left hand.

A swishing silk cord hissed out of the darkness, touched his fingers, all but settled around his neck.

Fenton tugged at the cord with his left hand. He dropped to his knees, gave a single choking cry, as though the rope had found its mark and was, in fact, tight around his neck.

The ruse worked. The strangler, thinking he had found his mark in the darkness, came running forward, following the taut cord. Fenton felt the man's claw-like fingers touch his, felt the grip on his arm, could feel the hot, panting breath of the man on his cheek, then steel-strong fingers shot out of the darkness and gripped him by the throat.

Fenton struck out blindly with the dagger.

The point caught in the strangler's clothing. The sound of ripping cloth came to his ears, then an exclamation of pain.

Fenton raised the dagger for another thrust, and then suddenly realized there was no need. The tension of the fingers relaxed. The deadly poison on the point of the blade had done its work. The strangler lurched forward, lay limply inert.

ONCE more flame ripped the darkness apart. The room was filled with the reverberating roar of a weapon. A bullet spatted into the wall but a scant half inch from Fenton's head.

Fenton flattened himself to the floor, inched his way along it. It seemed that this man could see in the dark like a cat. To Fenton's eyes, the room was as black as the inside of a cave.

His groping hand encountered legs that were trussed with taut cord.

Taking great care to use only the razor-sharp edge of the dagger, keeping the poisoned point well to one side, Fenton cut through the ropes.

Running feet pounded the ground. A door crashed open. Fenton could hear the gasping intake of breaths as men who had been running streamed into the room.

Gasping from his exertions, Fenton made one last despairing effort to reach the ropes which bound the wrists of Richard Parr.

"It's the end," he whispered. "The mob is on us."

But it was the voice of his friend, Fong Tie, which answered from the darkness.

"We are friends," he said. "Make a light."

A match sputtered. Someone produced the end of a candle. The match held to the wick and flickering flame illuminated the room.

Richard Parr, his bonds cut from his wrists, stared ruefully about him. Fenton cut Ming Toy free.

The dead strangler lay on the floor. There was no sign of the Lord of the Black Egg.

Fenton faced Fong Tie.

"How did you find me?" he asked.

Fong Tie shook his head.

"There is," he said, "much to be done. I have blundered, or I would have been here before. It was the sound of the gun which guided us."

"Where's the man in robes? The man who was here in the room?" Fenton inquired.

Fong Tie said, with obvious reluctance,

"There is an evil spirit in this thing. My men closed upon the room, but in some manner he whom we wished slipped through our fingers."

Richard Parr rubbed his finger-tips across his neck.

"We've got a job to do, you know," he said. "We can't forget Miss Sedgewick, Fenton."

Fenton stared morosely about the room.

"In a matter of seconds," he said, "that howling mob will be turned loose on us. They've worked up to a fanatical killing pitch. This is once when we've got to retreat. The girl isn't here. This chap who calls himself the Lord of the Black Egg had something that he wanted to do when he left here. It was something that was more important than sticking around to see that we were properly killed. As soon as he realized his retreat had been discovered, and that there were men coming to the attack, he rushed away. He's gone somewhere. If he had gone into the room where those men were being initiated we'd have had a howling mob on our backs before this. Therefore, he went some other place. We don't know where that place can be, but we've got to find out because that's the place he's holding Anita Sedgewick."

Fong Tie's voice was low-pitched.

"Woe has come to my life," he said, in Cantonese. "I have lost face with my ancestors. To find this man in *Tum Jie* before he can accomplish his purpose is like trying to find a grain of rice in the sands of the seashore."

Fenton pushed his way toward the door which led to the outer night.

"Come on," he said. "The first thing to do is to get out of here, some place where we can talk. That whole fanatical horde will be released in a minute. They'll be on our trail, lashed to a killing frenzy."

HE LED the way out into the warm darkness of the outer night. The heavens had cleared. There was a half moon. Outlines of junks in the bay showed in the moonlight. The rain of the typhoon

had washed the vegetation clean and it glistened freshly.

The big stone house, looming in the moonlight, with black shadows smeared in inky outlines upon the ground at its base, gave no hint of the packed humanity it contained.

Fenton, running at top speed, dashed down the trail which led toward the waterfront.

It was not until he had come within a stone's throw of the beach that he paused to hold a swift conference.

To Fong Tie he said, as his laboring lungs fought for breath, "One man—knows where—the Lord of the Black Egg has headquarters."

He turned to Parr.

"Wood," he said, in English, "Wood is the key to the situation."

Parr, leaning against a tree, sucking in great lungfuls of the night air, stared in puzzled contemplation.

"Wood," he said, "is a traitor."

Fenton took several deep breaths. His splendid physical condition gave him command of his breathing. He spoke more freely.

"Wood almost died because he didn't understand the Chinese. The Lord of the Black Egg naturally intended to kill him when Wood had served his purpose. Wood didn't understand Chinese psychology or he would have realized his danger. On the other hand, the Lord of the Black Egg doesn't understand the psychology of the American gangster. Wood knows where the man has headquarters. Wood is looking for vengeance. He is coming over here in a junk. It remains for us to spread out along the waterfront, stop that junk when it arrives and then follow Wood."

VIII

THE junk was a Hongkong fisher, a two-masted affair with a high stern and patched sails. It slid over the moonlit waters of the bay, still agitated from the effects of the typhoon. The anchor hit

the water with a splash. The huge stern swung with the wind as the anchor bit into the mud. A sampan slid out from beneath the black hulk and reached the shore.

Oscar Wood, attired in a suit of natty whites, his Panama hat tilted to one side of his head, his expensive cravat carefully knotted and clipped against the front of his sheer, silk shirt, emerged from the sampan, strolled up a path which led from the beach.

There was something incongruous in this spectacle of an American gangster with his vanity for clothes, with his thoughts and emotions transplanted to the far ends of the earth, still keeping true to the code of gangster etiquette and swaggering with affected nonchalance, while he went to gun out a man who had given him the double-cross.

The wind had gone down. The moonlight cast black shadows.

Behind a clump of shrubbery, a figure crouched—a figure that remained motion-



less as an idol carved in the Hangchow rocks.

Oscar Wood approached. His shoes scraped against a rock. He half turned. The figure behind the bush lurched into motion. There was the flash of a silken cord shooting out through the night, and the loop settled about Oscar Wood's neck.

Oscar Wood's right hand was in the side pocket of his coat. That pocket suddenly seemed to explode fire.

The figure reeled backward, blasted as by an invisible sledge-hammer.

Wood calmly loosened the silk cord, kept on walking.

Two hundred yards and he left the path, another fifty yards and he approached a house. Flames spurted from the house. There was the crack of a rifle. Oscar Wood whirled about, spinning on the heel of one foot. He lost his balance, crashed forward to his face. He struggled, got to his knees. Both hands held guns now.

The rifle flashed once more.

Both of Wood's guns roared simultaneously.

THERE was silence. Wood struggled to his feet, took two staggering steps, then became conscious of the Panama hat which had fallen from his head. He walked toward the hat, stood standing over it for a long second, slowly stooped, reached out gropingly with his right hand. He straightened, adjusted the hat, turned and tried once more to swagger as he walked toward the building.

Parr, Ming Toy, Fenton, and Fong Tie were racing toward the place from which the shots had been fired. Fenton raised his voice and shouted to Wood, but the man either could not hear them, or failed to heed if he did hear. He staggered, almost fell, then once more caught his stride. He reached the house, raised a foot, kicked open the door, walked inside.

The place became a pandemonium of noise. Guns roared. A Chinese jumped through the window, crashing out sash and glass. He fell to the ground, made four or five convulsive jerks, and was still.

Fenton, his elbows close to his side, sprinted far in advance of the others.

A tall figure detached itself from the others, ran awkwardly, with flapping garments.

Guns in the little building ceased to roar. Fenton jumped into a low, hard tackle. He crashed into the tall figure. Both went to the ground.

Fenton's fingers twisted in the silken garments.

"If," he told the man who had started the new cult which was intended to free China from the grip of her enemies, "you

make a move, I'll stick this poisoned dagger into your arm."

The tall man lay flat on the ground, gasping for breath. When he was able to talk, however, his words held that same bell-like resonance.

"One," he said, "who is afraid to die, is afraid to live. My ancestors await me."

Fenton tried another angle of approach.

"I am thinking," he said, "of China. Perhaps, I am not entirely out of sympathy with your organization. Alive, you may do much for China. With your ancestors, your work goes for nothing."

Fenton waited for an answer. There was none. The man beneath him squirmed slightly.

"I offer you," Fenton said, "a bargain. Stanley Sedgewick and his niece returned safely to the hotel; safe conduct for myself and my friends—otherwise, a thrust with this poisoned dagger. And if you think I won't make good my threat, you're just crazy as hell."

There was no sound whatever from the little house.

"I'll give you," Fenton said, "exactly while I count three.

"One—"

"You could never escape alive."

"With you out of the way," Fenton said.

"I think we could make it. Two—"

The man under him heaved a sigh.

"It is," he said, "agreed."

TWO men dashed from the house. Fenton looked at them with hope gleaming in his eyes—the hope changed to despair. The men were barefooted, naked from the waist. They ran with the long-legged, lean-waisted gait of the rickshaw coolie.

Fenton struggled to his feet. The man beneath him rolled free. Once more Fenton saw the flash of a silken cord. He flung up his hands to protect his neck. The noose caught about his forearm, and the men were on him.

The voice of the Lord of the Black Egg

was more than ever like the tolling of a bell.

"Peace," he said, "this man has my safe conduct."

The two stranglers paused. The moon shone down upon Fenton's hand.

For a moment there was faint amusement in the voice of the tall Chinese.

"So," he said, "you were holding a penknife against my throat."

"I had lost the dagger," Fenton confessed.

There was no irritation in the voice of the Lord of the Black Egg. He was a gambler and a fatalist.

"We shall meet again," he said, "and the next time you will count more than three."

IX

THE big Japanese liner was snubbed close to the dock at Kowloon. She loomed tall above the warehouse structures, towered above the battered junks that crept slowly over the placid waters of the Bay. In the distance, the buildings of Hongkong showed a clean white, dazzling in the tropical sunlight. High above them reared the Peak with its residences strung along the top, the air, fresh-washed, giving to the greenery a depth of color, a vivid brilliance.

Sedgewick stood near the rail. His eyes stared over toward Hongkong. There was a peculiar expression of haunting terror in their depths.

Anita Sedgewick stood a little to one side. Back of her, Ming Toy appeared utterly impassive, his face as a mask.

Fenton, attired in freshly laundered pongee, paused for a few low words. Parr, standing very straight, stood with his back to the rail.

The whistle up against the huge funnel with its red and white bands bellowed into throaty sound.

"So," Fenton said, "George Simms was in his pay."

Sedgewick nodded.

"You've found out other things about him?" Fenton asked.

"I have found out much and lost much," Sedgewick said slowly. "The papers that I had collected as evidence were found and destroyed. The man is a devil."

"But," Fenton pointed out, "he kept his word to me."

"Yes, he kept his word."

"May I?" said Parr, "inquire your plans?"

Fenton smiled.

"I'll just knock around for a while," he said. "But, frankly, I'm curious. May I inquire yours?"

Sedgewick took a deep breath.

"I'm taking my niece out of China," he said. "I think I shall return. I'm afraid it is my duty to return. But," and he shuddered as he said it, "I'm afraid of the damn place."

Anita Sedgewick turned to Parr.

"How about you, Dick?" she asked.

"I'm afraid of it," he said. "I used to be something of a coward when I was a youngster. I made it a rule whenever I was afraid of anything, to tackle that thing and keep on tackling it until I got over my fear."

"You're coming back to China then?"

His face set in stern, grave lines.

"I'm not leaving it," he said.

"What?" Sedgewick exclaimed.

Parr shook his head slowly.

Anita Sedgewick's face had turned white, but her eyes were starry.

"You're staying, Dick?"

"Yes."

"Don't do it, my boy," Sedgewick said. "This damned Chinese magician is getting more power every day. He gave us safe conduct to the boat. When we walk down this gangplank that safe conduct ends. You can see what's happened—how utterly ruthless he is. He bribed Wood, and he employed Simms. Both of those men died,

simply because they knew too much."

Parr shook his head.

"I'm willing to agree with you about Wood. I think the stranglers decided to kill Wood after he had served his purpose. That was because he was a traitor to those who had employed him. With Simms it was different. My theory is that Simms was hired to decoy Anita into the trap. Then Simms was left to serve the Chinese. He was given a gun and told to stop Wood. Wood took too much stopping. By the time it was finished they were both killed. What do you think, Fenton?"

Fenton stood staring over the rail.

"China," he said slowly, "is China."

The throaty whistle boomed once more. Fenton extended his hand.

"Be seeing you," he said casually, in fact, a bit too casually.

Sedgewick took his hand.

"I wish," he said, "you'd reconsider. You could——"

Fenton shook his head, turned away. Sedgewick reluctantly released his hand. Anita Sedgewick's cool, capable fingers closed about the bronzed skin.

"Could I make you reconsider?" she asked.

Fenton took a deep breath, turned to stare into her eyes.

"That," he said slowly, "is what I'm afraid of, just a little bit."

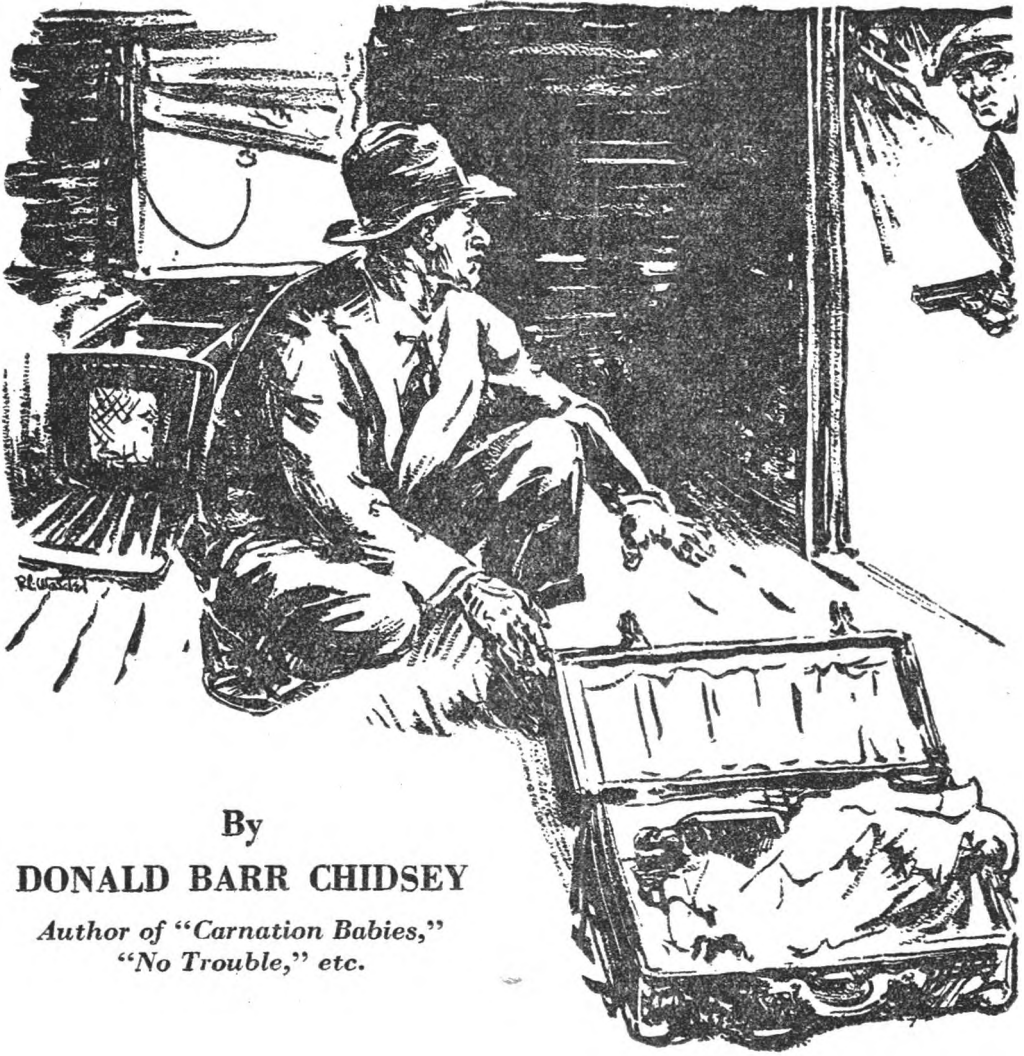
She swayed closer to him, could feel his muscles tighten.

There sounded the slippety-slop of Chinese feet on the deck. Fong Tie glided into view, stood motionless, erect, dignified, his hands thrust up the sleeves of his flowing Chinese coat.

Fenton's eyes met those of Fong Tie, then turned back to Anita Sedgewick. His muscles slowly relaxed. There was yearning in his eyes, but, in addition to the yearning was a stern determination.

"I am staying," he said slowly, "in China."

GORILLAS' REST



By
DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

*Author of "Carnation Babies,"
"No Trouble," etc.*

I

IT WAS not the first time Archie Rhodes had worked the double cross. But he was up against a tough bunch now, and he knew it. He knew too, when he saw Art Walsh tiny, poisonous, very alert, in a doorway across the

street—he knew that they'd caught up to him at last.

Well, the Apperson loot had been worth it, he thought. Almost a quarter of a million in negotiable bonds. A mob of professionals had stolen these—not Rhodes. Rhodes, for a fifteen per cent cut, was to have turned them into cash—a delicate op-

***Why a Certain Young Man Changed the Name of His Florida
Retreat from "The Gables" to Something Very Different.***

eration for which he was peculiarly well fitted, being a specialist. But after a few preliminary gestures, and without having raised a penny in liquidation, he had slipped away with the whole package. It had been careless of the boys to trust him even for an instant.

He had wriggled and squirmed, back and forth and around in circles; he had doubled and dodged; he had used half a dozen aliases, and even had indulged in a bit of disguise. But now he was caught.

Rhodes was no coward, but he was very far from being a fool. He knew that Art Walsh was not alone, and that any attempt to shoot his way out of this spot would be sheer suicide. Anyway, that wasn't his method. He never did stand and fight it out so long as there was any possibility of slipping away.

Death wasn't what Walsh and the others planned for him. Not a prompt death, anyway. They knew he was too wise to have the bonds in his personal possession. Eventually they would kill him, of course, for there was nothing of the forgive-and-forget spirit about these crooks; but first of all they wished to ask him—in their own way—certain questions. It wouldn't be any fun.

There was a chance that Walsh had just arrived, that the back door was not yet covered. Archie Rhodes raced out into the hall, down two flights of stairs. He paused, leaning over a rail. On the floor below, the ground floor, a man was talking.

"... about my height, kind of dark brown hair, smooth dresser—"

"I don't know anything about anybody here!" a woman cried. "I tend to my own business, and if I was you I'd do the same!"

A door was slammed.

Archie Rhodes raced back upstairs. He had recognized the voice. It was as he had expected. They knew that he was here, and it would not take them long to learn which apartment he occupied. There were only ten apartments in the whole building. Rhodes had been in his only two days, and

had intended to remain only two or three days longer. But it was too late now. He cursed himself dispassionately for selecting even a temporary lodging in which he could be trapped like this. For he knew only too well that he could not climb from one of his windows to the roof—it would only be postponing the crisis if he could and did—and that aside from the front and back doors the only way out of here was by an old-fashioned fire escape which ran down the building directly within range of Art Walsh's watchful eyes.

Rhodes wasn't pleased, but he wasn't rattled. He had been in tight places before. He shrugged, smiled, locked his door, went to the telephone. While he talked he was able to see Art Walsh across the street.

"Put me through to Wilcox, sister. . . . What? . . . No, I want Wilcox himself, nobody else. This is important. Please don't hold me up."

A moment later he was saying to an United States district attorney: "You're a straight guy, Wilcox, and I'm trusting you. This is Archibald Rhodes speaking. Little Archie himself. Listen. If I were to surrender to you right now and agree to take a guilty plea to that income tax rap, would I be sure of three years?"

Wilcox started. "I know you are Rhodes because I know your voice, but the district attorney's office never—"

"I know. You don't dare to bargain over the phone, and I don't blame you. But there's no sense talking around in circles, and anyway I just haven't got the time. And speaking of time, never mind telling somebody out of the corner of your mouth to get this call traced, because if you do I'll be gone before the boys can get here anyway. Now think fast. How 'bout three years?"

"I have absolutely no authority to reach any agreement—"

"I tell you I haven't got time for that stuff! Let's put it this way, then. Let's say do you think it's very likely that three

years is about what I'd draw? Think fast, man!"

WILCOX, who desired intensely the glory of sending Archibald Rhodes to jail on any charge whatever, paused, tempted. Rhodes, watching the tense figure of Art Walsh across the street, heard a second floor bell ring and knew that the inquiry was being pushed. Very soon now, by the process of elimination, they would be knocking at his own door.

They knew he was in this building. They had him boxed.

Wilcox replied at last, very slowly, "Yes, I might say that I think it quite possible that the court would see fit to sentence you to about three years imprisonment, in those circumstances. But of course you understand that I am only expressing a private, unofficial—uh——"

"Okay. Then here's the address—One-fourteen Westover Terrace, fourth floor front. Name over the bell is J. B. Harrison. And for Pete's sweet sake don't just send one or two of the boys—send a whole flock of 'em! And make it snappy!"

Five minutes later, surrounded by deputy marshals, he walked out. Nobody else was in sight. But Archie Rhodes knew that eyes filled with hate were glaring at them from half a dozen different places. He smiled.

"Atlanta, James," he said loudly, as he stepped into the car.

The federals questioned him for almost a week, but he was a past master of evasion and they learned nothing about the Apperson bonds. Though they had no evidence against him, they were certain that he had handled these bonds, and they would have preferred to find them and to indict Archie on a charge of transporting stolen goods from one state to another. But this was not to be. And eventually he stood before a judge and pleaded guilty to a charge of falsifying an income tax report, and was sentenced to serve three years in the federal penitentiary at Atlanta.

"Just the same, I wouldn't like to be

in his shoes when he gets out," said Wilcox. "Something's mighty wrong when he's in such a hurry to be arrested even though we were thinking he was in Europe. And a quarter of a million dollars," Wilcox added thoughtfully, "is a hell of a lot of money."

II

FEW tourists, or even townspeople, ever saw the cottage called The Gables, on the shore of Biscayne Bay in the south end of Coconut Grove, for it was a tiny place by itself, not visible even from a side road and reached only by a long private driveway which wound through a miniature forest of live-oaks festooned with creepers. However, those who did see it, even the big virile men among them, invariably exclaimed "Cute!" It was, too. There was no garage, only a back porte-cochere; the driveway led apologetically to a great clump of red and white oleanders, and encircled this, being bordered on the outside by palmetto shrubs and gawky, startled poinsettias. The house itself was not of any particular type but was simply a pleasant little structure, one story high, sporting a couple of front-facing gables, false gables, and between them a rustic sign upon which the name was painted. It fronted the bay, the waters of which almost lapped a doorway rather self-consciously quaint. An aged banyan crowded it from the far side. There was a little dock in front.

Yes, it was cute. Obviously it had been designed by somebody who talked a lot about Art and desired to be "different."

Paul McEldowy had purchased it rather in spite of than because of this fact. It was remote, quiet; and for all the knocker and the footwiper and the rustic sign which he was always forgetting to tear down, it was an ideal place for an unsociable bachelor who liked to work. Paul McEldowy was twenty-nine and an architect. In the normal course of events his business took him to his office in Miami two or three mornings a week; the rest of the time he would

be able to labor on plans at The Gables, blessedly alone, uncursed by wide-eyed Northern tourists who asked where the William J. Bryan Memorial Church was, or whether that thing over there was a bougainvillea, or how they could get on the road to Matheson's Hammock.

He furnished the place sparsely but comfortably; moved in his books and plans and other belongings; engaged a negro woman to come for two hours each day; observed gleefully that the water off the end of the dock was deep enough for swimming at high tide if you were willing, as he was, to take a chance on getting nipped by a barracuda; and settled down to work. He fully intended to live there the year round.

But the 1933-34 season proved unexpectedly good—the best since 1926, no less!—and as early as November Paul was offered through a friend in the real estate game a breathlessly big price for The Gables. Cash down, too. Until May 1.

It happened that business affairs threatened to take him to New York just then, and to keep him there for a considerable part of the winter, so he was glad enough to give a lease. He never saw the leasee, another solitude-seeking bachelor, named Charles T. Simpson; his real estate friend took care of all that.

IT WAS late in March when he returned to Florida, ready to resume work on his own plans, and reconciled to the prospect of five weeks in a hotel. But he had a pleasant surprise, the second day. Harry Otis, the real estate friend, dropped in to say hello.

"You can go back to your too-sweet-for anything shack, kid, whenever you like." He skidded a letter across the desk. "Give a peek."

"March 22, 1934

"Dear Mr. Otis:

"Am vacating The Gables today on account of business taking me to New York. I wish you would see the Florida Power and Light people about what I owe, as I

will not have time to do this. If there is anything left over from my deposit please send it to me in New York. There should be. Also will you fix it about the telephone? Am leaving the key on the ledge over the front door, since I was not able to find you in. Thanking you for your kindness, I remain

"Yours very truly,

"Charles T. Simpson"

Paul scaled the letter back, nodding his delight.

"Swell. Now I'll get my swim every day, the way I like."

He went to The Gables that noon, bag and baggage, to learn that the key was not on the ledge but in the lock, on the inside. And the door was ajar. The interior of the house was a wreck.

Paul's first thought was that Charles T. Simpson was a man who didn't believe in leaving the premises in good order when he moved out of a furnished house. His next thought was that there had been burglars here—and burglars of a singularly thoroughgoing character. For the rugs had been kicked aside, pillows and cushions and the bed mattress had been cut to ribbons and their stuffings strewn everywhere, the secretary and the closets and the chest of drawers had been ransacked, oilcloth had been ripped up from the kitchen floor, even the pictures hung awry on the walls.

Apparently none of his own property had been removed. Nevertheless, this was certainly a burglary and should be reported. He picked up the telephone.

It was dead. The wire had been yanked out of the box.

He sighed, replaced the receiver, and wandered disconsolately around the house again, peering at things. He was not alarmed, only annoyed. He'd have to make his swim a short one, he thought, for there was a lot of work here. He would be obliged to spend most of his afternoon straightening up this mess before he could begin to unpack.

He started for the half-cellar, a low, dark

little place where he had stored only garden tools.

"Hello, Simpson."

A tall and very heavy man, with hard black eyes and a hard blue chin, stood in the front doorway. A brown hat was low over his forehead. He grinned emphatically but not good-naturedly, disclosing many gold teeth.

"I'm not Simpson. Who are you, and what do you want?"

"No soap, kid. Little big-brain outside



here had a peep at one of those letters and we know you got orders to stick around till Archie can make a show."

"I don't know what the devil you're talking about!"

"Sure," said the big man. He jerked up his head, without taking his gaze from Paul. "Come on in, Ed. He says he's three or four other guys maybe."

ED WAS another of the piano-mover type. His jaw was not so blue, but it was just as big, and his eyes were as hard. He didn't grin, like the first man. He scarcely glanced at Paul. His gaze flitted around the living room, and he frowned irritably.

"Somebody beat us to it. Art Walsh, maybe. He might've found out the same time we did and taken a plane down, huh?"

The first man said, "Yeah, we ought to've done that ourselves."

Through the open door Paul could see the blue, blue waters of Biscayne Bay softly

asparkle in the Florida sunshine; a skiff with a triangular, amazingly white sail sat aslant there as though posing for some painter. On the left of Paul was a window through which he could see, just beyond the poinsettias, a large black touring car; there was a man with a light gray hat at the wheel, a man who kept his head turned away from the house.

Ed walked close to Paul and glared down into Paul's face.

"Somebody's been here, huh?"

"Certainly looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Never mind the bright remarks. What I'm asking is that somebody's been here, and who was it and how long ago?"

"I wish I knew."

"And what'd he find, huh? What'd he find?"

"Listen; before we go into all this, suppose you two fellows tell me what the devil you mean by barging into my house?"

"Did he find that stuff, huh?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, but whatever it is I wish you'd get outside and come back some time when I'm not busy!"

"Now listen, Simpson——"

"My name isn't Simpson, and are you going to get out of here or am I going to have to throw you out?"

The first man, the one with the gold teeth, chuckled fruitily, deep in his throat.

"Oh, pshaw! He jess thinks he's smart. Don't pay any 'tention to him an' he won't ack that way!"

But Ed pushed Paul McEldowy in the chest, hard—pushed him back into one of the few chairs in the room which remained upright.

"I'll teach the guy to—— Now listen you——"

Paul rose slowly. His eyeballs burned and throbbed, and he could feel sweat in the palms of his hands.

Ed pushed him again, harder than before, and Paul slammed back into the chair, slammed against the wall behind him so that the chair went up on two legs.

"Why, you lousy damn——"

THIS time Paul came out of the chair fast. He came out like an angry boxer bounding from his corner at the sound of the bell—a boxer in a grudge bout, determined to make it a one-round affair.

He hit Ed once in the mouth with his left. Then he brought up a heavy right to that space just under the ribs known to ring fans as the solar plexus. It was perfectly timed. Ed's face went dark blue very suddenly, like the corner of a blotter sucking up loose ink. He turned completely around, his knees buckled under him, and he plopped down upon his face, making jerky little groans.

Paul swung without hesitation upon the other piano mover, the one with the gold teeth. He had hit the big blue jaw twice—it was not unlike slapping a stone wall—before this man's slow brain clicked and he emitted a bullish grunt and started to hit back. Paul slipped inside of one wide swing and had clunked knuckles upon the blue jaw for the third time when a ham-like fist crashed upon his right cheek bone. His head snapped back, and he thudded upon his heels. Things whirled mercilessly for an instant. But he shook his brain clear, ducked, and stepped in again, both fists swinging.

It had its David-and-Goliath aspect, this fight, for all the fact that it was slingless. There was about five feet eight of Paul McEldowry, though none of this was soft; but he was a featherweight in front of this giant.

"Take that home with you, Little Goldy Teeth!" he gasped, and smacked a stiff punch against Goliath's left eye.

Goliath was slow, but he could afford to be. Blows with all Paul's weight behind them seemed not so much to hurt as merely to astonish him. He was not even angry, though gradually he appeared to become impatient. He couldn't seem to hit Paul; Paul just wasn't there at the right time. So he waded lumbrously in, feet wide-spread, like a man wading waist-deep in water; his huge arms were open for

an embrace, and he looked and rather acted like a grizzly bear.

The man's strength, Paul reasoned, must be stupendous. Paul backed away, hitting, dodging, swinging his head from side to side, stepping in to hit again, and then backing further. Goliath waded on and on with the ponderous inevitability of Time.

Paul stumbled upon an overturned taboret. He fell backward, striking his left shoulder against a wall. Goliath, bellowing, arms outspread, tried to fall on top of him.

Once those mighty arms got a grip the fight would be over.

But Paul twisted away, rolled to safety, sprang to his feet.

Then he saw that Ed was to be reckoned with again. Ed was on one knee, dizzy, mumbling hot curses while he scrabbled for something under his left armpit. A pistol! Somehow Paul McEldowry sensed it before the weapon itself appeared—and he sprang through the nearest door.

This was the cellar door, which he had started to open before the advent of these toughs. Given a chance to think he would not have selected it, for the cellar was a tiny, low, unfloored chamber without any windows or any other door but this one, and he would be hopelessly trapped there. But then, he hadn't been given a chance to think. A good free-for-all was one thing, a pistol quite another.

THE door opened in toward the cellar. It was tolerably heavy, but not thick enough to stop a bullet. There was no landing, and the steps fell away with an almost ladder-like abruptness, so that Paul was able to bear his back against the door and putting one foot upon the opposite wall to stiffen his knee and brace himself in anticipation of attack.

The attack came—not a shot but a shoulder against the other side of the door. The door shook, even the steps shook. But Paul's leg held firm.

Another thumping attack. This time it seemed as though the whole house shook;

but the door remained unsplintered, and Paul McEldowy remained wedged in place, a human bolt.

He heard Goliath say, "The hell with him. Let's fan up here first. He can't get away anyway, and if he yells nobody'll hear him."

Paul never had thought of yelling. But now that Little Goldy Teeth suggested it, Paul realized that it would be futile indeed. It was true that no shouts could reach from this cellar to the nearest house, several hundred yards away on the other side of the little forest.

Ed, spitting and coughing, growled something about tearing the bastard to pieces with his own two hands.

"If we don't find the stuff up here, or downstairs either, we'll bust his fingers one by one," Little Goldy Teeth decided cheerfully, "until he tells us what he did with it."

"I'll bust 'em anyhow," Ed promised.

They made a lot of noise searching the place, but they didn't take long. After all, there was not much of anywhere to look. An earlier visitor had pretty well covered the possibilities. From the sounds Paul guessed that the two piano-movers were devoting themselves chiefly to the contents of his three bags. Well, he'd been grumbling about the work of unpacking, and now these men were doing it for him. Doing it none too neatly though, he guessed.

"No business," Little Goldy Teeth said.

"We might have known," said Ed. "Now let's go to work on that guy downstairs. Take that chair. It'll be easier."

Paul had known all the time that he could not hold the door against any real assault. Even without shooting—and he guessed that they were reluctant to use guns—they could smash the panels down around his shoulders.

The cellar was black as pitch. Unless Charles T. Simpson had stored something there and forgotten to take it away with him, it contained only the few garden tools Paul had intended to put into use when he

got around to it. A rake, a spade, hedge scissors, a lawn mower, things like that.

As Paul saw it he had one wild chance, one last fighting chance. Certainly there would be no use trying to reason with these men. Certainly, too, he was not going to wait for them to come and take him, pistols or no pistols, and crack the bones of his fingers while they snarled questions at him. He would not defend the door. He would instead get the rake, or maybe the spade, and wait for them to start down the steps. He'd be in darkness while they were exposed to the light. Possibly he could break a few bones himself, even though there wasn't much room to swing down here.

He started down the steps.

At the foot of them he stumbled upon something large and soft. It gave him a creepy feeling, and he stepped back.

There was not a glimmer of light, and he could see nothing at all. He stooped. He shuffled forward slowly, feeling low with his outstretched hands.

He touched the thing again; and now the creepy feeling, previously indefinite, inexplicable, flashed to a spasm of real terror. For a moment he was stricken with panic in that dark place. He stood trembling all over, and sweat rolled in fat drops down his face while he strove to resist the impulse to dash up the steps and out of the cellar—away from this corpse.

Yes, it was a corpse. His hands had told him that.

As though from a great distance he heard and scarcely heeded the sound of a strange voice upstairs.

"Come on, clucks! If Art Walsh's fanned this dump it's a cinch he didn't miss anything! Never mind that guy down there. We can come back for him any time!"

"He smacked me!"

"Dear, dear! Well, come on! I just heard a car turn from the highway into the road out there, and I don't want to take any chances."

Paul McEldowy clawed and crawled his

way up the steps, pushed open the cellar door, staggered into the blessed light of day. Through the window on the left he saw the large black touring car disappear up the driveway.

HE STOOD trembling, his breath coming in rapid gasps. He shook himself, wiped his face with a handkerchief. More than anything else the sight through the doorway of placid, lovely Biscayne Bay, with that one shining sail slanted so jauntily to leeward, restored his nerves. His impulse was to run out of the house to run down the driveway calling for help. But the panic had passed. The sensible thing, he realized, would be to return to the cellar, armed with a flashlight, and



take a look at the thing he had found. Perhaps it wasn't really a corpse, after all? Perhaps the man was still alive?

He didn't like to, but he did it.

No, indisputably this was a corpse. Cold, stiff. It had been a man of about forty, a smallish, pale man, dressed in an ordinary gray business suit. The back of the head and the back of the neck were wet with blood, but it was not this alone which gave the body so hideous an appearance. The eyes, watery blue, were wide open, bulging with terrible agony, and the mouth too, bloody about the lips and with some of the front teeth sagging loose, was strained open, rigid from the endurance of pain. Elsewhere on the body the reason for this expression was apparent. Little Goldy

Teeth's snapping of the finger bones one by one would have been almost gentle compared with the manner in which some fiend had treated this poor fellow.

Paul McEldowry went sick at the sight. Head down, face utterly cold, he stumbled upstairs, stumbled toward the front door and sunlight.

"What's the big hurry?"

Paul stopped short, gasping, throwing his chin up. He swayed a bit as he stood blinking at the newcomer, a chunky, broad-shouldered man of about forty, a man with beautifully kept hands, expensive clothes, a face handsome but inexpressibly hard, cruel, crafty.

"What's the matter with me?" The man's voice was gentle enough, but there was a thread of impatience in it. His eyes were dark brown and very hard. "Do I look like your grandfather's ghost or something?"

"I—I'm sorry," Paul said, "but it happens that I just stepped on a badly mutilated murder victim in a dark cellar, so naturally I'm not feeling quite up to snuff just this minute."

"That so?" The man seemed not at all amazed. He looked around. "Have a hurricane here or something?"

"Who are you?" asked Paul.

"Who are *you*?"

Paul snapped, "I'm Paul McEldowry, and it happens that I own this place, and I'm getting pretty tired of having men walk in on me without any invitation and demanding to know who I am!"

"Oh. You had a visitor today?"

"Two of them. And when I told them to get out, and they wouldn't go, we had a little fight."

THE visitor looked around, unsmiling. "It must have been a honey!"

"Oh, the house was this way before that. We just made it a little worse, that's all."

"Who were these men?"

"I don't know, but I wish I did! But who are you?"

This brought them back to where they

had started. Anger, surging into Paul's breast again, made him feel better, stimulated him, caused him to forget his sickness and momentary fright. The sight of his clothing and other personal effects, including his plans, exacerbated this feeling. His three suitcases and all their contents had been irreverently handled, mauled. Even the suitcases themselves had been ruined. The lining had been cut out of them, and in some places the leather too had been sliced.

"I'm looking for a man named Charles T. Simpson."

"He moved out yesterday. That is, unless it's his body I just found downstairs. Do you know him when you see him?"

The stranger nodded.

"Better take a look then. But it's not a very pretty sight!"

"I guess I can stand it."

The stranger, in fact, showed no emotion of any sort when he viewed the body at the foot of the cellar steps. He only nodded.

"Yes, that's Simpson. Too bad. He was a nice chap, too."

"What in the world do you suppose was the reason for it?"

"Well, I can give a pretty shrewd guess."

"Before we do anything else," Paul decided, "I think we'd better lock up this house and drive off to the nearest telephone and call the police. My phone's been disconnected, here."

The stranger said, "I wouldn't do that. Not right away, I mean. The police must be notified, of course, but I have my own reasons for wanting at least a little delay."

Paul wheeled on him.

"Say, I've asked you this before and I'll ask you again. Who are you, anyway? What are you doing here?"

The man produced a badge from a side coat pocket and held it out for Paul's inspection.

"The name's Peterson, if you must know. I've got paper credentials too, of course."

Paul said, "Oh—from Washington, eh?"

"Department of Justice."

"I'm beginning to understand. Come on upstairs. Was this fellow Simpson a criminal of some sort, then?"

"Well, not exactly. But we have reason to believe that he was associated with one of the biggest crooks in the business. Ever hear of Archie Rhodes?"

"It seems to me I have. But isn't he in jail?"

"He was released yesterday. He took a train for New York, and if he ever gets there the police will probably pick him up and question him for a while, because they're convinced, just the way we are, that he had a hand in that big Apperson bond theft. But they won't get anything out of him, any more than we did. Besides being one of the smoothest hot security handlers in the country, Archie Rhodes is a master at the art of playing dumb."

Peterson righted a chair and seated himself. His dignity was immense, his self-assurance measureless.

"Sit down, Mr.—uh—sit down and tell me what happened here before I came. And then I can tell you part of the story that brings me here and why I'm asking you not to report this murder right away."

SO PAUL McELDOWY introduced himself and told his story, complete, while Peterson smoked a cigarette and stared at the ceiling. But Peterson, despite his languid air, was all attention. He asked many questions.

"I came here thinking I'd get a nice little swim before I started to unpack, but now it looks as though that would have to wait. Burglary, assault, then murder—I wonder what's going to happen next!"

Peterson smiled.

"Almost anything is likely to happen next, Mr. McEldowy. I told you I came here looking for Charles T. Simpson, and so I did. But really I'm looking for something Simpson had, something he was keeping for Archie Rhodes. We know, in Washington, and every district attorney's office and police department that had any-

thing to do with the case knows that Archie Rhodes was handling the loot from that Apperson robbery three years ago. We couldn't get anything out of him before he was sent away, and neither could anybody else. He was too smart. But from the fact that he deliberately surrendered himself to the federal authorities at a time when he could easily have escaped, we figure that he was due to be put on the spot; he wanted to go to jail for his own protection.

"Now we know perfectly well who stole those bonds, Mr. McEldowy. It's sort of hard to explain. Things like this are often known all over the underworld, and to policemen and federal detectives, and yet they never get into the papers, and never get public. We haven't a shred of real evidence against any of these men, you see."

Paul nodded.

"They're good and sore at Rhodes, who must have played them some kind of dirty trick just before he went to the pen. It looks as though he'd ditched those bonds somewhere. We've checked against every safe deposit box he might ever have had under any name, and searched every apartment he might have occupied, and questioned every friend and relation to whom he might conceivably have entrusted those bonds—but we got nowhere. Until a short while ago.

"Then we learned through a spy in the penitentiary that Archie Rhodes was carrying on a secret correspondence with somebody outside. We'd suspected this for some time, but now we learned it for sure. The man outside is nobody any of us had ever heard of before—or anybody in the underworld had ever heard of either, as far as we can find out. Charles T. Simpson is just one of the names he went under. Apparently he was a quiet little fellow who had no police record of any sort and never associated with criminals. Where Rhodes met him, and how he enlisted his services, is a mystery. Rhodes is full of mysteries like that. He didn't write to Simpson very often, and when he did he wrote in code

and the letter was smuggled out of the pen. We intercepted one of those letters—and had the dickens of a time decoding it, too—and that was how we learned about Simpson.

"It seems that Simpson has something very valuable which he's holding until Rhodes gets out. It must be the Apperson bonds. It can't be anything else. Simpson was well supplied with money, and all he had to do was live quietly and keep out of trouble. He was spending his summers on Cape Cod and his winters down around here.

NOW about the time we learned all this, the same dope got out to certain parties in crookdom. We didn't want it to, but it did. The mob that had engineered the Apperson theft originally consisted of five men. One of them was shipped off to Dannemora for life, three months ago. Two others got themselves erased in a gang fight in Philly last summer. The remaining two, Art Walsh and Herbie Moscovitz, had a bust-up lately and they aren't on speaking terms. But I guess they both must have had the same source of information that we did at Atlanta, and they found out about this Charles T. Simpson too.

"Naturally they came here. From what I can figure, after what you've told me, Simpson, who must have been warned who he should look out for, spotted one or the other of these babies in town here, and he decided that he'd better be moving. He packed and sent off his bags—because there doesn't seem to be any of his belongings around the house here—and he was just about to follow in person when in blew one of the boys. Probably Art Walsh. This looks like Art's work.

"He asked Simpson questions and wasn't satisfied with the answers. He searched the place, and even dug up the floor of the cellar. No luck. He did things to Simpson, which eventually killed him. Maybe he got something and maybe he didn't. We have no way of knowing.

"A little later along comes Herbie Moscowitz with a couple of hired muscle men to help him with the heavy work. That's just the kind of thing Herbie would do. They breeze in here today and assuming that you're Simpson they start to go to work on you."

Paul asked, "But that still doesn't explain why you want me to delay notifying the police about this murder?"

"The reason for that is that I want a good chance to search the place myself first. I don't suppose it'll do much good, after Art Walsh has been over it, but remember I've got to make a report on all this. If you know anything about Department of Justice men you know that they never do like to call in the local cops until they absolutely have to—for more reasons than I've got time to give you here now. One thing is, in this case, that the cops would trample all over the place and maybe spoil something for me before I had a chance to examine it. Oh, you'll have to report the murder, of course! All I'm asking is that you wait a little while. That's reasonable, isn't it?"

Paul muttered, "I suppose it is." He wasn't convinced of this.

Peterson had scarcely started his search when a taxicab drove up. Peterson went outside, intent upon heading the driver off, preventing him from having a look at the interior of the house.

"Mr. Simpson here?"

"Not right now. Anything I can do for you?"

The taxi man produced a couple of baggage room checks.

"I took some bags down to the station for him this morning and he asked me to come back afterwards and bring him these checks and also to take him down himself. And when I came back he wasn't here. I hung around a little while and then knocked again, but still no answer. I had to get back on the job. So I left word at the stand where I was, but I guess he didn't go there and ask. So I thought I'd

come back here again. I figured he might be wanting these."

"Thanks," said Peterson, and took the baggage checks. "I'll give them to him. He'll be back in a little while."

"Will he be wanting me to take him down then?"

"No, I think not. I promised to drive him down in my own car." Peterson gave the man five dollars. "This is for your trouble."

THE taxi man drove away, and Peterson returned to the house.

"There's a chance that Simpson left the bonds in one of his bags—though it would be a pretty careless thing to do. Anyway, I want to run down and get them and examine them before we report this murder. Suppose you just wait here, huh?"

"Suppose I don't do anything of the kind! I don't want to sit around in a house with a sweet-looking corpse like that! Particularly a house where gorillas keep bounding in and out all the time!"

Peterson gave him a suspicious glance, but nodded affably.

"All right. Tell you what we'll do then. You come along with me in my car. Just



let me get these bags and take them somewhere and search them, and then if they don't contain the bonds, or even if they do, you can call in the cops. How's that?"

Paul consented to this plan, though not eagerly. Peterson drove. The car, a large old-fashioned Packard, bore Virginia license plates.

At the station Peterson said, "Come on along in with me, huh?"

Paul followed, wondering. He sensed Peterson's reluctance to allow him out of his sight. Was it possible that the secret service man supposed that he, Paul McEl-dowy, had had something to do with this murder?

Peterson got the bags. Paul bought an afternoon paper.

"Says something about your friend Archibald Rhodes here," Paul remarked conversationally, as they started back for Coconut Grove.

"Picture of him, is there? He's a good looking chap."

"No, there's no picture. But it seems he slipped off that train that was taking him north, somehow. At some little town in Georgia, while the train was stopped on signal, he slipped away and disappeared. Looks sort of funny, and it says here that there's to be an investigation as to why the train was stopped there on signal."

"As far as I know," Peterson said carefully, "no state has any charge outstanding against Archie Rhodes. If they had he'd have been arrested on his release from the federal pen."

"Yes, it says that here. Only it says that because of the mysterious circumstances surrounding the disappearance, police everywhere are being asked to keep a look-out for him."

III

THEY went out South Miami Avenue, out Bayshore Drive. Peterson drove fast, and repeatedly glanced into the mirror. Paul noticed this, and turned.

"Looks as though that big black car is following us, doesn't it?"

"It does, sort of?" Peterson made a right turn into an insignificant side street. "Well, we'll soon find out."

The black touring car made a right turn.

Peterson turned left, turned left a second time, turned right into Bayshore Drive again. The black car followed, getting closer.

"Say, that car looks a lot like the one those gorillas had who called on me this afternoon. We ought to stop and hail a cop."

"I don't like cops," Peterson said. "Never have."

"But good Lord, man! you're not going to take a chance of getting shot just because of that!"

"We won't get shot. Let's see if these babies can follow this!"

He pressed his right foot flat upon the floor, and the machine surged ahead, swaying from side to side. It was an open chase now. The black touring car was getting closer all the time.

Peterson knew how to drive. He handled that old Packard like a master of the dirt tracks, and squeezed every ounce of speed out of it; but it was not as fast as the younger car behind.

They were near the Pan American airport now, and a Clipper ship, a huge S-40 amphibian taking off for Cuba, thundered overhead. Peterson swung sharply to the right again. The old Packard took it on two wheels and seemed about to topple, but it held the road. The instant the corner was turned Peterson jammed on the brakes, foot and hand, with all his strength. The roar of the four aeroplane engines in the Clipper gulped the lesser noise the brakes made below. Peterson clacked the Packard into reverse.

The black touring car swung wildly around the corner, and the driver in the light gray hat saw too late that he'd been tricked. Somebody leaned out with what looked like a thick black stick in his hands. The rat-tat-tat sound was faintly audible above the thunder of the Clipper's engines, but it was so slight a sound that it did not seem possible it was caused by a machine gun. It was not until they were speeding along Bayshore Drive again that Paul observed the broken speedometer glass and the long nasty scratches in the paint of the instrument board.

"Close," Peterson yelled. He was perfectly cool. He had swung off the drive

again, and was turning up one street and down another. The black touring car no longer was in sight.

Paul yelled, "Say, I don't like this at all! It may be part of your job, getting shot at, but it's not part of mine!"

Peterson nodded. He was driving much slower now.

"We'll just slip out to some quiet spot and take a look at what's in those bags first, anyway. No harm in that, is there?"

He did this. In a side road, drawn up under a spreading mango tree, rapidly but thoroughly he searched both bags, shaking out things, poking things. He found no bonds, and no clue to the bonds.

"Funny," he muttered absently. "That's not like him."

Paul asked, "How does it happen that you seem to know so much about this fellow Simpson, and were able to identify him so quickly, even though you'd never seen him before?"

Peterson started the car again.

"Oh, I had a good description, of course. And I was posted about what he was like, and his habits and all."

"Well, what about driving to some police station now?"

"Take it easy. That stiff's not going to get any more dead than it is already, is it? I still want to take that one good look around your house there before the cops come tramping in like a herd of buffalo."

"I don't like this," Paul said frankly.

"It won't take long. Remember, there's a quarter of a million dollars at stake."

"Not for me there isn't! All I want is to have this business over with and get my swim this afternoon, before it's too late."

Peterson drove slowly and with great care along the little driveway to The Gables. Near the end of the driveway he braked the car silently, but left the engine running and the front doors open. He nodded to a small sedan behind the oleanders.

"Visitors," he said, and got out. He drew a pistol. "Better let me go in first."

The front door was ajar, as they'd left it. Paul stole to a side window, and from there watched what followed inside, which seemed to him exciting but somehow not altogether real, like a moving picture.

THERE was a small man, a stranger to Paul, kneeling in the middle of the room. He was examining some of the clothing from one of Paul's violated handbags, and he was shaking his head in a puzzled manner. He was a waspish man, with flashy clothes, a tense, tough manner. He knelt facing the front door.

Peterson did not walk in through the door. Instead he stayed outside, exposing only a small portion of his head, and his pistol was raised before he spoke. His voice was quiet.

"So it's little Artie Walsh again, huh?"

The man sprang to his feet, reaching for a gun at his right hip, but already Peterson was firing. Peterson fired four shots in quick succession, and evidently each of them found lodgment in Art Walsh's body, for he was buffeted over backward to a sitting position on the floor, and then he toppled gently and was still. But even so, Walsh had succeeded in getting out his own gun and squeezed the trigger once. It had been the final spasm of a dying man—a farewell gesture of hatred and defiance, appropriate to this tiny, gall-bitter fellow.

Paul stamped around to the front of the cottage, charged through the doorway. Peterson was calmly reloading.

"Couldn't you have taken him alive! Did you have to slaughter him like that, without any warning!"

Peterson looked at his companion with large dark brown eyes, and shook his head. He did not seem in the least offended.

"Not Walsh, no. In the first place, he was reaching for a gun when I fired. And in the second place, I knew this treacherous little skunk of old, and I know what he'd have done to me if he got the chance. He'd have shot me between the shoulder blades any time I was fool enough to turn

my back to him. Why should I show him any mercy here now? As a matter of fact, I should have just started shooting without saying anything, so that he'd never know what hit him."

"I suppose you know your own business," grumbled Paul, "but somehow it doesn't seem right to me. It seems like a dirty trick."

"He had plenty of chance. He got his gun out, didn't he? It stands to reason he had plenty of chance! Why, he even managed to get one shot at me, even if it did go wild."

Peterson pointed to the hole in the ceiling where Walsh's bullet had torn away some of the plaster, precipitating a tiny white dust-like heap on the floor below. Suddenly Peterson's eyes narrowed, and he walked to a point directly underneath this hole.

"Say, that stuff looks fresher than the rest of the plaster you knocked loose in the fight with those gorillas."

He got a chair, stood on it, began to tear at the edges of the hole, dislodging bigger chunks of plaster.

"Leave something of my house, please," Paul begged.

Peterson, paying him no attention, pulled away larger and larger chunks, causing great columns of white powder to shoot floorward.

"This's a neat job. You'd never notice it was done just lately and done over."

PRESENTLY he thrust his right arm into the hole he'd made, and his right hand reappeared clutching a large package wrapped in newspaper. He tore this open, sprang to the floor yelping in delight.

"At last! After all this trouble!"

The Apperson bonds were insignificant in appearance. There were many of them, but they were small and plain. Paul had seen other bonds and many stocks too which were much more brilliantly gilded.

Peterson was counting them eagerly, and he had forgotten the very existence of Paul McEldowy until Paul leaned in front

of him, slid a hand underneath Peterson's coat, and snatched Peterson's automatic.

"Never mind counting those things! Get your hands in the air, Archibald Rhodes!"

The hands went up, Apperson bonds clutched firmly in each of them. Rhodes was unruffled, though there was a crease of gentle puzzlement on his forehead.

"The paper I bought at the station didn't have your picture, as you were careful to verify. But this three-year-old sheet your friend wrapped these things in"—he tapped the newspaper which recently had enclosed the bonds—"this has the story of your trip to Atlanta *and* a picture!"

Archie Rhodes, never one to lose his head, remained watchful, but quiet, obedient. Paul turned him around, made sure that the man did not have another pistol concealed upon his person, and ordered him to gather the bonds and wrap and tie them into a package. Paul took this package under his left arm. He had the pistol in his right hand. It was a heavy automatic, and he kept the muzzle pressed against Archie Rhodes' spine.

"I notice you left the car turned around and the engine running. That was a swell idea. Well, you're going to drive just the same, but I'll be sticking to you like a brother! You don't have to keep your hands up like that, now, but keep them in your side pants pockets until we get into the car."

They started for the doorway. It was late afternoon, and the sunlight was less garish, less fierce, mellowed. Two little triangular white sails, instead of just one, now stood out gallantly against the incredible blue of Biscayne Bay; and the cotton-batting clouds above were beginning to show gray on one side, gold on the other.

IV

THIS view, a justly celebrated one, was blocked suddenly by the appearance of Little Goldy Teeth. He had a pistol in his right hand.

"Toss 'em up, guys!"

Because Paul was standing close behind Rhodes and slightly to Rhodes' left, the gunman in the doorway was not able to see the pistol which pressed against the small of Rhodes' back.

Rhodes took his hands out of his pockets slowly, and slowly he raised them. Paul felt him stiffen a little. The man was between two guns, and he knew it. But he was calm, blandly self-assured.

Archie Rhodes and Paul McEldowy knew that there was going to be shooting at any moment. Goldy Teeth was not aware of this.

Paul never did learn why Goldy Teeth had gone down the drive afoot, ahead of Herbie Moscovitz and Ed. Presumably it had been with some idea of studying the



lay of the land before the car—the big black touring car—was brought into the driveway.

"You too, Simpson! Let go of that package of newspaper or whatever it is you got there, and raise 'em up!"

Then the big fellow frowned inquisitively. He started forward, his left arm outstretched.

"What the hell is that you got there, anyway? Let's have——"

Archibald Rhodes, a highly sensitive organization of nerves, almost psychic at times, must have felt it coming. Or possibly Paul had moved the pistol instinctively, and Rhodes had felt it stir against

his vertebrae. Whatever the reason, Rhodes sprang to one side, threw himself upon the floor, his arms covering his head, his knees doubled underneath him.

There were two shots, but they sounded like one.

Paul McEldowy took three steps backward, stunned. He started to move his left shoulder up and down, as though not quite certain whether it was still there.

Little Goldy Teeth seemed to jump a trifle, with stiff knees, and his eyes grew very big and his mouth fell open as though something had startled him. He leaned back against the door jamb for a moment, like a man seeking to catch his breath. Then he crashed to the floor.

"Come on! Up with you and outside!"

Archie Rhodes got to his feet, but not enthusiastically.

"Into that car out there!"

Rhodes objected. "If I go out first Herbie and that other——"

"Well, if you don't go out you're going to get it from the back anyway, so you'd better make up your mind!"

Rhodes ducked, ran through the doorway, Paul ran close after him.

But there was no sign of the other two men, or of their car, at first. Rhodes sprang into the driver's seat of the Packard, threw out the clutch, released the emergency brake. Paul scrambled into the seat beside him. Paul still carried the package, but the string broke as he got into the car, and Apperson bonds were strewn all over the front seat.

Then the black touring car appeared.

It poked its way rather timorously down the drive and stopped in front of the oleander-centered circle. Behind the wheel, under his light gray hat, was thick-faced Herbie Moscovitz. Ed the piano-mover was standing in the back, a sub-machine gun in his hands.

ARCHIE RHODES did a beautiful bit of quick thinking then. It would have been impossible to drive past the tour-

ing car, which filled the end of the drive. The woods in back of the house were too thick with trees and tenacious creepers, bushropes of gloriosas and other tropical climbers, to permit passage of any car in whatever emergency. To jump out, here, and try to run for it would have been simple suicide. There was only one thing to do, and Archie Rhodes did it. He put the Packard into reverse and stepped on the accelerator.

An outraged engine roared. A machine gun splattered, stopped, splattered again.

Paul slid to his knees on the bottom of the car and was firing at the windshield of the touring car, at the machine gunner behind that windshield. He had a flash, too, of Herbie Moscovitz, fat-faced and scared, frozen at the wheel.

The Packard whirled backward, making a perfect half circle around the oleanders. Its engine bellowing indignantly, it jounced past the front of The Gables.

But here the hoary banyan blocked retreat. Archie Rhodes did not hesitate. He gave the wheel a mighty twist—and the Packard thundered back to the little dock, out on the little dock, off the end of the little dock.

It felt to Paul like a roller coaster gone bad. It felt as though they dropped half a mile. He was thrown back against the seat, and saw the windshield, the hood, the radiator cap, all rise magically toward a smiling heaven. Scattering Apperson bonds, he tried to jump out. Then water smacked him maliciously, deafeningly, from behind.

The dock was not high above the surface, and the water was not deep. When the rear wheels went off, the differential angrily ripped away a mass of wood splinters, and the whole machine went over backward, turning completely and precisely upside-down.

It couldn't have been done neater if it were a circus stunt, planned by engineers and rehearsed many times by acrobats.

Ed the piano-moved was unhurt, and he could have escaped, but the fool supposed

that he had a little time to spare. He saw nothing but Apperson bonds. On the surface of the bay just off the end of the dock they floated thick as water lilies. Ed ran down there, put aside his machine gun for the moment, threw himself upon his belly, and reaching over started to gather them.

PAUL McELDOWY, free of the mud, had given himself a push toward the shore. His intention was to swim under water to the dock, if possible, and to use that structure as protection against machine gun fire—for he assumed that the muzzle of the machine gun would be in search of bobbing heads.

He couldn't quite make it. The distance wasn't far, and he was ordinarily a strong swimmer, on the surface or below; but the excitement, the sickening backward dive, the struggle to free himself of the car and of the mud bottom, had used up too much of his wind.

He rose like some untidy Neptune, taking in air with great noisy gulps.

Directly in front of him and about two feet above, was the startled face of Ed. And below Ed's face were Ed's two groping hands.

Paul acted purely on instinct when he grabbed those two hands. There was no conscious thought connected with it.

Ed wriggled, struggled. He got one hand loose, flapped the arm wildly, feeling for the machine gun. All the time he was yelling for Herbie Moscovitz and his fellow gorilla, Little Goldy Teeth; but neither of those personages was in any position to respond to the appeal.

Paul got his feet braced against the piles, gave a mighty tug backward and down.

Ed slithered off the dock.

After that it was easy, for Ed was not a swimmer, not even much of a bather, and he swallowed vast quantities of Biscayne Bay promptly upon being immersed therein. Indeed, Paul's only difficulty was in hauling the helpless, semi-conscious hoodlum out of the water. He was sitting on Ed, and was trying to recover his breath

and his senses—trying to remember what had happened and where he was—when the first of the policemen appeared.

Not these fellows, but some who followed them soon afterward, gave Paul McEldoway first-aid treatment on the spot. He didn't require much. He was dizzy and tired, a little cut, badly bruised, smeared with mud of course, and the top of his left shoulder showed a superficial wound, but no bones had been broken, no vital parts disturbed.

"I'm glad to hear that," he muttered.

It was very confusing. But they gave him a drink of whiskey, and that made him feel better; his head began to clear.

A cop, his hands full of wet Apperson bonds, asked, "How many of these things are there supposed to be, do you know?"

"I don't know. But too many, anyway."

They told him that three dead men had been found in the house. He nodded. Three. Yes, that checked. The man he had been sitting on was all right, suffering from nothing more serious than shock and submersion. The man behind the wheel of the black touring car would recover too;

he had a broken shoulder bone and some minor flesh wounds. The man who had been pulled out of the water from under the Packard was emphatically dead.

"Too bad," Paul muttered. "He saved my life, that fellow. Still, he was the one who started it all in the first place."

The cottage looked not at all cute. It was downright rowdy, and its art-drunk designer never would have recognized it. Just in front of the doorway Paul McEldoway stooped to pick up a battered, sadly splintered sign which had been torn loose by machine gun fire. So much lead had passed through the sign, in fact, that it was difficult to read the words on it, "The Gables."

Paul chuckled.

"Obliging, these criminals. They unpack my bags for me, they fix it so that I can get my swim—whether I like it or not—and they take down this sign, which is something I'd been meaning to do ever since I bought the place."

He tossed the shattered relic aside.

"I'm going to put up a new one," he told policemen. "I'm going to rename the place. Going to call it Gorillas' Rest."

*Captain Lucifer, Guns at his Sides, Defies
the Curse of——*

THE AGRA SKULL

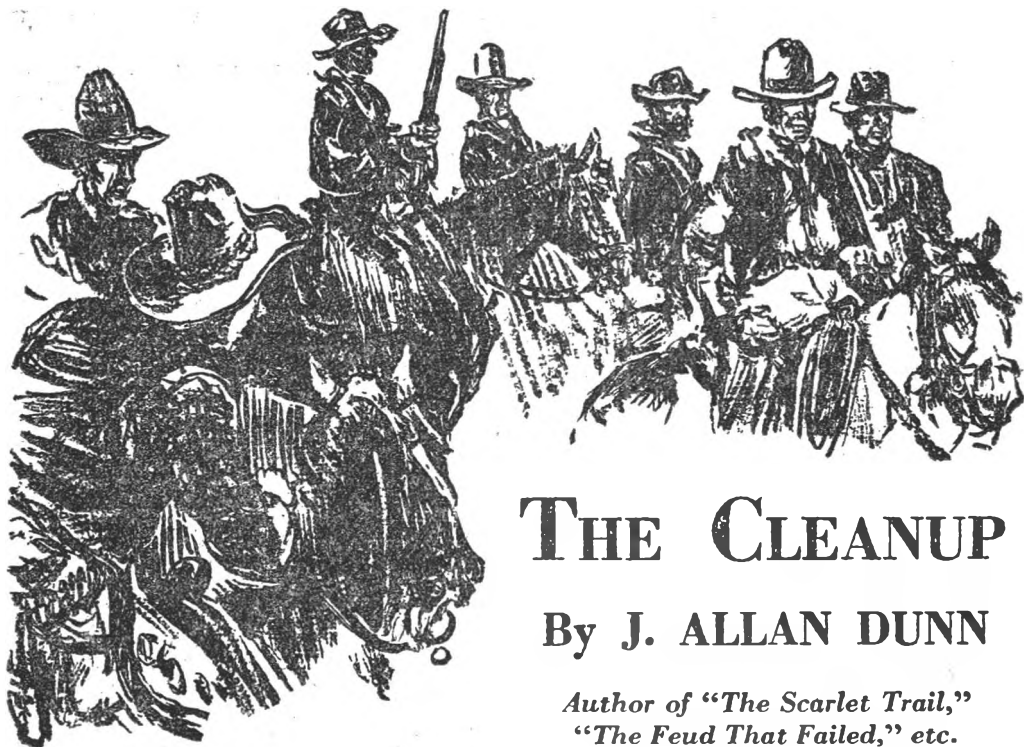
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THE CLEANUP

By J. ALLAN DUNN

*Author of "The Scarlet Trail,"
"The Feud That Failed," etc.*

THE quiet of the Texas night was broken by a low sound that steadily grew louder beneath the shining stars. Had it not been so continuous, it might have been thunder. It was like a steady roll of drums.

A man who was watching on the porch of the house that stood on a knoll well above the creek, heard it, and knew what it meant. It was the sound of loping horses, of horses that were being ridden hard, coming across the prairie.

There was a light shining from one window of the house, in its low second story. A woman lay there racked with fever, an older one watching her.

The man slid back silently from the porch into the large kitchen which was the main living-room of the house. An old man sat there, handling a rifle that belonged to his generation, a long-barreled weapon known in Missouri as a turkey-rifle.

This was Riley Gates, once of the Ozark Mountains in Missouri, now of the Lone Star State of Texas. He was bearded and gaunt of face, his skin tanned, wrinkled

like an alligator's. His wide shoulders were bowed, and his eyelids puckered, so that the pale blue orbs looked out from triangular folds of flesh. But there was fire, and purpose, in them.

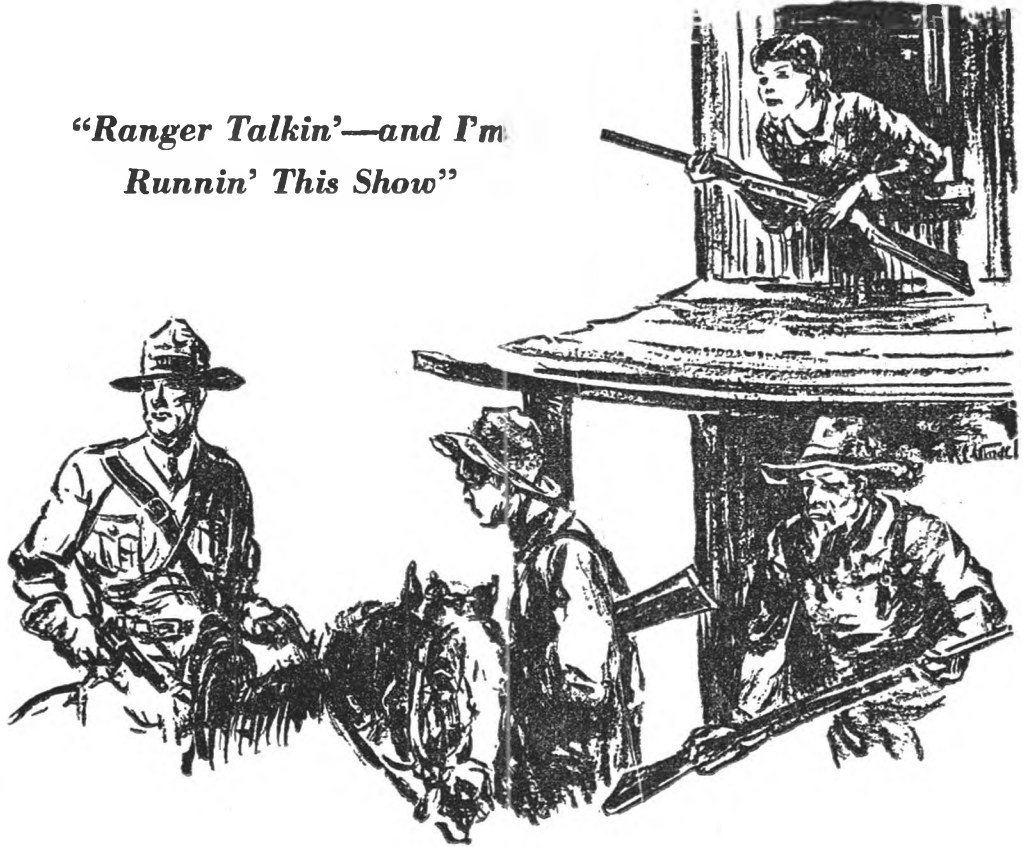
He looked up at his son, Jim Gates. Riley was getting hard of hearing. "Thet Floyd comin', with the doctor?"

"No, Dad. It ain't time yit. It's the H O outfit, I reckon, figgerin' on runnin' us off their private range."

Jim spoke bitterly. Ned Hardin, "Old Man" Ned Hardin, owner of the H O, had done what many other cattlemen were doing in Western Texas. He had run a four-string fence around two hundred thousand acres of land, and claimed it for his own. He had got his riders to file homestead claims for part of it; and he trusted to his own power and influence to keep possession.

Riley Gates also had filed a claim, but all this land between the Pecos and the Rio Grande was more or less in dispute, part of old Spanish grants to original Mexican owners; not yet settled by the legislature.

*"Ranger Talkin'—and I'm
Runnin' This Show"*



Meantime, might was right on the Western frontier. The cattle barons were wealthy. The scattered settlers, like Gates, were not; although they were doing well enough on the rich bottom lands, with corn and cotton and sorghum.

Hardin and his fellow cattlemen called them nesters. Usually it was the other way around, but in this instance it was the cattlemen who deliberately ran fences. They cut off the crops, they kept the settlers from water, they ordered them to get off the land. Some of them obeyed, others, with the true spirit of pioneers in their veins, refused to give up their holdings. They cut the wire.

Hardin and the others got a law passed making that a felony. The Texas Rangers were ordered to stop the practice.

The cattlemen called the nesters cattle-thieves, accused them of rustling stock. The long Wire War had started.

Gates sighted through the long, shining barrel. He patted the stock of the

rifle, where a double row of notches registered a grim tally. Riley Gates, and his father before him, had shot a man for every one of those marks. White men, many of them, killed in feuds back in the Ozarks. Indians and Mexicans, the rest. They were not outlaws, or murderers, the Gates. They notched their guns only in self defense.

There was a brass plate on the butt, with a name engraved upon it, the name of the rifle. "Betsy Ann."

Riley Gates shook out a single bullet from a pouch. He wrapped it in a disk of buckskin. He measured powder from a horn in the palm of his still steady hand. He rammed the charge, powder, wads and bullet, hard; until the ramrod rang as it sprang back. Then he placed a percussion cap on the firing pin.

He went over to a horsehide trunk that was his own especial property. It was unlocked but nobody ventured to touch it except Riley. He took out of it two squares

of cardboard, on which words were printed in black, block letters. The printing had been done on a regular press. Those cards had been printed by the hundred, ordered by the cattlemen.

The first read:

**FIRST WARNING
TO ALL NESTERS
CLEAR OUT**

The second:

**SECOND WARNING
ALL NESTERS
GET OFF BEFORE
YOU'RE PUT OFF
THIS MEANS YOU
AND NOW!**

"Aimin' to run us off in the middle of the night," the old man said to his son irascibly, "when we'd all been sleepin', if it warn't fer your sister bein' sick." He went on. "Treatin' us like we was hawss-thieves! An' them the worst kind of land robbers. Reckon me an' Betsy Ann'll do a li'l arguin' on thet score."

"They jest want an excuse to start shootin', Paw. With Floyd erway, they'll be six to one, or better. Thet old he-wolf, Sam Bligh, 'll be leadin' 'em. If they knew Sis' was sick, mebbe——"

He faltered before the blaze in the older man's eyes.

"Ef I warn't plumb sure you was my own son, Jim Gates, I'd wonder if you hadn't been swapped in the cradle. This is *our* land, an' we'll fight fer it. The Gates women ain't quitters. You slip upstairs, an' whisper to your Maw. No sense in rousin' Millie, 'less we have to. Then you come out on the porch with thet patent repeatin' Winchester of yourn."

Jim Gates put out his hand and his

father gripped it. "I ain't quittin', Paw," he said simply.

"I knowed you warn't, son." It was the kitchen light that shone out on the prairie. The one in the sick room was shaded. Riley Gates gathered up his ammunition and blew out the light. He could see as well in the darkness as a panther. His son's night-sight was almost as good.

The loping hoofs had halted now. In front of the house at the foot of the knoll there was a long, wide tongue of rich soil, held in the loop of Cabeza Creek. Right across this tongue of land ran the posts of the H O fence. But the wire had been cut. The Gates' crops were still being cultivated.

THE H O spread was the biggest outfit between the Pecos and the Rio Grande. Its owner, Ned Hardin, was tougher than dried rawhide. He had been a plainsman all his life, buffalo hunter and Indian fighter, when the Comanches and Apaches fought for the last of the bison in the Staked Plains of northwest Texas. When they began driving the wild Texas long-horns to the middle-western States, along the Chisholm Trail, across the Panhandle of Texas, Old Man Hardin was one of the first to see the opportunity for becoming a millionaire.

He boasted that he never dodged a fight or backed water—and never would, while he could fork a horse or hold a six-gun. The time had come when high living, old wounds, old hardships brought their penalty of rheumatism. He could hardly sit with comfort in a chair when the attacks were at their worst. They twisted his fingers so he could barely clasp the arm of that chair; let alone curl them about his hogleg's butt.

Tonight, while his men rode to get rid of the nester who refused to obey the printed warnings, Old Man Hardin sat on the veranda that ran all about his house. He would have led that raid if he could. His always explosive temper was not improved by the pains that shot through him.

He was hard, ruthless, with few real friends. He had never married. He cared only for power—and then more power. He was as unreasonable as a stampeding buffalo bull against any thing, or any one, opposing him. Head down, horns raking, bellowing his anger, Old Man Hardin would sweep obstruction out of his road.

Sam Bligh, his foreman, was a fitting representative of the Old Man. Bligh was an old-timer who knew all the tricks, and had played most of them. When his face twitched in a grin, there was no mirth in it, save for Bligh himself. With his stained teeth, his twisted, narrow lips, his long, twice-broken nose, and his yellow eyes, he looked like an old timber wolf.

Bligh toted two guns, strapped low. He carried lead in his body, that was scarred



with both blades and bullets. He had been a scout, pack-master for army troops, and a cowboy. He had fought in the Lincoln County war alongside McSweeney and Billy the Kid; willing to be hired as a gunman. He had started in when there was no law west of the Pecos, and he did not recognize any change.

Bligh was not far wrong. Sheriffs could not control the outlaws and bandits who were listed as fugitives from justice. They swarmed along the Rio Grande, hiding in the mesquite and the mountains. At heart, Sam Bligh was one of them, though he now drew down a hundred a month as general foreman for Ned Hardin. He was an old he-wolf, even when he acted the part of a watchdog. Every day of his life he started a ten-penny nail in the adobe wall of the H O bunkhouse, and drove it to its head, at twenty paces, with his forty-five.

He was chain-lightning on the draw. Bad as another man might be by reputation,

swift to jerk his artillery, he was content to agree with Sam Bligh, rather than risk a quarrel. Bligh belonged to the time when life was cheap along the border. He was a cold, quiet man, vindictive as a shedding rattlesnake. This mission was just to his liking. If there was one man Bligh ever regarded as an equal, it was Old Man Hardin. They were two of a kind. Hardin had the brains of the two, and had made the money.

BLIGH worked for Hardin, but he was the better man physically. He had never let up. He was the sort who dies with boots on; it might be in the saddle, or in a saloon; it might be on the gallows. Hardin had softened a bit with prosperity. His muscles were getting flabby, aside from his rheumatism. And Bligh's respect for Old Man Hardin was beginning to fade. He had his own ambitions. He did not want to be drawing wages all his life.

Now he spoke softly to the riders he had brought from the H O corrals to do the will of the Old Man. There were eight of them with Bligh. There were many more punchers on the spread, but not all lived at headquarters. The outfit was so vast it paid to erect separate bunk and chuck-houses for the others.

These men had all been hired by Sam Bligh. He had hand-picked them. They drew ten dollars a month more than the other H O riders. Several of them found the spread a convenient place to stay while certain deeds of theirs died down. Like Bligh, some of them toted two six-guns. Four of them had Winchesters scabbarded beneath their thighs. They were a reckless lot.

If Bligh told them the nesters were rustling cattle, they were willing to believe it, without further proof than snipped wire.

They naturally hated a nester as a dog hates a cat. Texas, west of the Pecos, was a land for stock-raising only, not for crops. Every farm meant less free grass, meant the arrival of towns, schools, churches, respectability. They had no more use for

respectability than coyotes have for apple blossoms.

"The Old Man's orders," said Bligh, "is to give 'em a chance to take what they can tote in their wagons. Rest of the stock they leave behind goes to even what they stole. Then we burn down the buildings, mend the wire; an' that's the end of 'em. The other spreads'll back up the Old Man's lead, pronto. We've already chivvied off most of the lousy nesters, an' now we'll clean up the tough hombres, like this old hill-billy."

"Suppose they show fight?" asked one of the punchers. "That old turtle can sure shoot with that pea-rifle of his. I saw him bring down a buzzard on the wing."

"You figgerin' yourself fer a buzzard, you'd best go back to the ranch," answered Bligh in his cold, hard, jeering voice. "The Old Man figgers it's worth five hundred dollars to him to git this nest cleaned out. You all share in thet kitty."

"I heard there was a sick woman, Riley's daughter," said another. "Might make hard talk if we put her out."

"I'd ruther listen to others' hard talk than your soft talk, Slim Bonney," snarled Bligh. "It's a warm night, won't hurt her none, if they're reasonable. If they ain't—you know dern well thet Riley Gates told the Old Man he'd cut thet wire, an' keep it cut, if he had to do it with bullets. His son-in-law, Floyd Dolan, threatened the Old Man personal, one day in Conejo. The Old Man laughed at him, an' told him not to talk thetaway till he got dry behind the ears."

"He should have plugged him," growled a rider.

"It was in Sutton's store. There was a Ranger in there."

"Ah, what's a Ranger?"

"Son," said Sam Bligh softly, "no one ever accused me of bein' scared of anybody, an' lived to repeat it. Jest the same, I don't hanker none to pick up an angry porkypine, to fool with a cow on the prod, dispute the right of way with a hydrophoby skunk, or tickle the scales of a rattlin' side-

winder. I never tried to make a pet out of a Gila lizard. I ain't afraid of none of 'em, but I respect 'em on their own ground. I feel the same way erbout a Texas Ranger. I reckon the Old Man's ideas is erbout the same as mine. They're tough hombres, Rangers. An' what law there is, is back of 'em. Now, let's git goin'. I'll make the talk."

THEY splashed through the shallow creek, flowing on to join the Pecos. The reflected starlight shivered in its broken ripples. They rode through the Gates' ripening crops, trampling down the toil of weeks, the results of industry. It was living merchandise that should have been soon turned to cash, or traded for supplies.

The tall corn hid them, but Riley Gates marked the rippling stalks, plumed with green leaves that sheathed the tasseling ears.

His son Jim was beside him, both on the porch.

"We shouldn't have ever let 'em dig those postholes, boy," said Riley. "But there was too many of 'em thet day, an' your maw was feelin' poorly." He chuckled. "She ain't poorly now." he said. "She's upstairs, with the window up, an' Melissy across her knees. Did I ever tell you, son, of the time she come to the turkey meet an' beat me out of the prize tom, shootin' with Melissy."

Jim Gates had heard the story many times, and his father knew it. But the chuckle in the face of danger was a tonic that he hardly needed. He had seen the brave face of his mother, watched his sister fight off her fever, weak as she was, when she heard the news.

"Don't give up. Make them carry us out," she said. "I only wish Floyd was here."

Both Jim and Riley Gates wished that. They knew that their case was a desperate one. They needed help, badly, against these riders, who considered them as they thought of the ticks that bring Texas fever.

But they were going to fight.

"I'll do the talkin', Jim," said Riley Gates, just as Bligh had spoken to the riders. "Here they come, out of the corn. Thet's thet tarantula Bligh on his gray hawss. Don't you pull trigger till I tell you, even if I shoot."

"All right, Paw. Jest the same, don't fergit I've got a repeater. You got to reload."

Riley Gates chuckled again in the face of danger. Years rolled off him for the moment. "You ain't ever seen your paw in real action," he said. "You'll be surprised how fast I kin load, when I have to."

Jim Gates was steeled for the encounter but he did not discount the risks. He admired his father, renewing his youth; but he could not help but be anxious about the women upstairs. He had not, like Riley, fought with one beside him against howling Indians. He was game enough, but he thought of his sick sister, of Floyd, gone for the doctor. And Riley acted as if he were playing faro, with bullets for chips.

THE voice of the old Missourian rang through the night, clear as a trumpet call.

"You're on my land, you interlopers! Clear off, or I'll let Betsy Ann do my talkin'. You, Bligh, they say you're a bad man. So am I. I was whelped in a cave, an' suckled by a she-cinnamon. I've got fur on my chest, an' my nails are longer than the claws of a paint'er. Vamose."

"They're on the porch," whispered Bligh. "You with rifles, slide 'em loose. Keep back in the corn. Git ready fer a volley, an' shoot low. Then we'll swing wide, an' charge. I'll give them their chance." He called back. He was fearless enough, disdaining to hide in the corn himself. "I hear you, Gates. Make up your mind. You've had your warnin's. We're cleanin' out all nesters and rustlers, an' we'll let you go, with all you can load on your wagons."

For a moment there was silence. There

came a chuckle from the porch, the click of a trigger.

"Mind's made up," said Gates. "Likewise Betsy Ann's. Lay flat, Jim," he whispered.

Jim obeyed, hugging his rifle. "I can hear more hawsses, Paw," he said. "Must be Floyd an' the doctor comin'."

"We don't want the Doc to mix inter this," answered Riley Gates. "I got a bead on Bligh. Watch this, son, fer a turkey shot."

There was a spurt of flame from the porch. The pea-bullet slid through the snakeskin band of Bligh's high-crowned sombrero. It parted the foreman's scanty, grizzly hair, and grooved his skull. Half-stunned, he drooped in his saddle.

Riley Gates set his hand between his son's shoulders, forced him flat to the porch



floor. "I creased thet hombre, jest like I would a mustang," he said. "Hold your fire, son."

The riders with rifles fired a hasty volley. The reports crashed as the slugs smacked into the wooden walls of the house, thick, axe-squared logs, that stopped them halfway.

Six-guns came from holsters. The riders paused, waiting the word of Sam Bligh before they charged.

A woman's voice, high-pitched and clear, came from the upper story of the house.

"Come on, you night-crawlin' centipedes," cried Maw Riley. "Come on out in the open, you bushwhackers, the hull troop of ye! A fine lot, ridin' against two men an' two women, with a babe yet unborn. You heard from Betsy Ann, now

listen to Melissy. She's jest barkin' now, but she kin bite. You there, on the pinto, I'm goin' to ventilate your sombrero."

A jet of fire broke from the window. The man on the pinto horse felt his hat shifting on his head as a bullet whipped through it. The men with the rifles fired again, and glass crashed.

"They ain't hit Maw," whispered Riley, "she's too old at the game. You go to the back, Jim, they'll likely split up, an' charge us, but they ain't all got rifles, an' they got a hundred yards to go."

Sam Bligh straightened up, his head splitting, venomous.

"They shot first," he cried. "Now we'll wipe 'em out."

The punchers gave out an Indian yell. They were well primed with liquor before they started. The five hundred dollars they would share urged the lust of fire and slaughter in their veins.

"*Yahoo!*"

HALF a mile away four horses traveled over the prairie, coming from Conejo. Two were buckskins, hauling the buckboard of the doctor. A black carried Floyd Dolan, a tiring mount on the double trip. Alongside the black there loped a big roan, bigger, heavier, stronger than any cow pony.

The man who rode it wore double cartridge-belts, with shells for the six-gun on his right hip, and the carbine in its saddle sheath. Balancing his six-gun, a bowie-knife swung at his left side.

The starshine glittered on a small silver badge on his breast, pinned to his buckskin tunic. It bore the one word of six letters:

R A N G E R

This was Tom Riggs. He had been in Conejo, trailing killers who had been murdering right and left in a wild outbreak of crime; two men whose descriptions, gathered sketchily, might have fitted a score of outlaws.

Riggs had found the trail cold at Conejo, though he was sure the killers had come

that way. He was in Conejo when Floyd Dolan arrived, looking for the doctor. He heard him tell about the illness of his wife, about the warnings pinned to their door, his fears for his people's safety.

"You been cuttin' wire?" Riggs asked him. "We got a complaint from Hardin, about two weeks ago, but there's only a few of us, an' we've got a big territory to cover."

"He aims to settle it his own way," said Dolan. "Yes, we've cut wire, to save our crops, to git our stock to water. We was there long before he run his fence or claimed that land. We've filed on it, but it's hung up. Now he threatens to run us off, like they did others, take our stock, burn our buildin's. We got a right to protect our own. An' my wife's ill. We're expectin' our first baby."

It was then the doctor came in, an overworked but willing man. "I'll be with you, Dolan," he said, "soon's I water my team an' get a cup of coffee."

Tom Riggs talked with the doctor briefly. "I'll go along," he told Dolan. "The law's the law, but justice is justice, an' we Rangers aim to administer both."

AS THE wild war-whoop sounded, after the scattering shots, Riggs swung in his saddle.

"I'll go ahead," he said, and touched his roan troop-horse, Buddy, with his spurs. The roan had traveled far and steadily for days, but it answered as if it had been in stable for a week. Like its master, it was always in prime condition, well groomed, grained with rations of corn.

A Ranger's mount belonged to its master. It was chosen from the best, passing stiff inspection. A Ranger was half man, half horse, like the centaur of the legends.

Floyd Dolan pricked his own mount, but the black fell behind as the great roan covered the ground in long leaps. It crashed through the creek, over the already invaded crops.

Riggs urged it on between the house and the invading riders.

"Get back, you," he ordered them. "Back up, you hombres! Put up your guns!"

Slim Bonney fired at him, and the bullet flipped through the wristflap of Riggs's left gauntlet.

Riggs shot from the saddle of the rearing roan as he swung it about. Slim looked down on his dripping fingers. His six-gun fell to the dirt.

"I'm runnin' this circus," cried Riggs. "Savvy that, both sides. Ranger talkin'."

Sam Bligh heeled his gray forward. He saw the silver star. His wolf face was crafty.

"You a Ranger?" he said. "Thet's good. These nesters have been cuttin' wire, runnin' off our steers. Our Boss send word to your Camp, a fortnight back. Didn't seem like you was able to attend to it, so we rode in, to sort of make 'em realize things. They threatened to shoot Old Man Hardin——"

"So he got you buckaroos to come in the middle of the night an' persuade these folks to stop wire snippin'. Too bad you didn't bring along a few more. Hardin's outfit, eh? You must be Sam Bligh. We've heard of you, hombre."

"What of it, Ranger, what of it?"

Riggs could see the old-timer's hands hovering over his guns. He knew they fairly itched to draw them. He had holstered his own hogleg.

"This ain't my Sam Bligh night," he drawled. "Here comes the doctor. Make way for him. I reckon all you brave hairpins had mothers once. If there's any manhood left in you, you'll give the right of way to another. To two mothers. Mrs. Gates and her daughter, whose motherhood is at hand. I'll ride back with you, and have a talk with Hardin. You've got no right to take the law in your own hands."

"They've got no right to cut wire," growled Bligh. He had no qualms about mothers. His own had abandoned him before he could recognize her. But the Ranger's ill-hidden contempt cut him. He saw that Riggs's words lay on his men

like the lashes of a quirt. They parted to let the buckboard through, to let Floyd Dolan pass. What there was left of humanity in them squirmed, though they would soon forget it.

The single figure of the Ranger had challenged, and held them. They felt his fearlessness, backed by the law.

THE light went on again in the kitchen. The figure of Riley Gates appeared in the open doorway. Maw Gates came to the porch to greet the doctor.

"Looks like there is a real man or so left," she said clearly. "Git those slimy lizards off our land, Ranger. They're in luck. I could have licked the hull kit myself, me an' Melissy. I've fit real bad men in my time. These only smell theterway. Scat!"

Somebody sniggered, and another laughed outright at her brave taunts. It broke the strain. Tough as they were, they admired her spirit. The arrival of the Ranger, the presence of the doctor, whom they all knew was an able, resolute man, changed the look of things. Only Slim Bonney, his fingers wrapped in his neckerchief, still scowled. Sam Bligh showed his twisted grin.

"We'll talk it over with Hardin, then," he said. "You're the law, Ranger. Gates has broken it. We didn't harm him any. He started the shootin'. He's trespassin' inside our fence, an' he cut the wire."

"You came through the wire from outside," said Riggs. "You trampled his crops." He spoke coldly and severely, but he knew Hardin was likely to get the best of it. Gates might bring a civil suit for damage to his crops, but he wasn't likely to get anything out of it, even if it ever got to court. The cattlemen had the ears of the judges, of the men who appointed them.

They did not return through the snipped fence but rode straight for the H O headquarters, in silence. Bligh and his men kept together, the Ranger on their flank. He could feel the dislike they held for him,

as plainly as he could feel heat from an oven. But he paid no attention to it.

Presently they sighted the H O ranch-house. Like Gates's more humble dwelling, this one was on a little hill. It was a big building of adobe, roofed with tiles. Trees shaded it. Cabeza Creek flowed around a shoulder of the knoll. Lights showed on one side of the house, the side they approached. Old Man Hardin was waiting to hear the success of his raid.

But he was never to listen to it, in this world. Bligh and Riggs went to the house together, ascended the porch steps, and found Ned Hardin slumped in his chair. Both of them knew death when they saw it, in the light that came from the windows of the big room behind him. It showed a dark pool on the planks of the porch.

BLIGH swung on his heels, called to the riders who were on their way to the corral.

"Hardin's been killed," he cried. "Murdered! Shot, I reckon," he said to Riggs in a lower tone. "Hold on," he added. "Someone here?"

The riders were hurrying to the scene, on foot, awkward in their high-heeled haste.

Riggs had already seen the man who came through the long windows of the big room, and now stepped back on seeing them. He did not try to close the windows, or to escape, as the two followed him, the punchers crowding in behind.

The man was young, lean and lithe and brown of skin. His eyes and hair were dark, his features hawkish. As he looked at them coolly, his lips almost twitched into a smile. His brown eyes met the gray ones of Tom Riggs in mutual appraisal.

Sam Bligh uttered an exclamation, went for his six-gun. The Ranger stepped in front of him, setting him aside with a powerful forearm.

"I'm still runnin' things, Bligh," he said. He liked the frank aspect of the stranger,

who did not look to him like a murderer. "How come?" Riggs asked simply.

"I was ridin'," said the other. "I saw lights. It seemed kind of late for that. I knew this was H O headquarters, but I didn't figure on comin' here, till I heard a shot. Then I headed in. I caught a glimpse of a rider scootin' across the creek into the mesquite. Foot of the hill, I heard a groan. I came up to find him dead."

It was a thin yarn. The Ranger acknowledged that. A strange rider, passing by at that hour, admitting he knew this was H O headquarters. Riggs did not blame Bligh for butting in, the others for pressing forward.

"Night-rider, are you?" asked Bligh, his wolf-face vicious. "You're new round here, but you knew the place. So you heard a groan an' found the Old Man dead. This is the killer, boys. Git him."

Tom Riggs was not conceited, but he had reason to believe that he had the fastest draw in Texas. Now he doubted it. He saw the stranger step back and sideways, like a fencer, or a champion boxer. Guns were coming out fast, but he beat them all. The Ranger was a little slow, but he had hesitated for a second. On the face of it, this man was guilty.

Just the same, Riggs moved toward the other, to stand beside him. He was not going to see a man shot down in cold blood, lynched before his eyes.

He was too late. As if by the magic of a conjuror, a long-barreled Colt gleamed in the stranger's hand, moving on a level arc.

"Who wants to go out first?" he asked, almost pleasantly.

He had them covered. That level blue muzzle moved back and fro, like the head of a snake. It did not jerk, but it seemed to pause for a split-second before each of those in the front ranks, and, one by one, they felt their bowels shrinking. Even Bligh kept his hogleg pointed to the floor.

Now the Ranger stood by the stranger, his six-gun aligned with the other's.

"We'll talk some more," he said. "Hol-

ster up. You, too, stranger. I'll handle this convention. You got any more to your story, cowboy, before you tell us your name an' business?"

The hawkish features were lit up with a flash of white, perfect teeth.

"The cook is back there in his shack," he said. "Dead to the world. Been smokin' opium, or marihuana, I reckon. I couldn't wake him. He wouldn't have heard a thing. That's all, gents, except that my name is Jim Wyatt. I'm a cattle-detective. I'm down here to investigate the rustling that's been goin' on. I ride nights when I'm in a hurry an' my hawss ain't too tired."

Riggs's eyes narrowed. He knew the name of Jim Wyatt. It tied up with that



miraculous draw, with the coolness of the man.

"Reckon you've got identity papers with you?" he asked.

Wyatt handed them over.

"Might be faked," snarled Bligh. "Look at his gun. I'm bettin' he killed Hardin." He looked at his men. They muttered angrily but made no move.

"My gun's clean, an' likewise loaded—full," said the range-detective.

Riggs gave him back his papers. They included a small photograph. "I'll accept these," he said. "One of you better go to Conejo, for the sheriff. Some of you scout round for sign of the man Wyatt saw go through the creek."

"I'll go for the sheriff," said Bligh. Riggs was a little surprised at his willingness to leave. He figured that the foreman

still had some idea of pinning the crime on Wyatt.

THAT was absurd to the Ranger. As the others left, he turned to the man who had found Hardin dead.

"We've heard of you," he said. "My name's Tom Riggs."

"Shake," said Wyatt, "that leaves us even. I don't often get into Texas, but we hear what's goin' on. If I wasn't a range-detective, I've often thought I'd like to be a Texas Ranger, and if I was a Texas Ranger, I'd like to be Tom Riggs; or have his record."

"That's sure a handsome speech," Riggs came back, with a half-embarrassed laugh. "It's not only you we've heard about, but that palomino hawss of yours. Flash is the name, an' likewise it's nature, ain't it? I didn't see it as we rode up. Did you leave it in the corral?"

"I left Flash in the mesquite," said Wyatt. "He'll stay there till I go for him, or whistle for him. You see, this house bein' on a hill, I saw the light shinin' quite a ways off. Like I said, I wasn't figgerin' on puttin' up here. I was cuttin' through to Conejo."

Riggs nodded understandingly. A range-detective would find it best to enter a territory unannounced. Once let him be connected with any outfit and his business known, the news would spread and his usefulness damaged.

"Some of the nesters have got reason to cut wire," he said, and told Wyatt what had happened to bring him to Hardin's. "This wire proposition is makin' a heap of trouble," he went on. "They started to fix a law that there shouldn't be any fencin' at all, but crops have got to be protected against cattle. So then Hardin an' others used the law and ran plenty of wire, an' shut in the settlers. Or shut 'em out, like Gates. It's my job to prevent wire cuttin'; one of my jobs. But there's cases where the cattlemen are sure takin' advantage of the law."

"Hardin won't take advantage no more," said Wyatt grimly. "Looks like it was a tie-up job between you an' me to find out who killed him, though the sheriff may want to handle it."

"The sheriff is all right," answered Riggs. "He means well, but he got elected when he was over fifty, an' he's been in office most as many years as I've lived. He ain't over an' above active. Men like Hardin figgered to run the county."

"I can sabe that," said Wyatt. "Would Hardin be liable to keep much cash on hand?"

"There's no bank at Conejo, none nigher than Red Springs. Most big owners keep money in their safes. Why?" Riggs's eyes were suddenly questioning.

"I didn't quite speak all my piece," said Wyatt. "I didn't quite like all my audience. I had a look at Hardin's safe. It's in a room off this one. Reckon he uses it for an office. You better take a looksee."

It was a big safe, but the face of it had been ripped away, and what was left of the door released from the exposed locks, and swung wide. The safe was empty except for a few papers and some account books.

"Claw levers," Riggs announced, after a swift survey. "This lines up with the trail I followed to Conejo, and lost there. Two men who have been committing just this sort of crime, murder and robbery. They are old hands at it. They started in as plain safe-crackers, then they killed a watchman in El Paso. The next job they pulled, they shot a man and his wife. They got away and have been hiding out along the Rio Grande. Now they've started in again."

"Got their names and descriptions?" asked Wyatt.

"They've changed their names plenty of times," said the Ranger. "Known last as Lampson and Garrett. I've got their descriptions and pictures, on reward bills. If they killed Hardin, it might leave you out of it. Lampson and Garrett ain't mixed up with rustlin', that's sure, so far."

"Have they been usin' hawsses?" in-

quired Wyatt. "The one I saw sure knew how to ride."

"Both of them ride well enough," answered Riggs. "You only saw one, you say. The other might have been around as a lookout."

"Sounds reasonable," said Wyatt. "There's several things I don't quite savvy. Bligh seemed mighty anxious to place me as the killer of Hardin. If you hadn't been along they likely would have shot me up. Found on the spot, it would look bad for me, though I wouldn't be botherin', seein' I'd be plumb dead and not able to defend myself."

"Judgin' from the draw you made, you wouldn't have been the only corpse. Of course Bligh didn't know you from Adam. He was hasty, but he could show some excuse, seein' his Old Man lyin' murdered. He couldn't tell you for a range-detective. You didn't say so till later, an' you don't wear a badge."

"That's one of the things I was talkin' about. Bligh *knew* who I was, unless he's suddenly gone loco. Last time I was in your state I was at Waco. They were trying a gang that had been caught rustlin', but they had a long record as bandits. They killed two night-herders an' three of 'em swung for it."

The Ranger nodded. "I read about it," he said. "One of the times I knew about you. You rounded up the rustlers, saved the cost of a rope for two of 'em, as I remember."

"I was there to testify," said Wyatt. "There was an attempt made to save the prisoners. It didn't work. They arrested several thought to be leaders. This Bligh was one of 'em. I spotted him in the crowd. He dug up an alibi that was finally accepted. But I grilled him. He remembered me, all right."

"We know some things about him, too," Riggs said. "We don't want him for anything. He's a tough hombre, like most of the old-timers. Hardin trusted him. He'd be in Waco on H O business that

trip. Hardin ain't traveled much lately, 'count of his rheumatism."

THE sky was graying, dawn was coming, the stars fading fast, as the Ranger and the range-detective stepped out to the veranda, where Hardin stared with sightless eyes at the dark pool at his feet.

The bullet had entered his head in front, just below the right eye. It had made a ghastly wound at the back of his skull where it came out. There was no doubt of its exit. But neither Riggs nor Wyatt could find any trace of the slug. To experts like them there was only one answer. The murderer had taken time to pick it up. He had, single-handed, or not, ripped the safe after its owner was dead.

"Cool customer," said Wyatt. "Took his time about it. Looks like an old hand—likewise he knew the Chink would be doped with his opium, and all hands away, includin' Bligh. How long you figger Hardin's been dead, Ranger?"

"Not long. I don't claim to be an expert. You figgerin' on Bligh? He'll use me for an alibi. He had to ride from here to Gates's place. Must have been there round half an hour; then we rode back together."

"He had a good alibi in Waco," Wyatt said drily. "It was a rifle killed Hardin. Shot from the foot of the hill, by the angle of the wound. I'm with you in this job, if you're agreeable?"

Riggs agreed. He noted again the entrance and exit of the bullet, marked the general course of the lead, pointed out a patch of mesquite to the range-detective.

Wyatt nodded. The two of them went down the hill and into the little grove. They found something of what they were looking for. A place where a man had entered the mesquite on foot, twigs he had broken to clear the view for his murderous aim. But there was no sign of an ejected shellcase. The killer was thorough.

From where he had fired, Hardin must have made a perfect target as he sat on the porch against the lighted windows. He

might have been watching the light in Gates's window, waiting to see it go out, forever, to know his own illegal orders were carried out.

The murderer might have known he would find Hardin sitting there. Wyatt suggested that. Riggs objected.

"Sounds a bit far-fetched, to me," he said. "You don't like Bligh, do you, but I don't see how you're goin' to tie him in."

"Neither do I," Wyatt admitted. "You're right, I don't like him. I've got a hunch he wouldn't stop at much. They've been losin' stock on the H O right along as well as other outfits. Plenty of rustlers in the gulches, I reckon?"

"Plenty," said Riggs. "Some of 'em got corrals hidden out there. Country's built right for rustlin'. Some of the thieves are the small independents the big men have driven out of business. They call 'em nesters, but all nesters ain't rustlers, but regular settlers, like Gates, aimin' to grow up with the country. They shouldn't get the worst of it. Let's see if any of the H O men have cut sign."

"Yep, let's see," said Wyatt. He was inclined to doubt results from this lead. He did not believe in condemning anybody because of a hunch; but he felt that the raid on Gates, the rustling of H O stock, and Hardin's murder, were somehow related; even admitting that the men the Ranger was after, Lampson and Garrett, might be the actual killers.

THEY saw where the man in the mesquite had mounted his horse again. Wyatt thought he might link up the tracks with the rider he had seen. He spotted a peculiarity in one of the hoofmarks, a hind one. He and Riggs were still on foot, Flash still waiting for Wyatt, the Ranger's big mount by the main corral.

As Wyatt bent for a closer inspection, he felt the wind of a bullet hum by his cheek. The crack of a rifle came from the right some distance off. Wyatt whirled, seeking his gun. The Ranger did the same, though both knew they were outranged.

the sniper well hidden, all the advantage in his favor.

Wyatt's foot caught in a looping root of a ground vine. He stumbled and fell to his knees and on his empty hand. He rolled over, and lay still.

Riggs sprang to his side, expecting to find him badly hurt, or dead. To his amazement Wyatt winked at him.

"Look me over," he whispered. "Like I was hit, which I ain't. May fool him. He's got the range of us. I think it's me he was after. Pay better to plug a stranger, whoever he was, than shoot up a Ranger. He wouldn't know he missed me. He got the report and the recoil first."

Some of the riders came running to the spot. They were waiting for the breakfast the Chinese cook, coming out of his opium dream, was preparing. The others had not come back from their search for sign. These offered to try to round up the hidden marksman.

"Must be the same one shot Hardin, or his partner," said one of the punchers. "Let's get him."

"It might be, at that," Wyatt said, rising to his feet. "But I doubt if you round him up this trip. If you do, he'll have an alibi, like as not."

Riggs looked keenly at Wyatt, seeking a special meaning, but the range-detective's face was that of an expert poker-player, with four kings to a three-card draw. If they worked together, the Ranger told himself, they would do it from different angles, though he thought they would arrive at the same goal.

Riggs was still on the trail of Lampson and Garrett. Wyatt was after the rustling end of it.

They met the men Riggs had sent to the creek. They had found nothing, they declared. When Riggs and Wyatt decided to confirm that, they found both sides of the creek trampled badly, also the cattle paths in the mesquite that ended in a rocky gulch which, in turn, led to a long stretch of shale.

Ranger and range-detective looked at

each other. It was the former who spoke. He was beginning to turn to the idea of Wyatt that local talent might be mixed up in the affair.

"Couldn't have done a better job if they had set out to fog the sign," said Riggs.

Wyatt nodded. "Might as well have chow," he said as they went back to the ranch-house. "Better wait till the sheriff comes, I reckon. By this time, everybody in Conejo an' vicinity knows what I look like, and what's my business here. That can't be helped, an' it may be mended. Do you want to bet a dobie dollar those punchers don't tag the gent who tried to get me?"

"I don't bet against cinches," grinned the Ranger. "How's for goin' in to Conejo together, an' talkin' things over?"

"Suits me fine," answered Wyatt. "Then I'm goin' to do the disappearin' act, but I'll be keepin' in touch with you."

He set his fingers to his lips and gave



a shrill call. Inside three minutes, a palomino horse, saddled, the reins over the horn, came out of the mesquite, its hide shining like polished metal.

The Ranger frankly admired its action, its short-coupled body, powerful muscles and springy pasterns. "No need askin' if that's Flash," he said. "He sure looks it."

Sam Bligh came back before breakfast was ended. He brought with him the elderly sheriff, who looked tired and worried.

"We're just goin' to snatch a snack," said Bligh. "Then we're goin' over to Gates's, me an' the sheriff."

"If it's about the wire, that's my end of it," said Riggs.

Bligh gave the Ranger one of his wolfish, leering grins.

"It ain't the wire," he said. "Sheriff's goin' to arrest Floyd Dolan for the murder of Hardin! He was heard to threaten to kill him. Last night he claimed in the Cactus Café that he was lookin' for Doc all over; said a man told him Doc was out to the Three Bar, but when he got there, the place was all dark an' no sign of Doc. Now Doc was never there. There warn't any man mentioned the Three Bar. But the trip there would have given Dolan plenty time to make the H O, an' kill the Old Man."

"Knowin' he would find him all alone, with the cook in a pipe-dream?" asked Wyatt.

Bligh's grin turned to a snarl.

"You detectives are all-fired smart," he said. "He might have, at thet. Most Chinks dope up nights. He knew we'd warned his paw-in-law, an' might be expected any time. He took a chance. We've got the motive, an' the threat. Dolan's goin' to jail. There'll be a quick trial promised, an' carried out; to prevent lynchin'. An' there ain't no bail allowed in Texas for folks accused of murder."

"That's right," replied Wyatt. "Not even in Waco, Sam Bligh."

But Bligh only grinned at him again, with a malicious triumph in his eyes.

TOM RIGGS rode down the main street of Conejo slowly, going over the general situation. He felt that he was in the public eye, not merely as a Ranger, but as an officer of the law who was baffled in the pursuit of his duty. That was not, in Riggs's idea, a good thing for the public to imagine.

Floyd Dolan was in the local jail. Public opinion had accepted him as the killer of Hardin, had already convicted him, and many were anxious to see him hanged. This was a situation deliberately fostered by Sam Bligh and his punchers. It was known that the Ranger did not agree, that

he was trying to find another murderer, or other murderers.

But Dolan was a nester; more than that, he was a dirt farmer. Public opinion clung to the idea that there were only two main industries in Western Texas, grazing and mining, the first on top of the ground, the second underneath; neither interfering with each other. But dirt-farmers were interlopers. Cattle-ranchers could raise what crops they needed with peons; outside of that, it was a Chinaman's job to grow garden truck. Not a white man's. West of the Pecos, especially, the land was intended, by Nature, for stock-raising only. Conejo was a cowtown, first and last.

Bligh's riders, with the punchers from other outfits, spread the idea. The cattle owners were naturally for it. It made no difference that Floyd Dolan had just become the father of a son. The baby was referred to as an interloping brat that didn't belong, and should never have been born. The doctor who had brought the child into the world was laughed at when he combated such talk.

Hints of lynching were beginning to grow louder and more frequent. The elderly sheriff had two deputies, one of them a half-breed Mexican, the other the relative of a cattleman. The owners had the say so about these appointments.

Riggs held his peace, seeking to pick up the trail of Lampson and Garrett. The fact that he had lost it in Conejo was significant to him. They had not hidden out in the town, but he was certain they had been there, and he believed they were not far away.

Unless he produced them, proved this last murder on them, he was going to have to combat a lynching, and he would have to do it single-handed; unless he counted in the range-detective. But Wyatt had done as he said he would, dropped out of sight. And he had not been in touch with the Ranger.

There were only a few more than thirty men in Tom Riggs's troop and they had a tremendous territory to cover, many mat-

ters to look out for. Wire-cutting was the least of them. They had their hands full with the hundreds upon hundreds of outlaws hidden out in the mesquite and the bosque, but always more or less active in robbery, smuggling, in every variety of banditry, including murder. Every Ranger was on his own, save upon extraordinary occasions.

If they tried to lynch Dolan it might be impossible for Riggs to get in touch with his troop in time.

The Ranger imagined that the range-detective was after rustlers, under cover. Rustling was still going on. The H O was among the losers.

WITH Hardin dead, his heirs were being advertised for. The papers left in his safe gave no indication that he had any relatives. There was no suggestion anywhere of correspondence. No doubt, claimants would show up for the valuable heritage, and many of them would be fakes, if not all of them.

Meantime, a State administrator appointed Sam Bligh to take charge of the spread. Eventually, if no heirs were accented within the legal period, the State would take over the property. The question of debts owing by Hardin, of monies owing him, was turned over to a State accountant. The administrator cut down the H O force. Sam Bligh was allowed to retain the men he asked for, naturally enough those who worked closest with him, who had been with him when Gates was raided. He complained that they were not enough to do the linework, let alone properly carry on the work of the outfit.

The administrator pointed out that the outfit was being held in escrow for possible heirs. Progressive work was not necessary. He permitted the sale of steers enough to pay wages and food, for actual necessities, such as salt and horseshoes; but all expenses had to be cut to the bone.

The job advanced Bligh's importance. He blamed the latest rustling on the stinginess of the administrator. Nine men, he

pointed out, could not begin to cover two hundred thousand acres. It would not be his fault if, by the time the outfit was turned over—to heirs, or the State—there would not be enough stock left on it to make a decent sized herd.

Riggs was inclined to agree with Bligh's estimate, but not with his reason for it. He knew that Bligh and his men came into Conejo almost every night, leaving never more than one or two on the ranch; and that they were spending plenty of money. Bligh's salary went on but the punchers had their extra ten dollars a month cut off.

Yet, unless the Ranger was blind and feeble-minded, the bunch drank, gambled or otherwise wasted, more than a month's allowance in one night in the shabbier resorts of Conejo, where a host of hangers-on shared their liquor, listened to, and applauded Bligh. It was in these places that the talk of lynching grew.

RIGGS only got that at secondhand. His appearance was the signal for all that sort of talk to be stopped, even in Spanish, although he had not let it be known he could speak the language. All he got to see was the wolf-grin of Bligh, all he heard were half-jeering remarks. He was offered false clues about Lampson and Garrett. He knew that Bligh was deliberately trying to undermine his influence and importance, to make a joke out of a Ranger.

Under his skin, this burned Riggs up, but he never showed it. He waited his time, hoping for a break, wondering what the range-detective might be about.

One thing he had accomplished. He had got Riley Gates to put a fence of his own about the ground inside the loop of the creek, and Riggs made a firm stand about the wire that had been cut. He arranged for Gates to replace the strands, but to put in a gate. With Hardin dead, his estate in escrow, the Ranger pointed out that there was no one who could make complaint, and that therefore he, as a Ranger, was satisfied.

There was some grumbling about this favor to dirt-grubbing nesters, but nobody came out in the open with it to the stern-faced young Ranger with the silver star on his chest. There was a grinness in his eyes, and about his lips, that strongly suggested there was a limit to his patience, when it came to questioning his rights, and his duty.

It was growing dark one evening when Riggs entered the Chinese restaurant where he had found the best meals in Conejo. The lights were all going, and the nightlife of the cowtown starting in full swing as he came out again. He rode along the street, stopping here and there to drop in unexpectedly at *café* or *cantina*, hoping to pick up some sign of his broken trail. With the hint of future reward, with a few dollars spent from his own small pay, Riggs had enlisted a man here, and another there; to act as his ears and eyes.

But he did not have much faith in their type of manhood. It was true that, if they helped to land Lampson or Garrett, they would share in a big sum, and after they had looked at the reward posters the Ranger had showed them, their eyes glowed with greed. But they were a risk, likely to talk too much. They might be more harm than good, but he had to try them.

He stopped toward midnight outside the posada—or inn—called in Spanish by the enticing title of "The Rose Without a Thorn." There was not much suggestive of a rose about the place. It attracted the rowdiest element in Conejo. When punchers, ordinarily contented with average entertainment, had a few drinks too many, they veered towards the posada. There was dancing there, and gambling, the liquor was strong, and most of it contraband.

There were always as many Mexicans as Americans there; in the daytime, more. Nor were these honest, hardworking peons. They had no visible means of support, and they were always flashily dressed in more or less dirty finery, as caballeros.

Pedro Sanchez, the smug and swarthy owner, did not cater to peons. He liked

the free-spending cowboys and vaqueros, and Riggs had no doubt that many of the Mexies were allied with rustlers, would pick a pocket or cut a throat without a qualm.

WHAT interested the Ranger the most in "The Rose Without a Thorn" was that Bligh made it his favorite resort. At some time, almost every night, he was sure to be there. And Riggs had one of his bribed spies in the posada, a man who acted as a sort of bus-boy, collecting empty glasses, and mopping up tables. He had given him five pesos the night before, and the Mexican had seemed grateful. He might have heard something. If so, he would give the Ranger a sign.

The entrance to the inn was the usual sort, under an arch that led to an inner court, or patio, off which a door entered the main room, used as a bar, a gambling hall and a dance-floor.

Riggs was about to ride beneath the archway when a man came bolting out of it. The lantern showed a gleam of steel that darted like an arrow, and struck the man in the back, sending him down. But not before the Ranger had recognized his face. It was that of his spy. The Mexican fell flat, the knife sticking up between his shoulders. It had not killed him, Riggs thought it might have struck bone; but as the other tried to rise, two men rushed at him to finish him.

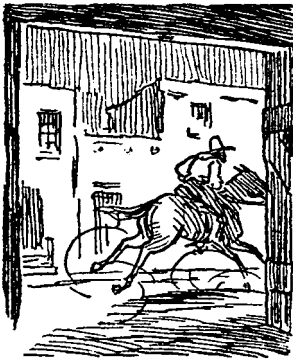
It was a common enough scene. But not one a Ranger could tolerate, even if Riggs had not felt responsible for the stricken man. He was crawling to one side, feebly trying to defend himself, when Riggs pricked Buddy, and at the same time nudged him in front of his nigh wither.

The well-trained horse knew what was wanted of it. It sprang like a jumper at a high hurdle, clean from its hindquarters, front feet striking out like the arms of a fighter. One man went down before him, and the roan snaked his neck and grabbed the shoulder of the second one

between his teeth as Riggs slashed him with his quirt.

The man screamed in terror and agony, and the big roan stopped shaking him, at Riggs's word. The first man lay still. A hoof had broken his upper arm, another had clipped his skull. He was too senseless to even realize his luck at being alive. The man who had been knifed managed to stand up, the blade had dropped from his back, but he was slowly sinking down again, as Riggs slid a leg over his saddle-horn and hit the ground; catching him, his buckskin tunic instantly stained with the same red, vital fluid that soaked the Mexican's short jacket.

The man who had been slashed, fled, howling imprecations in Spanish. The other lay still. Riggs ordered his mount into the patio, as men came piling out of the interior, headed by Sanchez. Riggs knew Buddy was safe. If any one tried



to touch him, he would know that a Ranger's horse was as good as its master, when it came to taking care of itself.

"*Quien es?*" cried Sanchez. "Who ees eet? What ees all thees? Ah, Señor Rangero, eet ees you? What then, 'as 'appen?"

Riggs's man had fainted from loss of blood. The Ranger picked him up in his strong arms, and took him into the general room. He laid him on a faro table, against the protest of the dealer and lookout as well as the players who had placed their stakes. Riggs was not in a mind to listen to them.

"Sanchez," he said, "I found this man trying to escape, a knife in his back, from your posada; two men after him. Do you know him?"

Sanchez peered at the man who worked for him, and lied.

"No, señor, I have never seen 'eem before."

In a way the answer suited the Ranger. He let it go for a moment. "He came from here," he said. "One of the men who were after him is in the archway. He is goin' to be sick for some time. If this one lives, the other will be punished enough. If he dies, he hangs. Tonight, he goes to jail. No doubt he will tell who the other was with him."

SANCHEZ shrugged, spread his arms. "Can I help thees, señor? I run a respectable place. Eef men come 'ere, drunk, an' start a quarrel, men I do not know, ees eet my fault?"

"You know all three of them, don't lie to me. I've seen this chap cleaning up. They call him Luis. Now, if anything more happens to him, I hold you responsible. You understand?"

He spoke in English, forcibly. Sanchez understood, and feebly protested.

"I'll see the doctor looks him over," Riggs went on. "You'll put him in a good room, not where he usually sleeps, if he does sleep here. If he dies, you lose your license, Sanchez, make no mistake about that. You'll never get another one, in this state. Make a note of that. I'll see to it myself."

"Dios! Madre de Dios! Señor, 'ow can I——?"

"Up to you," snapped Riggs. "You heard me."

Though the man had been attacked there, the Ranger knew the posada was the safest place for him, after all, with Sanchez under penalty. And Riggs had a hunch that the man had been knifed because he had been suspected.

Sanchez swallowed the bitter pill. If he had to take medicine, he would do it prop-

erly. Luis was borne up an inner stair and placed on a bed. Old sheets and hot water were brought. Riggs slit the clothing with his bowie-knife and made an examination. No vital spot had been reached. A shoulderblade had checked the knife, but it was a nasty wound.

Sanchez produced brandy. It revived Luis slightly. He opened his eyes and Riggs read something in them. He chased Sanchez out of the room to get the doctor, and sat down by the bed, speaking Spanish in a low voice. First he explained how he had made Sanchez responsible for the safety of Luis.

"You are good to me, señor," said Luis. "I shall never forget you save my life. It is because they see me give some money to a friend, they wonder where I get it. I will not tell. They suspect me. They try to kill me, and then *you* come, señor, like the Archangel Miguel, who kills the dragon."

Riggs gave him some more brandy, hoping he was not getting delirious.

"Señor," said Luis, "this I have to tell you. If you wish those two men, seek them with Bligh. Watch where he goes, follow him. He knows, he sees them, they give him money. He boasts of this to a girl with whom he dances—though she would rather not. She is the one to whom I give the money. She does not wish to dance here, but she must, because her mother is ill."

"You mean Lampson and Garrett are at the H O?" asked Riggs, afraid Sanchez would return. This was hot news. Luis shook his head. The brandy had gone to it.

"No, Señor, *amigo mio*. You must follow Bligh, to where he meets these men, with others who steal cattle. In a canyon of the mesa they call Lost Gorge. I do not know where it is. But there you will find these men who give Bligh money, because he hides them, and because he knows of things they have done."

Riggs heard footsteps coming up the stairs.

"It is well, Luis," he said. "Speak of

this no more, unless to me. It looks as if you would have a big reward. Then you can give more money to your friend."

"I love her, señor," said Luis. "I wish to marry her. Now I am only a poor peon, but my heart is big. If the señor would give me another sip of the brandy —"

Riggs felt his pulse. The doctor would be coming. He did not drink himself, but he did not think it would hurt Luis. And it might keep his mouth shut.

IT WAS an hour later when Bligh arrived, with half a dozen of his picked riders. He seemed in high spirits, and Riggs noticed, with secret satisfaction, that all of them were well oiled with liquor. The onetime foreman, and now manager, of the H O, called everybody to the bar. All but Riggs answered promptly.

"Not drinkin', Ranger?" asked Bligh with his wolfish leer.

"Never drink on duty," Riggs answered, "and I'm always on duty."

"I sure wish you were a range-detective, 'stead of jest a plain everyday Ranger," Bligh said. "Where's that man you said was a friend of yours, the feller we found standin' over Hardin's body? There's been times when I wondered if his credentials was faked, if he didn't kill Hardin after all."

"Willin' to say that, at Dolan's trial?" asked Riggs.

"I jest said I wondered. I know Floyd Dolan killed the Old Man. Don't mistake me, Ranger."

Bligh's speech was thick, he had evidently drunk too much.

"Don' mishunderstand me," he repeated, swaying a little on his feet. "I was wonderin' what happened to that friend of yours, Jim Wyatt."

"How come you memorized his name so easily. Ever see him before?"

The Ranger's words were like hammer blows. Bligh pretended to ward them off.

"Never saw him before, but I wish I could see him now. Listen, Rarger, they

run off a hundred primes from the H O last night. Know what that means? Six thousand dollars. An' they'll hold me responsi-ponshi-ble. I sure wish this Jim Wyatt would locate them three-year-olds. Mebbe you could put me in touch with him, Ranger?"

Riggs saw that Bligh's drunkenness was half assumed, although he was well along. "I haven't seen him for days," he said.

"That's tough. All hands sasshay for another round."

The Ranger stayed for two hours, with his palms itching for the feel of weapons, while Bligh and his men gambled and danced. The doctor had proclaimed Luis in no danger, and Riggs had told Sanchez to see that Luis stayed that way.

At three in the morning Bligh rounded up his men.

"We got work to do, hombres," he announced. "Sanchez, we're takin' along some lickie. See it's the best."

The moon was rising over the mesa when Bligh and his punchers lurched and reeled into their saddles. The Ranger had left the posada some time before. But he was waiting. Bligh's talk of work to do meant that stolen steers from the H O were going to be rebranded in Lost Gorge, unless Tom Riggs did not deserve his silver star. It began to look as if he had solved his own problem, and that of Jim Wyatt at the same time.

Of one thing he was sure. He was not going to lose sight of Bligh and his merry men.

They kept merry as they rode, though the cool air gradually began to sober them. But they never looked back. If they had, they would not have seen Tom Riggs on Buddy, both adepts at dodging.

THE uplift of the mesa lifted from the plain, its cliff in shadow. But Riggs watched his men enter the dark cleft that must be the Lost Gorge, and followed them. On foot.

The Lost Gorge looked like a shallow place at first, twisting sharply and often.

It was floored with rock that held no sign. Bligh and his men went slowly. Riggs had no trouble keeping close to them. Presently he heard singing, voices, and the twang of a guitar. He saw the glow of a fire, reflected on the cliffs. The Lost Gorge suddenly opened wide. It became a natural park, surrounded by sheer walls, with a small lake in its center. Cattle were grazing there. There was good grass, some trees. The Ranger dodged between them, working towards the fire.

It was getting on towards dawn, but these men were the kind who slept by day, and worked or played by night. One Mexican in a high-crowned hat twanged lustily on a guitar, and sang bawdy ballads that met high approval.

They greeted Bligh with loud shouts.

"How about the money?" a voice rang out.

"You got to wait until the brands heal," said Bligh. "I'm not a mint."

"How about the two birds you got in the cave? Your pals, Lampson and Gar-



rett. Let them loosen up some more. How about a grand divvy?"

Riggs saw the full treachery of Bligh. He was harboring the two murderers, knowing them guilty, milking them of the money they had taken from Hardin's safe. Very likely he had planned that job with them. Now he had them in a cave.

Bligh gave his wolf's grin. "Don't rush it. We'll clear up the H O stock first, get spendin' money from these two buzzards as we go along. We can always turn 'em in for ten thousand, 'cordin' to the placards

the Ranger totes. We're sittin' pretty, mighty pretty."

THEY were all dismounted now, ranged about the fire. The Mexican with the guitar patted Bligh on the back, applauding him.

Riggs stepped out of the trees. He had them sitting down. His two murderers would be tied up. As for the rest of the odds, a Ranger did not reckon them.

"When you stand up," he said, "hoist your hands high. Ranger talkin', an' talkin' turkey! First one gets funny, flops."

They played a trick on Riggs he had never seen before, and would never be fooled with again. A folded canvas was suddenly yanked across the fire. The immediate change of light was blinding. Men started to shoot. He was seared in thigh and arm in the first seconds. He saw Bligh for a brief moment, and then he saw Bligh go down—but not by his own bullet.

Someone else was firing, shooting with absolute precision, as the Ranger sought cover, while his eyes adjusted themselves to the new light. Somebody throwing lead for the law.

"Come on, Ranger," cried a familiar voice. "Line 'em up!"

It was the figure of the Mexican who had played and sung, but the voice was the voice of Jim Wyatt. Wyatt banged his guitar over the head of Sam Bligh, left the ruins of it wrapped around his neck as Bligh was rising, then he tapped him over the head with the barrel of his six-gun.

Now he started shooting, neatly and methodically, at all who tried to reach for their weapons, instead of obeying the Ranger. Riggs came from the trees, firing with Wyatt.

The opposition did not last long. Bligh was out. The man they had accepted as a comrade had turned on them, proven not only an enemy, but an ally of the law.

"You hold 'em, while I collect their artillery," said Wyatt. "I figgered you'd come driftin' in soon. I lined up with

these hombres in Sanchez's posada, saw you happen in now an' then. I let 'em think I was hidin' out myself. They've got the two you want cooped up in a cave. Seems they had a note to Bligh, from a mutual pal. Bligh's been bleedin' the H O right along. That was my hunch. I trailed it, but it was a tough proposition to tackle alone. I waited for you to show."

Thirty minutes later they had the rustlers tied hand and foot. Some of them were wounded, but none fatally. The uninjured ones, coaxed by the six-guns of Riggs and Wyatt, assisted in the binding of the rest before they were trussed themselves like chickens.

"They can stay here with the steers," suggested Wyatt, "while we take Bligh an' your two birds, Lampson and Garrett, into Conejo. We'll tuck 'em into jail, an' get Dolan out."

"It sounds good to me," said Riggs. "Between the three of these coyotes, we'll get at the facts. Bligh double-crossed them, an' they'll tell all they know. Bligh may not hang, but by the time he's broken stone for a few years, he'll wish he had."

DAWN was breaking over Conejo when they arrived with their prisoners. It was not usual for Conejo's citizens to be awake at that early hour, but the main street was filled with men and the harsh murmur that rose from them warned both the Ranger and the range-detective of what was on foot. They had both heard that grim sound before, the subdued roar of a mob intent upon lynching, waiting to burst into full cry when they saw their victim.

"Cut through the rear to the jail," said Riggs.

Wyatt nodded, and they herded their three prisoners back of the buildings, up a narrow alley to the front of the calaboose, where the mob was thickest, shouting to the sheriff to bring out Floyd Dolan.

"Close call," said Wyatt, "but we'll make it."

Riggs grinned at him in the morning light. They understood each other, these

two. They knew what they could do together.

Flash, the palomino, and Buddy, the roan, surged through the mob to the front of the jail. Between them and their masters, three crestfallen riders were herded, their wrists handcuffed back of them, their ankles tied under the bellies of their mounts.

"It's all right to bring out Dolan," said Riggs. "We'll put these lizards in his place. Two of 'em are guilty of killin' Hardin. Bligh tried to pin it on Dolan. He's been rustlin' H O stock. Him, an' his eight punchers."

A howl went up from the back of the mob.

"That's what you say. We want Dolan!"

"Come and get him," said Wyatt.

There was a half-hearted rush, urged from the rear, checked by the sight of four six-guns, steady and menacing. Ranger and range-detective had added to their own weapons with those taken from the men they had captured.

"Who's first?" asked Wyatt. He grinned at the mob but it was not a friendly grin.

"And next?" inquired Riggs. "We both shoot two-handed."

The crowd melted. The sight of Bligh took some of the spirit out of them. The knowledge of twenty-four cartridges in the power of experts to explode, wilted them completely. They began to slink away.

Tom Riggs called up to the sheriff, who lived above the jail.

"Open up," he said. "We've got a trade for you, Sheriff. More to come later."

"There's just one thing I was wonderin'," said Riggs, as the sheriff told them he was coming down. "It's too bad we didn't have a chance to see which hawss was the faster, yours or mine."

"I'd hate to win from you," said Wyatt, "but I'd sure hate to lose."

"You spoke my sentiments," Riggs replied. "But mebbe we can try 'em out some day."

"Here's hopin'."

They said the two words together as the sheriff opened the front door of the jail. The street was empty, save for peepers, who were not anxious to be identified.

GAME LIFE

Harvey Kelly Wilson

AFTER living in a new and unsettled region for six months or more, and seeing the change in the wild animal life, we wonder just what effect the habitation of man has upon that life.

When first we come in and build our cabin by the spring, the fresh game signs are so thick that we expect to see moose, caribou, deer and bear in every glade and thicket, but the days pass and never a fresh sign do we see, within the radius of a half-mile around our home. If it wasn't for the fact that we can go back up on the ridge, a distance of a mile, and take a deer, or a moose, and see the runways of game, which

run through the bush in every direction, we would think that the wild life had all



left that region, when we came into it.

As we are crossing a ridge two miles

from our cabin at midnight, we hear a crash which comes from a hundred yards or so distant and know that a moose has winded us and has started on his way. We ride through miles of bush and do not see large game of any kind, yet we know that it is all around us, quietly slipping away at our approach. If we want a partridge for our supper we must go a hundred yards or more from the cabin for it. Even then it is a case of hunt-with-care, if we wish to get one or more.

Spring comes and we run into dozens of mother partridges with their chicks, and they hiss and run at us with ruffled feathers and extended wings while their chicks are scurrying away in every direction and hiding beneath the grass, leaves and logs. We laugh and try to make friends with them, but it is no go, they do not want our friendship.

We make the rule when we first locate, that "we will not shoot a gun close around the cabin." After a time we notice a change. We eat supper to the sound of fluttering partridges as they are fluttering in the poplar trees feeding on the buds of poplar trees, which, in the country north of fifty-five, grow buds the year around. We hear them fly and light upon the roof and upon the log pile in front of the door, fifteen feet away. Also, we learn that they are very fond of lettuce, and we are forced to build a tight sapling fence around and over our small garden, if we wish to have some of the said lettuce for ourselves. We find them nesting within twenty feet of the place, and feed them dry bread, and they act like old, gentle setting hens. At strawberry time, we pick from one end of the patch while the mother partridges with their chicks feed on the other.

Going to the spring early one morning, we see where a moose has come in during the night for its drink, as it used to do, before we came there to live. We see moose trails running on each side of the

cabin, not over seventy-five yards away, and know that they are passing there each night. While standing outside close by the cabin one night when the dark has settled down like a blanket and we can not see a thing, we hear a twig, or dry branch snap close by. As we listen without making a move we hear something slipping through the bush.

Upon going out and looking, the next morning, we find that a large moose had passed within thirty feet from where we were standing the night before. There is no doubt in our mind but that he must have winded us, and we wonder why he did not go crashing away, as the one had done when we were crossing the ridge.

We take our ride through the bush and see a wolf as it slips along by the edge of a

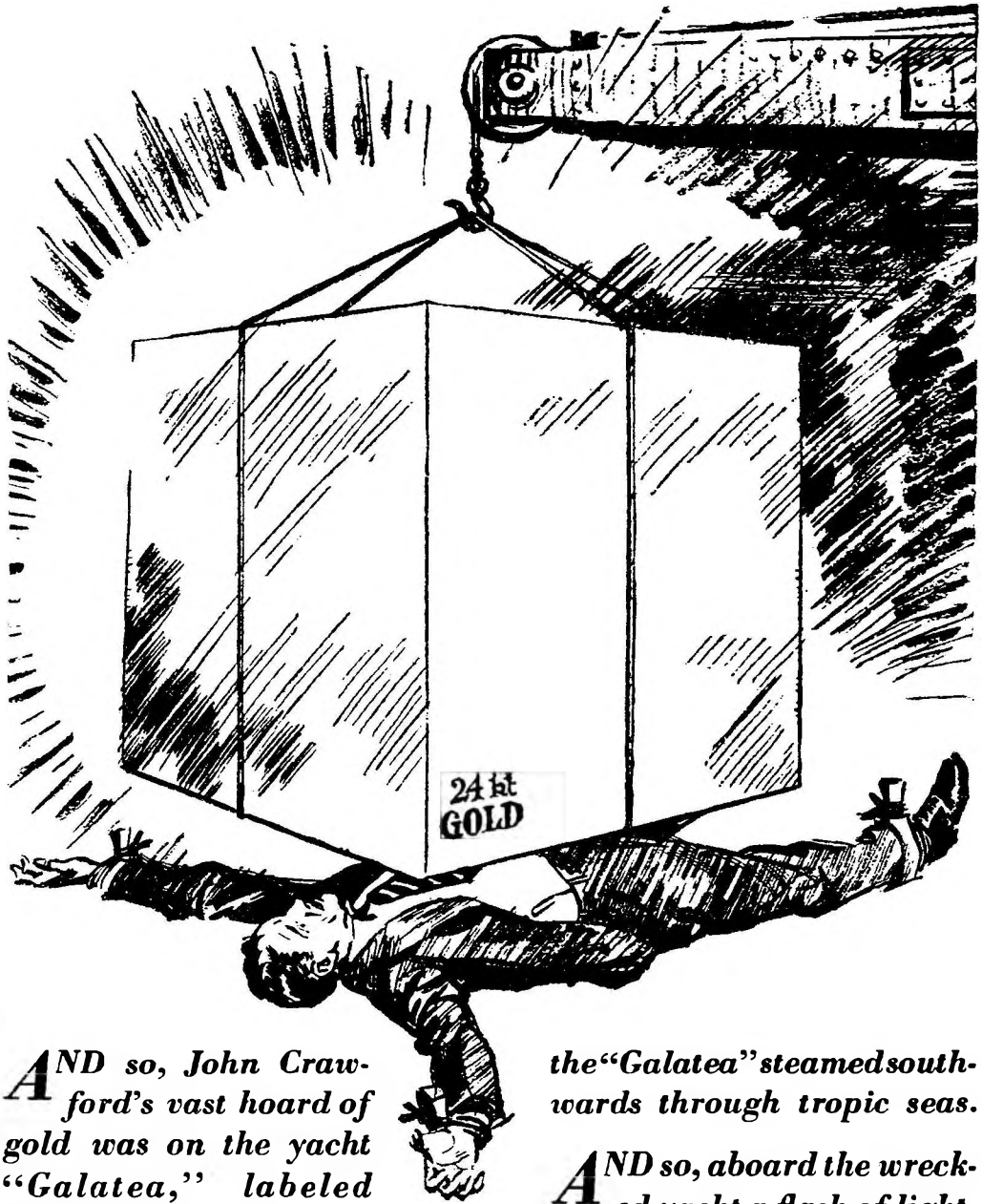
heavy bush strip. It throws its head up, winds us, and trots off, as we come up. In an open place along the trail we see a cow moose with her calf. It glances at us and saunters off with



the calf rubbing her side.

We find that the bear are ranging close in by the cabin. In fact, we have to go and get a hide to tan, now and then, in order to keep our horses on the picket ground, for our live stock does not like bear in any form and will break its picket ropes at the scent of one. Then it is a case of spending a day or so trailing them out.

Noticing this change, in the way that they act when they have become accustomed to us, we can not help but think, that wild animal life becomes gentle and likes to range around the habitation of man.



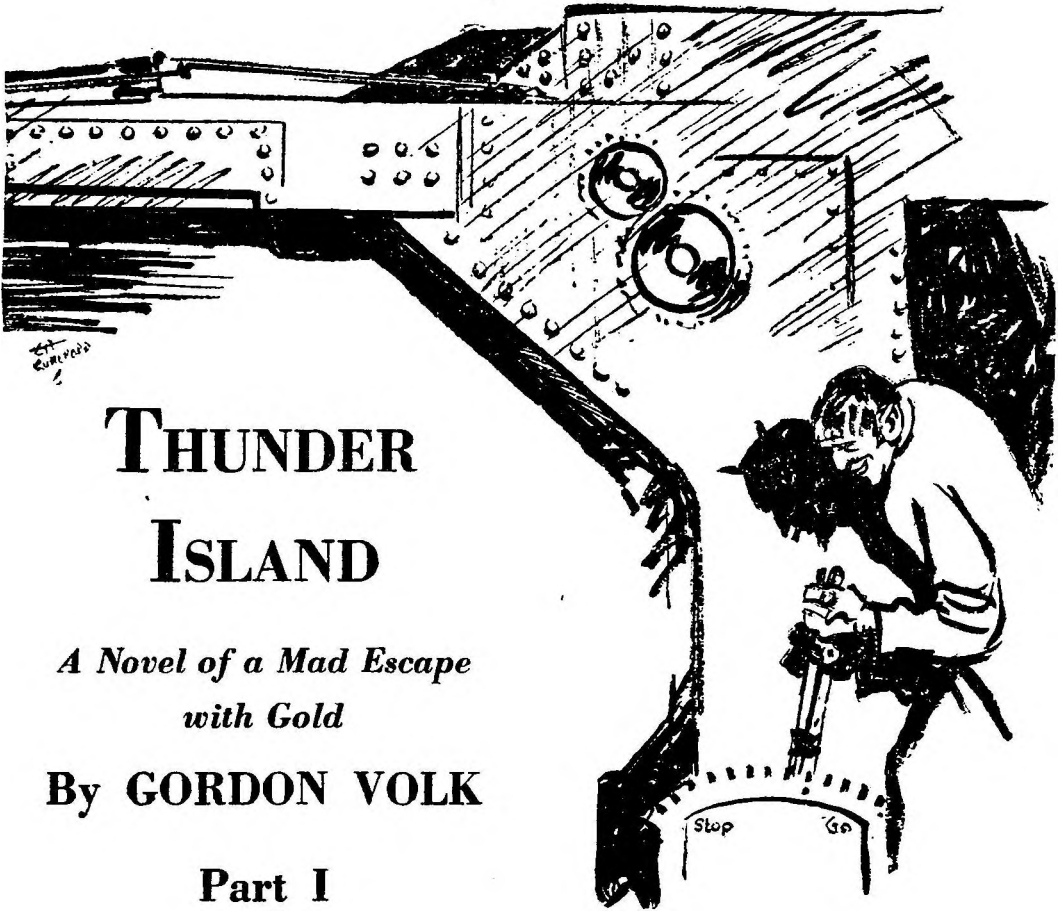
AND so, John Crawford's vast hoard of gold was on the yacht "Galatea," labeled "Emergency Stores."

AND so, with her freight of human lives and gold, and hope and despair; with her spotless decks, snow-white awnings, dazzling brasswork, gilded saloons and princely staterooms,

the "Galatea" steamed southwards through tropic seas.

AND so, aboard the wrecked yacht a flash of lightning revealed slimy yellow bellies of giant sea-slugs moving relentlessly across the decks. Then came the order "Abandon Ship."

AND so—



THUNDER ISLAND

*A Novel of a Mad Escape
with Gold*

By GORDON VOLK

Part I

CHAPTER I

THE STEAM YACHT "GALATEA"

LIKE one or two other men accustomed to thinking in millions, John Xavier Crawford saw the financial blizzard coming when it was but the merest smudge of gray on the distant horizon—still far enough off to be invisible to the short-sighted multitude; still far enough off to enable him to make his preparations to escape the full fury of its freezing blast.

He calculated—and, as it transpired, calculated with positively uncanny accuracy—that he had three full years in which to make those preparations and quit England in his palatial steam yacht *Galatea* with the bulk of his vast fortune stowed snugly away in gold in her strong-room.

It was a big undertaking, and one fairly bristling with risk. Only let a whisper of

what he was doing, and why he was doing it, leak out, and panic would have broken loose on a startled world. But he went about it with a supreme cunning which completely deceived even the wide-awake bankers who were already beginning to nurse their gold reserves as jealously as a doting mother nurses her sick babe. At all events, his explanations as to why he wished to convert large holdings of bonds and gilt-edged securities into solid gold in the form of jingling coin of the realm or dead-weight ingots (whichever was the more readily forthcoming) met with the desired results. Not all in one place; not all at one time. John X. Crawford was far too astute to attempt to do that. A hundred-thousand here; a few hundred-thousand there; in some cases applied for openly in his own name and in person; in others, covertly, through the medium of brokers who could be trusted to keep

his business (and their own) under their shiny silk hats.

"A secret Government mission" were the simple, yet, because of his unquestionable standing in the world of high international finance, readily accepted words that proved the "Open Sesame!" to many a strong-room door and spirited a quota of its treasures to the strong-room of his yacht.

The actual transference of gold from bank to yacht was astutely planned to overcome the difficulties and risks inseparable from the movement of bullion to a given point where, with a sigh of relief, the English banks and insurance people could wash their hands of it. In each instance, Crawford had the gold shipped, duly insured, and closely guarded, in moderately small steamers bound for Continental ports—Hamburg, Trieste, Genoa, or Marseilles—wherever the *Galatea* happened at the moment to be lying serenely and innocently at anchor. Here, by methods which do not bear the closest investigation, since bribery and corruption played no small part in the business, the bullion was smuggled on board the yacht in stout, steel-ribbed cases ostensibly containing nothing of greater value than consumable stores. And since these boxes of "Prime Cut Salmon," "Tinned Fruits—various," "Condensed Milk—sweet," and "Fray Bentos" were ferried from steamer to yacht in company with sacks of sugar, flour and potatoes, and barrels of apples, biscuits, and the like, their arrival on board in small quantities at different ports excited no suspicion, even when stowed away in the strong-room, since this was labeled "Emergency Stores."

Built of stout, fire- and thief-resisting steel, and situated immediately below the chart-room, this chamber was camouflaged with an unpretentious inner skin of matchboarding, while its one door opening directly to the deck, and secured by a very ordinary lock, was supplemented by a sliding steel shutter—an ingenious contrivance which the owner alone knew how

to open and close from the secret entrance to the strong-room approached only from his private suite on the deck below.

BEFORE, then, the economic blizzard burst in its blighting fury upon a country already groaning under the burden of over-taxation, war debts, and the iniquities of financial jugglery; before a dazed nation could realize the appalling truth that it stood on the brink of disaster, the major part of John X. Crawford's fortune was snugly stowed away in that most unpretentious "store room" on board his most pretentious yacht.

She was a vessel of 2,500 tons and a model of everything an ocean-going craft should be, combining beauty and dignity of line with a seaworthiness that had emerged triumphant from many a gruelling test in at least four of the Seven Seas. She had unusually powerful triple-expansion engines and twin screws. Her cream-colored funnel towered at a not too rakish angle above a boat-deck whose four boats, steam pinnace and motor-launch, red-mouthed cowl ventilators and brass-ribbed skylights, still left ample space for deck games, while her bridge, with its immaculate weather-dodger and awnings, burnished brasswork and adjacent wheel-house and captain's quarters, was a picture to admire.

Beneath it, a chain of deck-houses, running aft, provided a hint of the luxury to be found below, just as the spotless decks and gratings, neatly stowed anchors and coiled ropes, bespoke the iron discipline and first-class seamanship of the man-o'-war. At anchor and in port she flew, seemingly with conscious pride, the burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron—a fact sufficient in itself to indicate the unquestionable social standing of her owner.

Of her saloons, her lounges and library, and her elegant state-rooms, more in their proper place. Suffice it to say for the moment that they were as magnificent as unlimited wealth, ingenuity, artistic taste and craftsmanship could make them.

The *Galatea* had been built five years earlier to John Crawford's order, and in great measure to his own design. For, whatever his shortcomings in other respects—and they were many—he had a real and abiding affection for the sea, and a deep understanding of the ways and the whims of ships. He came of old seafaring stock, just as the fortune he inherited at birth, and upon which he had patiently built a dizzy edifice of riches, had the salt tang of the sea about it. For he was the last of the "East India Crawfords"—that long line of merchant princes whose famous clipper ships raced Homewards round the Cape of Storms deep laden with choice teas and the rich merchandise of the perfumed East.

His one regret was that, in the relentless pursuit of business affairs, in his slave-like devotion to the task he had set himself of amassing a stupendous fortune, he had denied himself the leisure to study seamanship, which, for all his passionate love for the subject, was still as a closed book to him—the sextant a mystery to be handled with reverent awe; Morse and semaphore no more intelligible than ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics; the ways of the tides and currents, the stars and all save the most obvious weather portents, matters beyond his comprehension.

Crawford was a man of sixty-five; tall, heavily built, and curiously loose-jointed. Iron-gray hair fringed a pate completely bald; his pale-blue eyes were deep sunk beneath lowering and bushy brows; the nose fleshy; the mouth showed as a hard, thin line beneath the trim, smoke-stained mustache, and there was ugly menace in the square, protruding lower jaw with a cleft chin. It was essentially the face of a hard man; relentless, stubborn, cold, and calculating; a man accustomed to being obeyed and to driving a hard bargain.

Sentiment found no place in his outlook on life outside the restricted limits of his family circle—and very little within it, for that matter.

In his own undemonstrative way he was fond of Heather, though in his heart he

had never forgiven her (or her mother) for being a girl instead of a boy, principally because it would probably mean that one of these fine days, when he himself was dead, Heather's husband (whoever was destined for that high honor) would be living in idleness and luxury on the fortune she would inherit. And the thought that any man, other than the flesh of his own flesh, should ever enjoy the fruits of his life's work was an exasperatingly galling thought to a man like John Xavier Crawford. All he could hope was that he would live to approve, or disapprove, of the man of Heather's choice.

BUT Heather, now in her twenty-second year, was still heart-whole—as far as he was aware. Which seems to prove pretty conclusively how very little a father may know of the ways of his own child, or of what may be going on under his very nose.

In short, Heather *was* in love; desperately, whole-heartedly, in love. Desperately in a very real sense, because she realized the hopelessness of expecting her father to allow her to marry Mark Howlett, his confidential secretary. Mark Howlett might be, and indeed was, the most dependable and the most trustworthy secretary John Crawford had ever had the good fortune to discover; he might have proved his worth in a position of implicit trust up to the hilt; he might be (in the true and only acceptable sense of the word) a gentleman by birth, breeding, and education. But he was still an employee, and dependent entirely upon his salary.

Out of this Mark Howlett had succeeded in saving a matter of a thousand pounds during the four years he had been with Crawford. Compared with Crawford's million and a half; compared with the huge fortune which (worse luck!) would some day come into Heather's possession, a thousand pounds was a miserably insignificant sum, and in his innermost heart Mark Howlett cursed the yawning gulf that lay between Heather and him-

self; a gulf that could only honorably be bridged from his side without estranging Heather from her people.

And that was the last thing he desired.

HEATHER'S was the type of beauty that grows more apparent with long and intimate acquaintance, just as a slowly opening bud reveals, little by little, the innermost beauties of the flower. She was dark, with a wind-swept fringe curling intriguingly over her forehead; long, sweeping lashes and brown eyes with a hint of smouldering fire in them; a hint, too, of the mystery of the East with which her paternal forebears had been so long associated.

In many respects, Mark was extraordinarily like her. So much so, indeed, that strangers to the house had more than once mistaken them for brother and sister. For he, too, was dark. His bronzed face, with its powerful chin, firm lips, and understanding eyes, was remarkable rather for its strength and those sterling qualities that count far more with discerning women than the merely superficial matter of good looks. One felt instinctively that he was a man to be depended upon in a tight corner. And, despite his indoor job, he was essentially an outdoor man whose muscles had been toughened—and more than one rib broken—in that most strenuous of all arenas, the football field.

But irksome though his job might be in the main, it had its rich compensations, for apart from the many opportunities it afforded him to snatch a few fleeting moments alone with Heather in her home, and sometimes outside it, he had on at least five occasions accompanied her and her father—in his purely professional capacity—on short cruises abroad in the *Galatea*. Ostensibly they were purely and simply pleasure cruises. But, as has already been revealed, there was a great deal more in some of them than met the eye. Had it not been for that, Mark Howlett might never have set foot aboard the yacht. He went simply because he happened to

be the only man living whom Crawford could trust implicitly with secrets withheld even from his wife.

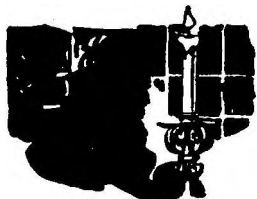
Mark Howlett knew all about the gold smuggled aboard the yacht in foreign ports under the guise of stores. But the knowledge was as safe in his keeping as it would have been in the breast of one dead and buried a hundred fathoms deep in the sea. John Crawford never knew a moment's uneasiness on that score. The one thing in connection with that immense hoard of gold which Howlett did not know, was its ultimate destination.

On that point, even to the one man in the world he trusted so implicitly, John Crawford maintained a Sphinx-like silence.

MRS. CRAWFORD was a bad sailor. Apart from two fair-weather cruises to Continental ports—during which she was very ill, and consequently very irritable—she had rarely ventured aboard the *Galatea* except when the yacht lay serenely at anchor. Thanks in part to all the modern contrivances for arresting and concealing the unkindly ravages of Time upon face and figure, and in part to her refusal to allow anything on earth (except dyspepsia, to which she was a martyr) to worry her, Mrs. Crawford carried her five-and-sixty years remarkably well. She was gray. But gray hair suited her type admirably. It went well with the heavy rope of pearls that curved down over her ample bosom, and with the two enormous pearls depending from the tinted lobes of her fleshy ears.

And except to add that all she asked of life was to be left to her Bridge parties and an occasional visit to the theatre, little more need be said about her. If she ever gave Mark Howlett a passing private thought, it was only to think of him as an agreeable young man and to wonder what his people were like. Certainly he never entered into her calculations when the question of Heather's future flitted, butterfly-like, in and out of her supremely contented mind.

Thus, all unsuspected by those almost as vitally concerned as Heather herself, Romance crept tip-toeing across the soft



rich carpets of the Crawfords' palatial home.

Long—to the uttermost ends of the earth; rough; beset with perils, aching suspense, and stark horror, was the path that lay before it.

CHAPTER II

HEATHER CRAWFORD

VALPARAISO was John Crawford's ultimate destination; the acquisition of Chilean nitrate fields his purpose—or one of several purposes.

But he was in no immediate hurry to reach the western seaboard of South America. *En route* he meant to explore the possibilities of some of the lesser republics dotted haphazard about the face of the great Continent.

How long he would be away—whether indeed he would ever venture to return to Europe at all—were matters he was content to leave in the lap of the gods.

Consequently, many things had to be done, many things considered, before his arrangements were complete.

There was the question of whom to take, and whom to leave behind. Insofar as his wife was concerned, the problem presented no difficulty. Indeed, Mrs. Crawford was so little interested when her husband casually mentioned that he was contemplating a lengthy holiday afloat that she did not even deign to raise her eyes from the green-baize card-table (she happened to be playing Golf Patience). She merely said: "Oh? When do you intend to start?"

Standing with his back to the fire (for

it was a chill November afternoon), John Crawford flicked a speck of gray cigar ash from the folds of his waistcoat. "On Tuesday—with luck."

"Going alone?"

"No. I mean to take Heather—if you can jog along without her for a bit."

"If she wishes to go I shall certainly be the last to stand in her way. Anyone else?"

"I have no one else in mind. Unless, of course, Heather wishes to bring a friend. That Barrance girl, or someone. That's up to her."

"And what about Mr. Howlett? Taking him?"

"No. He stays here. Too much going on. Things are too rocky altogether, and he's the only man I can really trust to think and act as I should in a given matter."

"Yes, he has always struck me as having his head screwed on the right way," said Mrs. Crawford, glancing at her diamond-encrusted wrist-watch before reshuffling the cards. "Nearly time for a cup of tea, thank goodness. . . . *John!* Do mind your cigar ash! Just look at the mess on that hearth-rug!"

Hard on the heels of the portly butler with the tea-wagon came Heather, radiant after a few all-too-brief moments with Mark at the study door on the floor above.

Love, it is said, always finds a way, and the wireless aerial, which passed upwards outside the windows of both the study and Heather's boudoir above it, served as a convenient communication cord. Pulled once, it indicated that Mark was alone and that it was safe for her to come to the study door. Two tugs meant: "Not safe. Love and kisses." And three; "Leaving at once for the day. So sorry. Good night, dear heart."

This afternoon she had learned to her disappointment that Mark would not be able to join the family for tea. A long and important confidential document had, it seemed, to be typed without delay for

Mr. Crawford's signature and despatch before he left to preside at a City Merchants' banquet. But perhaps after that (Mark suggested hopefully) Heather might be able to slip out to "The Square" for ten minutes? . . .

"Longer than that," she had whispered. "Pater'll be at the banquet, and Mother's off to a Bridge fight, so I'll be all alone. We'll go to the pictures. . . ."

Hence her radiance as she appeared in the yellow drawing-room and strolled to her accustomed settee by the fire.

But her happiness was short-lived. Over her first cup of China tea came news that sent a chill to her heart. "I'm taking you for a trip in the yacht, my dear. . . . Starting on Tuesday. . . . If you'd like to bring the Barrance girl, or someone, do, by all means. I don't want you to be lonely. We shall be away a long time. . . ."

Lonely! How could she be anything else without Mark? And although his name had not yet been mentioned, she knew already, she was *certain*, that he was to be left behind.

And she knew her father too well to ask him to leave *her* behind, too. His word was law. His wish, however lightly expressed, was a command to be obeyed without question or hesitation.

She looked up at him with a brave smile of well simulated eagerness. "Oh! How lovely! . . . But—but about Joan—Joan Barrance, you know. I'm afraid she won't be able to come. The stupid child is getting married. Didn't I tell you?"

"Well, if there's anyone else you'd like —"

Heather stared pensively into the fire. (Anyone else. . . . There was only one person in the wide, wide world. . . .) "No," she said presently. "I can't think of anyone. Except mother, of course. And I know *she* won't come, will you dear? . . . No. I thought not. . . . Tuesday, you said? And today is what? Wednesday. That doesn't give poor me very long to get ready." And then, trying to speak naturally: "Are you bringing any friends?"

John Crawford set his fragile porcelain cup and saucer on the low Oriental table at his side. "No one at all. Not even Mr. Howlett. I shall be lost without him, but he'll be far more useful to me here. . . . The only man I can really trust. . . . Yes, please, Anna, I'll take another cup. And an anchovy sandwich—if they *are* anchovy. . . . Very well then, Heather. That's settled. The *Galatea* is fitting out at Southampton. We'll leave here in the car sharp at eleven on Tuesday."

And that, he reflected, was that. Things were going as he had intended they *should* go. The last thing he desired was that anyone should suspect that he was leaving England for a year, or perhaps much longer, because if once such a suspicion prematurely gained ground it would inevitably lead to a panic which most certainly would involve not only his own remaining interests before he could get quit of them one by one, but also those of the few men who regarded and respected him as a trusted friend. The panic might come later, when his protracted absence began to excite comment and uneasiness. But by then, he hoped, he would have feathered another nest in one of the South American republics—a nest as secure and unassailable as an eagle's eyrie.

The fact that Heather was accompanying him would lend color to his story that he was setting out on a pleasure cruise only. And the fact that his wife was remaining at home would naturally be accepted as evidence that he would not be absent over long.

MARK HOWLETT saw in a glance that something was wrong the moment he glimpsed Heather approaching their accustomed rendezvous in the corner of a secluded square.

"Something's happened!" he exclaimed as he hurried to her side. "What is it, dear?"

A wan smile illumined her face for a moment, making it divine. "Yes," she

nodded. "Something positively awful. Father is taking me abroad in the yacht, for—for goodness knows how long. Months and months, I'm afraid."

Mark bit his lip. "Heather dear! But where on earth to?" The news that John Crawford contemplated a lengthy cruise did not come altogether as a surprise to him. Sharing as he did his employer's secret regarding the gold smuggled on board the *Galatea*, he had daily been expecting some such development. But the news that her father was taking Heather with him, "for goodness knows how long," left him dazed and almost incredulous. He had supposed all along that the surreptitiously acquired bullion was destined for New York. But the yacht could go to New York and return comfortably inside a month, even allowing a generous margin of time for business at the other end. And here was Heather talking of an absence of "months and months."

What did it mean? What was behind the mystery of this sudden departure? Whither was the *Galatea* bound, with a million pounds in gold and the only girl in the world on board?

Heather confessed that she had not the faintest idea. "All I *do* know," she said, as they walked slowly round the darker sides of the square, "is that I've got to take tropical kit, and that we're sailing on Tuesday. . . ."

"Good heavens! As soon as that? . . . But, I say, dear, there's just a chance that he'll want me to come. I mean, if it's a business trip. . . ."

"That's the worst part of it. He told me definitely that he's leaving you here, to watch his interests, because—yes, I *may* tell you this, I'm sure—because you are the only man he can really trust. And that is something to know, isn't it, Mark?"

"Yes, dear. But it'll be a mighty poor sort of thought to console myself with when you are gone. . . . Well, there it is. I suppose I've just got to grin and bear it. . . ."

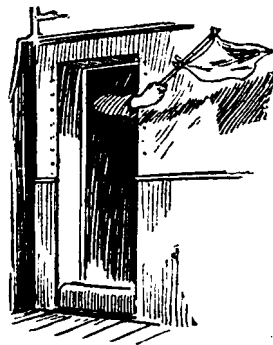
"I'm afraid I shan't have the pluck to

grin," she answered "Every moment I'm away from you will seem a year."

"To me, too. But you will write as often as you can, won't you, Heather?"

"You know I will. I'll have precious little else to do but think of you and write to you. I'll post a long letter from every port we touch at. But——" She stood stock still and stared at him blankly. "But how will you be able to write to *me*? You won't know where to send."

Mark nodded dourly. "No. That'll be the trouble. Unless, of course, he tells



you where he's making for after you've left. If he does that, and you write from the first port of call, my letters will have a chance of overtaking you by mail boat or air. I'll address them *Poste Restante*, and hope for the best."

"But, listen, dear," Heather broke in, "there's also the chance—no, it's almost certain—that he'll tell *you* where we're bound for, don't you think?"

He was silent for a moment. Then: "It's more than likely. But you see, dear, even if he does, it will be strictly confidential information which I simply can't make use of——"

"Not even to write to *me*?"

He shook his head. "It hurts me terribly to say so, but not even to write to you, Heather. You wouldn't have me abuse my trust, I'm sure."

"Of course I wouldn't," she agreed instantly. "Oh! *Bother* the business and all its secrecy! But there, if it weren't for that, perhaps we should never have met.

. . ."

CHAPTER III

OUTWARD BOUND

DIMLY glimpsed through the murk of a November drizzle, Netley Hospital, on the shores of Southampton Water, was abeam before John Crawford gave Captain Burton orders enough to carry on with.

Even then, the *Galatea's* commander was little the wiser.

Wearing oilskins and yachting cap, his big hands clasped behind him, Crawford had been pacing the bridge in moody silence for a full ten minutes. Suddenly he stopped short behind the captain and muttered: "Down Channel!"

Burton touched the moisture-beaded peak of his cap. "Down Channel it is, sir." And Crawford, replacing a half-smoked cigar between his lips, resumed his constitutional, leaving Burton still guessing whither they were bound.

Down Channel might mean pretty well anywhere in the wide world—the States, Canada, the Mediterranean, or anywhere south of the Equator.

That they were setting out on a long voyage Captain Burton knew well enough, as did every member of the yacht's company, down to the humblest pantry-boy.

Of late, everything had pointed to that as plain as a pikestaff. The *Galatea's* engines had undergone a complete overhaul from crankshafts to cylinder-covers; some of her boiler tubes had been renewed long before they needed it; she had been dry-docked and fitted with new propellers whose pitch promised to add a clear nautical mile an hour to her cruising speed, and she had taken unprecedented quantities of stores on board.

Furthermore, on the owner's instructions, there had been a weeding out of the crew, and three of the younger deck-hands had been superseded by sailormen whose knowledge of seamanship was not confined to holystoning decks, spreading awnings, and polishing brasswork. There had also been one or two minor changes in the

stewards' department and the stoke-hold gang.

Whether the *Galatea* was leaving England for a month or a year was all one to Captain James Burton, R. N. R., unencumbered as he was in the matter of family ties.

He was short and thick-set, with wiry, rust-red hair, closely trimmed mustache, blue eyes, and freckled, hairy fists. As his accent betokened, he hailed from the West Country, and claimed kinship, on his mother's side, with Drake. He had served his apprenticeship in sail; had known all the rough and tumble and hazards of mine-sweeping in a White Funnel paddle-steamer during the Great War; had been twice torpedoed, and once blown up by a mine, in other ships; had rammed an enemy submarine in the face of hellish gunfire—and taken it all in the day's work.

Iron fisted, iron willed, and a first-class mariner, he was, nevertheless, one of Nature's gentlemen, and, though he detested what he called bowing and scraping, he acquitted himself remarkably well in the social duties expected of a yacht master.

That the present was no ordinary pleasure cruise was evident, furthermore, from the fact that no guests had been invited. The owner and Miss Crawford were traveling alone. So much the better, from Captain Burton's point of view. There was something about Miss Crawford which you couldn't help liking. Just what it was, beyond her easily recognized qualities, Captain Burton couldn't say. But whatever it was, it was something that went pretty deep below the surface. . . .

Heather had gone below to her own suite immediately after embarking, and, as the best available antidote for the blues, she had busied herself with the task of unpacking her trunks and putting her house in order.

Planned, furnished, and decorated for her exclusive use, the suite was the most beautiful corner of the superb yacht. Its luxurious bedroom was a reproduction on a

smaller scale of her own bedroom in Mayfair, with cream walls, thick blue carpet silken tapestries, roomy wardrobe, chest-of-drawers, dressing-table complete with triple mirror, and cozy armchairs and divans. Adjoining it was her bathroom—a poem in marble and silver and white enamel—while her oak-paneled lounge and smoke-room led, on the left, into her bedroom, and on the right into what she was pleased to call her den, but which, in fact, was a Mayfair drawing-room in miniature, with seductive divans piled with shot-silk cushions, built-in bookshelves, a fireplace, secretaire, snug alcoves, warmly-tinted lighting effects, wireless set, gramophone and baby-grand piano.

This suite was on the port side of the yacht immediately below the main deck. John Crawford's, on the starboard side, was more commodious, since it included rarely-used accommodation for Mrs. Crawford and a plainly furnished room which served as office.

Between the two suites, a carpeted alleyway, running forward, led to ten other suites with accommodation for twice as many guests.

The saloons and other rooms for general use ran aft from the foot of the main companion-way situated immediately abaft the oak-screened steel casing of the engine-room.

Here, when the yacht was in commission, certain savory odors and an occasional subdued clatter of crockery hinted at the proximity of the domain of that autocrat the chef, Monsieur Lacroix—once the presiding genius in the kitchens of a celebrated London hotel.

A spacious lobby provided access to two dining saloons—one quite a small and unpretentious affair for use when no guests were on board, and a far larger one in the Empire style—a high-pitched apartment whose domed, stained-glass skylight penetrated the boat-deck. It boasted, too, a small, gilt-railed musicians' gallery and noble mural panels by Frank Brangwyn.

Still farther aft were to be found a rest-

ful drawing-room and a well-stocked, oak-paneled library into which artificial light streamed through stained-glass windows.

On the main deck immediately above, and reached both from that deck and from the lobby below, was the Tudor smokeroom with a great open fireplace, blackened beams, old English settles, wheel-backed chairs and a bar.

Such, then, was the yacht *Galatca*, steaming at half speed down Southampton Water through the gathering gloom of a chill November afternoon.

IN HIS heart, John Crawford disliked all the show and glitter of the yacht's internal fittings. He saw no point in putting anything into a ship which did not properly belong to a ship. Very much against his personal inclination, he had permitted things utterly out of keeping with all the traditions of the sea aboard the *Galatca*; firstly because his wife—and Heather—wished to have them because they were "the thing," and people expected them nowadays; and secondly because all this ostentation impressed visitors who came aboard either as guests, or, in foreign ports, to discuss big business propositions. "My word!" they would say afterwards. "You ought to see that yacht! It's a regular floating palace. Worth a million of anyone's money. Crawford does do things in style, and no mistake!"

It paid Crawford to do things in style; to make a lavish, even dazzling, display. His yacht was a good advertisement—a good shop front, inspiring confidence and getting him talked about as a man with money to burn.

Money he had in plenty. But in itself it brought him little happiness. It was in its acquisition that he found his greatest thrills: in pulling off big deals against tremendous odds; in beating the other man at his own game of bluff.

But he was more pleased with life at this moment than he had been for many a year. A long sea voyage, with adventure—the hazardous adventure of establishing him-

self in a new and unfamiliar country—lay before him. And he had made a clean get-away without exciting suspicion as to his real purpose. Sooner or later, of course, someone would begin to smell a rat. But by then . . .

THE mellow booming of the gong, announcing tea, broke in upon his reverie. Without a word he went below, removed his trickling oilskins, washed, and joined Heather in the luxurious drawing-room, where a coal fire glowed in the open-hearth and shaded lamps diffused a warm radiance on soft draperies, silken cushions and the dainty afternoon gown which adorned the one other occupant of the stately apartment.

With the *Galatea* as steady as a rock in the sheltered estuary, only an occasional tremor that set a silver ash-tray musically jingling destroyed the illusion that this was a drawing-room in a mansion ashore.

"Well, Heather, we're well under way now," smiled Crawford as he strode to the fire and extended his large hands to its cheerful blaze. "Glad to be on the water again?"

"M-m—yes," said Heather.

"You don't seem too sure about it. I hope you're not going to find it dull."

"That depends on where we're going, and how long we're away."

He nodded. "And *that*, of course, all depends on business." Then, changing the subject in that abrupt way which always indicated that he did not intend to pursue the discussion: "Find everything all right in your quarters?"

"Yes, thanks, Father. Everything. But I didn't know we had a new stewardess."

"No. I forgot to tell you. Mrs. Grant's looks were rather against her. So we made a change."

"Her *looks*? But I thought she was remarkably attractive."

"Exactly! That was just the trouble. Pretty stewardesses are bad for discipline. So we signed on a plain one. But I think you'll find she knows her job. Her name

is Ellerby—Mrs. Ellerby. . . . Ah! Here's tea."

He glanced at his wrist-watch, then turned with an ugly look at the steward approaching with a serving-wagon. "Two minutes late! Don't let it happen again. I insist on absolute punctuality in everything."

The steward inclined his head respectfully. "Very good, sir."

He knew the owner too well to offer excuses or explanations, or to shift the blame on to other shoulders, as indeed he might well have done, since the delay was caused by the blowing of a fuse which had temporarily plunged the galley and pantry into semi-darkness.

Members of the crew who wished to remain in John Xavier Crawford's employ had to learn to take hard knocks without turning a hair—at all events in his presence.

What they did or said afterwards, down in the stewards' quarters, or up in the fo'c'sle, was another matter, as time and the hazards of the sea were destined to reveal, just as the surgeon's knife lays bare a cancerous growth that may have been years in developing before its presence is suspected. . . .

CHAPTER IV

THE CHIEF STEWARD

IT WAS not until the Needles Light winked far astern that the owner reappeared on the bridge.

Pelting rain had succeeded the drizzle of the afternoon, and the *Galatea* was rearing and plunging to the shrill tune of a lively sou'-wester. Sheets of stinging spray swept over the fo'c'sle head, and, whipped aft by the wind, struck the bridge weather-dodger with the splatter of falling gravel.

Captain Burton had his night glasses focused on a distant light, dead ahead. Nevertheless, out of the tail of his eye he saw the owner making towards him. But he gave no sign until he heard Crawford's voice at his side:

"Be well out of this in a day or two, thank heaven."

Burton merely nodded, returned the glasses to the locker—and waited.

He did not have to wait long.

"Madeira," said Crawford.

"Very good, sir."

"Glass is falling, I noticed."

"Yes, sir. Freshening a bit. But there's not much behind it, to my way of thinking."

"You always were an optimist about the weather, Burton," said Crawford, turning sharply about and humping his broad shoulders as another hissing deluge swept the bridge. "You'd call this just a bit of a breeze, I suppose?"

"Depends on the ship, sir. With the *Galatea* it's got to blow pretty hard before I'd call it anything else. A better ship you couldn't wish for."

Few things pleased John Crawford more than praise bestowed on his yacht by a deep-sea sailor. Burton had said the same sort of thing a hundred times before. But the owner never tired of hearing it. To praise the *Galatea's* seaworthiness was, in large measure, to pay him a personal compliment, since he had been so largely concerned in the shaping of her lines, the exact disposition, type, and horse-power of her engines, and in those hundred-and-one lesser details that make all the difference between a handy vessel and an awkward one.

He nodded. "Yes, the *Galatea's* all right. Be better than ever with her new propellers, I hope. When we've run into some fair weather we'll see what she can do."

"I expect you've noticed one thing already, coming down Southampton Water, sir? Less vibration, by a long chalk."

"Yes. Great improvement. Well, I'm going to get out of this. Warmer below. . . . Join us at dinner tonight, Burton?"

"Better not tonight, sir, if you'll excuse me."

"Too much traffic about in the Channel, eh? Very well. You know your business best. . . . Good night. . . . Oh! Cigar?"

"Thank you, sir. Good night."

Left to his own thoughts, Burton buttoned his streaming oilskin to the throat. Madeira, eh? . . . Well, that was something to go on. It ruled out New York. And that was so much to the good. Burton had no use for the Western Ocean at that time of the year in a pleasure yacht, however seaworthy she might be.

For that matter, the Channel could be dirty enough in all conscience. It was well on the way to being so now. Blowing three parts of a gale, and the glass still falling. . . .

BELOW, in the smaller of the two saloons, Mr. Acton, the chief steward, was superintending the laying of the owner's table and debating in his mind whether to fit the fiddles (which the owner disliked), or to take a chance and rely on a damp blanket under the white cloth—also sprinkled with water—to keep crockery, glasses and cruets in their appointed places. In the end he decided to take the risk rather than incur the owner's displeasure. And then, when the covers had been laid, and a glass went by the board, he had half a mind to give the order to remove the lot and use the fiddles after all.

Mr. Acton's state of indecision was due to the fact that he had been drinking, not wisely but too well, the night before—his invariable practice on the eve of sailing from his home port. And the hair of the dog that bit him, tickling an empty stomach before breakfast, had proved to be but the first of a long succession of stiff liveners hastily swallowed throughout the day.

Yet no one would have suspected that he had been drinking to excess. In his speech, eyes, and gait, and the quiet and methodical manner in which he went about his work, there was not the faintest sign of it.

Often as Acton had been the worse for liquor during the five years he had served in the *Galatea*, John Crawford, who had his eyes about him, had never once had his suspicions aroused, or the chief steward

would have been put on the beach in double quick time.

Acton owed it to the perhaps not altogether disinterested friendliness of the mate, Mr. Kerrick, that he had not been fired long ago.

It was in Rotterdam, two years earlier, that Kerrick, returning to the yacht in pretty good trim himself after an evening on the spree, came on Acton, rip-roaring drunk and on the point of attempting to knock eight bells out of an enormous, balloon-trousered bargee. What the breeze was about, Kerrick did not know. Nor did he care a brass button. He only knew that if the fight was once on, Acton would have been removed to hospital—or more likely the mortuary—in sections.

Now, he did not like Acton. But, after all, to a navigation officer with a big thirst and small pay, a chief steward is worth keeping in with.

SO KERRICK lugged Acton clear of the unholy mess he was simply shouting to get into; walked him and talked him into something like sobriety; dumped him down behind some stinking fish-barrels on the quay, and then, having made certain that the owner was still ashore, got his man aboard and down into his room without



anyone save the deck-hand at the gangway being any the wiser—a service for which the chief steward duly showed his appreciation over a newly opened bottle in the morning.

From that day onwards the twain were as thick as thieves.

Only a man of Kerrick's size and strength could have got Acton back to his ship in one piece that night. Kerrick stood six-feet-two in his socks, despite the

fact that his shoulders were humped and his head never erect. He had sandy hair, skin the color of well-seasoned mahogany, high cheekbones, a hard mouth, and misshapen ears that stuck out like wind-scoops.

Acton, on the other hand, was a man of medium height, and notwithstanding the fact that he had spent a lifetime afloat—much of it in Southern waters—he was as pale as an underpaid city clerk. His pallor was intensified by jet black hair beginning to thin on top, intensely black eyes, and a black mustache with a twirl in the tips of it. Drunk or sober—or perhaps it would be truer to say that he was never really either—there was no fault to be found with the way he carried out his manifold duties. His store books and accounts were all kept with meticulous care; whatever out-of-the-way dishes the chef took it into his head to prepare, the ingredients were always forthcoming from the store-room; without a moment's hesitation Acton could tell the owner to a quarter-dozen how many bottles of wines, spirits, cordials, and mineral waters were on board, while the selection and purchase of fresh supplies were matters which Crawford could safely leave to Acton's unerring taste and discrimination.

The autocrat of the domestic department, James Acton was also a martinet feared and hated by his underlings. He was, perhaps, the only man on board whom Heather did not like. She could never determine what it was she did not like about him. He was, of course, the essence of courtesy in his attitude towards her: civil, attentive, perfectly acquainted with her tastes; always ready to anticipate her wishes. Furthermore—a small matter perhaps, but deserving to be placed on record—he always remembered the date of her birthday, and, if she were on board, made appropriate arrangements for its celebration at table.

Woe betide the steward who overlooked the smallest detail where the comfort and pleasure of Miss Crawford were concerned! *She* might forgive a slip or an oversight

with an indulgent smile, and forget it. But not Acton. The offender was on the carpet before he was much older. Another slip, and he got his discharge.

HENCE the nervous concern with which the head and second table stewards completed the laying of the covers for dinner that night. To lay the table without fiddles seemed, to their way of thinking, too much like asking for trouble. And if it came, upon their heels it would fall.

"Let it go at that," said Acton finally. "She's a bit steadier if anything. . . . Now then, Winter! Where's your eyes? Call that glass *clean*?"

To those two stewards, waiting at table that night, dinner was a long-drawn-out hour and a quarter of sheer torment. But to their relief the game of pitch and toss the *Galatea* was reveling in resulted in no more serious mishap than the overturning of a long-stemmed wineglass which happened at the moment to be empty.

Heather, too, was glad when the meal was over. She did not feel sea-sick, but the violent see-saw motion had—as it often did on the first day afloat—given her a troublesome headache, and it was with a sigh of relief that she at last rose from the table and begged to be excused from joining her father in the lounge for coffee.

Kissing him good night, she retired to her own suite, and at an early hour to bed. Lying there between the lavender-scented sheets with her unopened book nested within reach on the billowy shot-silk eider-down, she stared with unseeing eyes at the swaying tapestries adorning the beautiful room. The ports, closed against the driving spray, excluded the noises of the tempestuous night, but the internal ventilating plant sent a current of fresh air circulating throughout the suite, as it did in every part of the vessel.

Broken only by the occasional creak-creak of woodwork, the silence in that part of the yacht was uncanny to a degree. No

sound of human activity reached her. Even the modulated throbbing of the engines was scarcely perceptible.

Heather might have been the only soul on board the *Galatea*, battling with the pounding seas through the pitch-black night, crossing the tracks of countless ships heading for every point of the compass in the most crowded seaway of all the world. . . .

Inheriting her father's fondness for the sea and ships, Heather had often lain in that soft bed fascinated by the contrast between her luxurious surroundings and the outer cold and wet and darkness.

But tonight she had thoughts only for the man she had left behind in London. Strive as she would, she could not shake off the ominous feeling that she was destined never to see him again. And hard on the heels of that thought came another. Had her father guessed how matters stood between Mark Howlett and herself, and planned this long cruise purposely to separate them—perhaps for ever?

There was no telling. There never was any telling where her father was concerned. . . .

If the truth *had* been discovered, or suspected, as likely as not, when she returned to England, it would be to find that Mark had been transferred to Singapore or Shanghai.

The possibility that this might happen sent a chill to her heart. And, quite apart from possibilities, the actuality of long separation, already begun, was difficult enough to bear with that firm upper lip with which she had been taught and trained to face hard and unpleasant facts.

Even now, she had not the vaguest idea whither the *Galatea* was bound, except that the first call would be Madeira. That much her father had disclosed to her—in strict confidence. And after that, as he had previously hinted, the Tropics—thousands of miles away from Mark.

Perhaps she would learn more as to their future movements before reaching Madeira, in which case she would risk everything

and tell Mark in the long letter she intended to post at Funchal.

If only she could be sure of receiving an occasional letter from *him*, what a world of difference it would make!

AFTER his coffee and liqueur brandy, John Crawford made his way down to the engine-room. He liked its atmosphere. And he liked old Alec Mackenzie, the chief engineer.

A man of dynamic energy himself, Crawford liked the engine-room for more than one reason. It appealed to him because it represented enormous power, unswerving purpose, and, when the yacht was under way, ceaseless activity. Down there it was always day. There were always engineers on duty; the great gleaming engines always performing their allotted task, steadily, resolutely, tirelessly.

The sweep of the ponderous big-ends, alternately thrusting and pulling on the heavy cranks; the cheek-by-jowl circumlocution of the eccentrics; the play of light on connecting-rods and cross-heads, not only fascinated his eye but satisfied his innate craving for action and movement and life.

Alec Mackenzie was making one of his periodical rounds of inspection—ears, eyes, and hands all active and alert—when the owner, in dinner dress, descended the steep iron stairways to the control platform.

But nothing bigger than a very small fly could get into Mackenzie's beloved engine-room without his knowledge when he was on duty—which was usually a matter of eighteen hours out of the twenty-four—and he was aware of the owner's presence long before the owner himself had located him. Nevertheless, he completed his round in leisurely fashion, relighted the hissing dottle in his old briar pipe at least three times, and stowed each charred matchstick carefully away in the breast-pocket of his greasy tunic.

Engines came first. Owners (and he meant no disrespect) must wait. Alec Mackenzie's heart and soul were down

there, where beat the heart and sang the soul of the *Galatea*. Her engines were as pretty and as clean as the works of a giant clock set in a shining white-enamelled case rising steeply to the skylights on the boat-deck.

At sea or in port, Mackenzie rarely showed himself on deck, even on the Sabbath day, when, on principle, he always wore his number-one rig.

In his own good time, then, he made his way to the owner's side, and, by way of salute, touched the peak of his cap with a lump of greasy waste. Then, wiping his paws on the latter without effecting any visible improvement, he turned and stared at the only things in the world—after the Bible—worth looking at.

"Well, Mac," said Crawford, "how are they running after their overhaul?"

"'Tis airy yet to gi'e an opeenion," said Mackenzie with characteristic caution. Concerning the engines, his answers were invariably of the noncommittal order, however sure he was in his own mind that they were as perfect as human ingenuity—and his own lynx-eyed watchfulness during overhauls—could make them. "Will ye be lookin' roond for yersel', Mr. Crawford?" (Never a "sir" from Alec Mackenzie!)

CRAWFORD always waited for an invitation to see his own engines at close quarters; always accepted the invitation, to Mackenzie's secret delight; and always thanked him afterwards for showing him round.

He observed the recognized ritual on this occasion, and, before bidding him good night, handed the old Scot a cigar which Mackenzie placed for safety inside the mahogany log desk.

Then, after a final whisky-and-soda in the smoke-room, John Crawford took a turn on deck to fill his lungs with the clean, salty air, and to glance, in passing, at the door of the strong-room.

A million pounds in gold!

For the first time since he had conceived

the big venture upon which he was at last setting out, he felt just a fraction uneasy. Not only for the safety of the bullion; not only for the safety of the yacht; but for the safety of Heather's life—and his own.

In his dreams that night he saw a burnished block of solid gold, weighing, as his gold weighed, a matter of seven or eight tons, and suspended by a great derrick



over his prostrate, pinioned form. Slowly, inch by inch, the vast mass sank—down, down, until he felt its pressure on his chest. He saw his hot breath condense in little beads on the smooth and glittering surface. . . .

Then, suddenly released, the giant weight fell, crushing the life and a ghastly smothered scream from his body. . . .

CHAPTER V

A SECRET OUT

WITH two of the world's largest cruising liners and a Homeward-bound Union Castle boat anchored in the roadstead, Heather decided that Funchal would be too crowded with exuberant sightseers to be pleasant, and elected to enjoy Madeira from the distance.

Aboard one of the bigger liners a jazz band was playing. The moaning of saxophones in that gorgeous setting! How it jarred!

Standing at the rail, trim in white skirt, double-breasted blue jacket, and blue beret, Heather shuddered. "Thank goodness we've seen Madeira without all that din," she exclaimed.

John Crawford, in immaculate yachting

rig, nodded. "It's a crazy age, Heather. A world gone mad—music, art, politics, finance, markets—yes, and even religion, all upside down. . . . Yes, I think you're wise not to go ashore. But we must renew our acquaintance with the island on the way back."

Heather looked up at him. "So we're coming back this way?" But her hopes of learning more as to their destination were doomed to be short-lived.

Crawford was staring shorewards with unseeing eyes. "Yes. We shall come back this way. We've called here now for coal and water and fruit. And incidentally to see if there is any mail, or a cable from Howlett."

Her pulse quickened. "So Mr. Howlett knows where we are going?"

"He knows that we're calling at—at Cape Town"—Heather caught her breath. Cape Town!—"but he does not know our final destination. And I'm afraid I can't enlighten even you on that point, dear. So much depends on what I learn at the Cape." Then, dismissing the subject in his usual abrupt fashion, he went on: "By the way, if you've any letters for the post, you'd better have them ready. Mr. Acton will be going ashore in half an hour."

"Then I'll go and finish them," said Heather, and went below to her suite.

Her letters had, in fact, been finished long ago. They included one, of many closely written pages, to Mark—begun in Southampton Water and finished that morning. But could she trust Acton, the chief steward, to post it for her if he saw her handwriting on an envelope addressed to Mark Howlett? And even if he were to be trusted, why should she let him guess that she was interested in Mark?

Suddenly she remembered that there was a portable typewriter in the wireless-room. It was used for typing summaries of broadcast news bulletins.

Armed with a foolscap envelope, she hurried to the wireless-room and found to her relief that it was unoccupied. Closing the door, she looked about her for the

machine but saw no sign of it. There followed a hasty search of dark corners, shelves, and lockers before she located the typewriter case in a cupboard and seized the handle without noticing that a corner of the case fouled the corner of a stout cardboard box lying beside it.

Next moment the box fell with a dull thud to the linoleum, to be returned as quickly to its shelf with the fervent hope that no damage had been done to its contents.

Then, without interruption, Heather typed Mark's name and office address on the envelope, returned the machine to its appointed place, and hurried triumphantly back to her room. Even Acton would never suspect that a typed foolscap envelope contained anything but a dry-as-dust business communication.

Nor, in fact, did he, when, at the Post Office ashore, he affixed the appropriate stamps to the bundle of letters entrusted to him.

In a hastily scribbled postscript, Heather had written:

We're bound for Cape Town first. After that—goodness knows where. Write to Cape Town Post Office. I'll ask them to forward any letters to wherever we are going—if I know myself before we leave Table Bay. Even that is doubtful. Father is so mysteriously secretive. All my love to you, Mark dear. It seems ages already since I saw you . . . I daren't imagine how long it will be before I see you again. . . . H.

BEFORE the disagreeable business of coaling commenced, Heather purchased two canaries in a diminutive traveling-cage from one of the swarm of bum-boats that thought it worth while temporarily to desert the big liners in search of the *Galatea's* custom. But, excepting payment for Heather's small purchase, and a few coins thrown to the bronzed diving-boys, little money changed hands, and the

floating market presently returned to its more profitable customers.

It was her sense of loneliness which prompted Heather to buy the canaries. They would be something to care for; something which perhaps might respond to her yearning for love. A poor makeshift to fill the aching void in her heart, it was true, but even that was better than nothing. And, indeed, she found her mind already actively employed in planning a large, roomy cage, and in passing on the necessary instructions to Greenway, the bull-necked, ham-fisted carpenter, who, it seemed, knew all about canaries, and promised to get down to the job immediately the yacht was under way. He also offered the gratuitous opinion that one of the birds, despite the wily vendor's guarantee to the contrary, was, in fact, a hen. "So much the better, miss," the carpenter remarked. "For all we know, they'll mate. Any'ow, I'll fit 'em out with a nesting-box and a bit of tow to give 'em every encouragement. You leave it to me, Miss Crawford. I'll make a good job of it for you."

Meanwhile, unseen by Heather, Acton had returned to the *Galatea* in charge of a boat-load of miscellaneous stores. But, to her disappointment, he could not say whether there were any letters for her. In accordance with new orders issued on leaving England, all letters for the yacht had been placed in a small canvas bag by the Post Office officials, sealed with sealing-wax and embossed with the date stamp. "As far as I could judge, Miss Crawford," said Acton, "there would be about a dozen letters all told. They'd have come by a Rio boat which left Southampton the day after we did. She passed us the night before last."

Heather felt the blood drain from her cheeks. What if there had been a letter for her from Mark? Her father would recognize it at once. Before she had time to follow the harrowing thought to its logical conclusion, a steward approached her and saluted. "Excuse me, miss, but Mr. Crawford wishes to see you in his office."

So the worst has happened!

"You want me, Father?" Her voice trembled despite her efforts to speak calmly.

John Crawford was sitting at his roll-top desk with the letters before him, some already opened, some still intact. "Yes, Heather. Sit down, dear. There are two letters for you. One is from your mother, and one"—his face clouded ominously—"one appears to be from my secretary, Mr. Howlett. . . . The point that concerns me most at the moment is how he knew, when he posted this letter the day before we sailed, that the yacht was calling at Madeira, since I only gave him that information in strict confidence the morning we left home. That was the seventh of November. Yet this letter bears the postmark of the sixth. . . . I don't want to distress you, Heather, but it would tend to clear the air if you could throw some light on that point, first of all."

"I am to blame, if anyone," she faltered. "I mentioned to Mr. Howlett that I was buying some tropical kit. . . . I didn't even know myself at the time that we were touching at Madeira. But unless one is going East, Madeira is the recognized place of call on the way to the Tropics, so I expect that Mar—I mean Mr. Howlett, addressed the letter here on the off-chance."

Crawford nodded his head slowly. "Forgive me for saying so, Heather, but you seem rather anxious to shoulder all the blame."

"Simply because I *am* to blame for—for mentioning the Tropics. I shouldn't have done so if you had asked me not to. And I am perfectly certain that Mr. Howlett would never abuse his trust. . . ."

She broke off there. What else could she say?

For perhaps ten seconds that seemed like minutes, silence reigned. Then, suddenly, John Crawford said: "How long has this *affaire* between you and Mr. Howlett been going on?"

"Oh, I don't know. It—it has just sort of

happened. . . . I have always liked him."

"You mean that you are in love with each other?"

Now that the truth was out, her eyes met his fearlessly. "Yes, Father. We are. Do you mind very, very much?"

"I do. I have long suspected something of the sort. That was one reason why I brought you on this cruise. However, I will be perfectly frank with you—and fair. I have no fault to find with Howlett, either from the business or the personal and social point of view. He's quite a decent fellow. But I do expect my daughter—indeed I *insist* on it—to have bigger ideas altogether. My ambition is to see you installed as the wife of a titled man in one of the stately homes of England. Not living from hand to mouth as the wife of one of my employees in a wretched little suburban street. . . . Don't you see my point of view, dear?"

Heather moistened her lips. "But why a 'wretched little suburban street'? He has bigger ideas than that. Why shouldn't he make good—I mean, really good? After all, *you* have, from comparatively small beginnings."

"Yes. Years ago. Things are very different today. Even those of us who *have* made good are finding it extremely difficult to keep our end up, with the world in the state it is in today."

"You will admit that Mr. Howlett is a good business man, won't you?"

"He would not be my confidential secretary if he were not."

"And you will at least give him credit for—for—I don't quite know how to put it—for wishing to be absolutely independent, I hope?"

Her father inclined his head. "I do. And that only makes the position more untenable. To whom do you suppose I shall leave the bulk of my fortune but to *you*? The difficulty would not exist if he had similar expectations. But he hasn't, as far as I am aware. Heather, my dear child, don't you realize what insuperable difficulties money makes?"

"I do. I have from the beginning. And so has he. It has worried him all along. It has worried both of us. But, for that matter, aren't half the titled people—I mean the real old county families—as poor as church mice?"

"Granted. But, even so, they still have a great deal to offer—honored names and noble homes—the sort of home I hope I shall live to see you adorn as its titled mistress."

"But, Father, a woman can't love to order."

"My dear child, I know just enough about women to appreciate *that!* But you are young, yet. There's plenty of time, and, meanwhile, just please me by trying to forget this little *affaire* with Mr. Howlett. For I solemnly assure you, dear, that your mother and I will never consent to anything of the kind as long as we live. . . . Promise me, Heather, that you will start forgetting *now*."

"Father, I can't! I—I love him too much."

"Then, Heather, I'm sorry. There's nothing more to be said."

"And may—may I have his letter?"

"Yes. If you insist. Here it is."

SO THE secret—her secret and Mark's—was out! The moment she had dreaded had come and gone. She had expected a violent scene, but there had been nothing of the kind. Not one heated word had left her parent's lips.

No. All he had done was calmly and dispassionately to point out cold, hard facts which both she and Mark had realized from the dawning of their love. . . .

She felt no bitterness towards her father. He was not to blame. She only knew the dull, dead weight of despair. But strive to forget she never would. Nothing in the wide world would alter her love for Mark—nor, she was equally certain, his love for her.

The tears were perilously close at hand when she read Mark's letter—a letter that in happier circumstances would have

brought her untold joy. But every word of endearment, every hope for the future it expressed, only magnified her misery a thousandfold.

In such a state of mind, it was perhaps only natural if she gave rein to her imagination and found bitter-sweet pleasure in conjuring up pictures of the might-have-been—and what yet might be. In books, and in films, of course, the impoverished hero in love with the great financier's daughter either suddenly and miraculously acquired enormous wealth, or the obdurate father was ruined in a night, and was then only too glad to consent to the wedding.

But such miracles did not happen in real life. "Insuperable difficulties" were not scattered right and left like ninepins. . . .

After that memorable interview, John Crawford spent more and more time with Heather, both on deck, and below in the evenings. He revealed the kindlier side of his nature as he had never revealed it to her since she was a little girl.

And never once did he again refer, directly or indirectly, to the subject nearest her heart.

Heather knew why.

It was because he had nothing more to say. The last word had been said. Without using threats, he had made it perfectly clear that, in this, as in all other matters, he meant to be implicitly obeyed.

CHAPTER VI

IN TROPIC SEAS

AND so, with her freight of human lives and gold, and hope and despair; with her spotless decks, snow-white awnings, dazzling brasswork, gilded saloons and princely state-rooms, the yacht *Galatea* steamed southwards through Tropic seas, often for days on end with no other living thing in sight than glittering shoals of flying-fish, dainty little Portuguese men-o'-war, and a solitary albatross in effortless, watchful flight just clear of her tumbling wake.

At long intervals she passed Homeward-

bound liners whose passengers crowded the rails and stared at her as they might at a dream-ship. "That's the *Galatea*," they were told. "She belongs to John X. Crawford, the millionaire. . . . One of the finest yachts ever built. Cost best part of a million of money. . . . Fitted out like a palace. . . ."

And palatial yacht and ocean greyhound dipped their colors in passing, and presently, plowing each her own lone white furrow in the blue, dwindled to a toy and vanished over the rim of the far horizon, leaving only a smudge of smoke to mark her going.

As one of Joseph Conrad's deep-sea sailor-men observes: "Ships are all right. It's the men that's in them." So it was with the *Galatea*—as perfect and lovely a thing as ever left the slipways. There was nothing wrong with *her*. Just one or two men aboard were at the root of the trouble which was spreading like a cancerous growth within her graceful form—its presence all unsuspected by her owner, and, if not altogether unsuspected by her com-



mander, ignored by him as a thing of no account, only to be tackled with a firm hand if and when it revealed itself in earnest. Captain Burton was too familiar with the ways of those who follow the sea to lose any sleep because one or two hands were laboring under a grievance. He had never been in a ship yet, as 'prentice, mate, or master, in which there wasn't trouble of some sort or another. Nevertheless, when the first familiar signs of disaffection appeared, it beat him altogether to know what in the name of thunder the hands could find fault with.

It was because the trouble was at first confined to the stewards' department that Captain Burton turned a blind eye towards it. Except when flagrant breaches of discipline called for it, he never interfered with the affairs of that department. That was Mr. Acton's pigeon. And Acton was an experienced man who, in Burton's estimation, could be well trusted to have his orders obeyed without appealing for support from the bridge. Burton knew him for a firm disciplinarian, as he should be. What he did not know, and had no means of knowing, was that Acton, with a nature warped and soured by excessive drinking, was making the lives of some of his underlings a living hell, just as a nagging housewife may make a hell of the life of a domestic drudge.

But Acton went further than fault-finding—often in hoarse whispers in the owner's presence, and meant for the owner to hear. He caused work, already well done, to be done over again—preferably the last thing at night. On one pretext or another he turned the stewards out at unearthly hours in the morning and kept them on the jump throughout each day of stifling Tropic heat. He found fault with the pipe-claying of their shoes; with the appearance of their white duck trousers; raised Cain if he detected the smallest blemish on their short-waisted white jackets. And there was every reason to suppose that, to make good deficiencies for which he could doubtless account, he watered down the daily beer allowance and the grog, issued to all hands on high days and holidays.

Kerrick, the mate, knew all about it. There was no purple sentiment about Kerrick where deck-hands, stewards, or stokers were concerned. In his view, the quickest way to turn good seamen into bad ones was to coddle them as they were coddled aboard that yacht.

WITH a brief call at St. Helena to enable Heather to stretch her legs and see the island's Napoleonic relics, the yacht headed for Table Bay, where she re-

mained at anchor for the greater part of a week, only entering dock to repeat the disagreeable business of coaling and to replenish her water tanks and stores.

Glad enough to have his sensitive fingers once more on the pulse of the world's feverish activities, John Crawford spent most of his time ashore, sending to, and receiving from, London, cables in code; studying the financial pages of the *Cape Times* and the *Argus*, market summaries, closing prices, and latest rates of exchange, and more especially every down-to-the-minute fact and figure he could lay hands on relating to South American affairs.

What he learned was evidently to his liking, for Heather had rarely known him to be in such good humor. He welcomed newspaper reporters with open arms; told them a great deal about his movements and intentions that was true, and a great deal more that was far from the truth, and, questioned as to his future plans, spoke vaguely of "going home *via* the east coast" knowing full well that all this bluff would be cabled to England and help to delay the hour when London would wake up to the fact that he had quitted the country, not for the benefit of his health, but had gone while the going was good—and taken the bulk of his capital with him. To Heather, time and distance had brought no relief from heart-ache and blank despair.

Never once, since leaving Madeira, had her father even mentioned Mark Howlett by name. But occasionally, with masculine clumsiness, he had attempted to cheer her up by telling her that she was young yet, and that happy days she had never dreamed of were waiting for her when they reached England again.

Whether any letters from Mark had awaited her at Cape Town she did not know. Her father had called in person for correspondence at the Standard Bank and the Post Office, and he had neither volunteered any information on the subject insofar as it concerned her, nor had she ventured to ask for any.

But she posted a long letter to Mark,

telling him that their love was a secret no longer and that she was too desperately miserable for words.

Where we are going when we leave Cape Town, I haven't the slightest idea [she wrote.] Sometimes I think it is Australia. Sometimes South America. But wherever it may be, it seems as though father means to put as many thousand miles of deep blue sea between us as he can, and hope that Time will heal the wound in my heart.

Mark, dear, Time never will do that! I love you now more than I have ever loved you, and shall go on loving you to the end, whatever happens—wherever the next move takes us. Surely our love will find a way. . . .

I must stop now, dear. Father is ready to take me ashore to drive round the Mountain again. It is all very beautiful, Mark, but how can I begin to enjoy it when I'm so desperately miserable?

With all my love, now and always,

Heather.

THEN, one afternoon towards tea-time, the *Galatea* steamed slowly out of the placid waters of Table Bay and presently headed due south with the Peninsula's rugged mountains and snow-white surf to port.

Close in, she rounded Cape Point, where as Crawford knew, she would be seen and logged by the lighthouse-keeper as he meant her to be seen—steaming now roughly south-east, coastwise bound.

But late that night Wilson, the wireless operator, brought him a message just received from Cape Town—a bogus message he had arranged to be sent at that hour. It ran:

Close with your offer.

Immediately it came to hand, Crawford who was in the drawing-room with Heather, said: "This upsets all my plans. It means that we must proceed straight to South America!"

Then, leaving her too dazed to speak, too bewildered to think, he hurried up to the bridge.

Within three minutes the *Galatea*, rolling heavily in the long Agulhas swell, had turned about and was heading due west, bound for Buenos Aires.

Far out to sea, with all lights doused, she passed the Cape Light again in the dark hour before the dawn.

And the winking light they saw low down and far across the waters from bridge and heaving deck was destined for some to be their last glimpse of the living world of men.

CHAPTER VII

INTO THE UNKNOWN

HEATHER was on deck in time to see Table Mountain fade from sight in the shimmering haze far astern.

When it was no longer visible, Crawford, pacing the deck beside her, said he hoped that she would not mind the sudden change of plans which business had rendered imperative, and only regretted that there would be so little to see in the direction they were now going. "The only land we shall sight," he went on, "will be Tristan da Cunha. It's in a direct line between the Cape and Buenos Aires. And it's quite on the cards that we shan't even sight a single ship. Our course is right off the beaten track. . . ."

Day after sun-drenched day, night after star-spangled night, the engines' big-ends swept downward, upward, downward, upward, thrusting and pulling on the ponderous cranks; the auxiliary engines, driving dynamos and force-pumps and fans, raced their ceaseless race, and the humid air was heavy with the smells of steam and hot metal and warm oil.

The telegraph gong had last sounded on the Agulhas Bank, when the sweeping indicator had finally come to rest at "Full Ahead." Excepting only in case of fog or emergency, there it was likely to remain, like the hand of a clock that has stopped,

until after the yacht had made a landfall on the coast of South America.

Alec Mackenzie was content. In fair weather and in foul, his engines and the new propellers had given a good account of themselves on the 6,000 mile run south to the Cape. And they had never run so sweetly as they were running now.

Then came a day when the tell-tale pressure-gauge led the chief to investigate matters in the stoke-hold. His visit revealed firebars choked with unraked clinker and other evidence that the stokers were doing their job about as badly as it could be done. Sullenly, their spokesman blamed the coal, which, he averred, was the worst sort of muck they had ever touched with a particularly red brand of shovel in their perishing lives.

"Ye'd lay the blame off on the coal, would ye?" blazed Mackenzie. "Do ye no ken the best Welsh steam when ye see it, ye feckless loons? It's no the coal—it's the liquor that's to blame. There's nae a mon among ye that's sober."

His sarcastic tongue lashed the grimy gang into something like sobriety, and promised them hell with the lid off if he caught them at any more monkey tricks of that or any other kind. Shouting abuse above the din and clatter of raked clinker and shoveled coal, he stayed until the trouble had been remedied, and with a final word of warning returned fuming to the engine-room to watch the gauge pointers creep back to their normal and appointed places.

BOTTLES of cheap Cape brandy, of that particularly vicious type known as "Snake Bite," brought on board in large quantities in Table Bay, were doing their insidious work among stokers, deck-hands and stewards, and making them ripe for mischief of any sort.

While under its influence, an able-bodied seaman—one William Todman—had staggered up to the bridge a full three minutes late to take his trick at the wheel.

It was the mate's watch—at night.

Todman was powerfully built. A man with an ugly light in his close-set eyes. His nose had been broken by a belaying-pin in the days of his youth; a blue scar, left by a screaming shell-splinter in the war, slashed his left cheek from temple to chin; his pursed lips dribbled tobacco-juice which he was forever wiping away with the back of an enormous fist tattooed with a bleeding heart impaled on a Cupid's arrow. But if Bill Todman fell far short of the ornamental, a better seaman, when sober, never spliced a rope, heaved a lead, lowered or handled a boat in a nasty seaway, or took his trick at the wheel. Steam, sail, or sweeps—it was all one to him.

Even that carping critic, the mate, had never had fault to find with him until now, when he came lurching up on to the bridge half-seas over, three minutes overdue, blear-eyed and glaring defiance.

"Mean by it?" he hiccupped in answer to Mr. Kerrick's choleric outburst. "Mean by *what*, you lop-eared son of a——"

With a punch like the kick of a mule, the mate's fist caught him fair and square on the point of the jaw.

Three parts drunk, most men in Todman's place would have been roused to white-hot fury and hit back. But sometimes a blow in the face will sober up a man in double quick time. This seemed to happen in Todman's case. He took his gruel without a word; without any attempt at retaliation.

Then, squaring his shoulders, he said: "I beg your pardon, sir."

"And I suppose I'm going to say, 'Granted, my man,' and shake hands?" the mate fired back. "You're logged. Get off the bridge!"

And, thirsting for revenge, Todman obeyed.

In point of fact, Mr. Kerrick did not report the incident to the commander. What he *did* do was to mention that in his opinion too much liquor had been smuggled aboard at the Cape, and to obtain Captain Burton's permission to search the fo'c'sle

and confiscate every bottle he could lay hands on.

The swift raid, which brought to light some two dozen full or partly consumed bottles, was followed by the stopping of the beer issue for three days. But if these measures quickly reduced all hands to a state of sobriety, they also had the effect of bringing them to the verge of open mutiny.

IT WAS then that another incident, small in itself, fanned the dangerously smouldering embers of disaffection.

At breakfast, four days after leaving Table Bay, the owner took it into his head to apply the white handkerchief test—familiar enough in the Navy—to an enameled ledge in the small saloon.

The test, made in the presence of Acton and the two table-stewards on duty, revealed just the faintest trace of grime.

The owner turned to the chief steward with a look of thunder. "Mr. Acton!" he said. "Is this what I pay stewards big wages for? I pay for a clean ship, and I'm going to have a clean ship!"

When the owner had finished breakfast and left the saloon, Acton let fly. Winter, the fair-haired, hollow-cheeked head table-steward, got the full brunt of the furious outburst, lost his temper in his turn and whipped off his short-waisted jacket. White with passion, he shouted:

"Come on, you drunken tyke! I'll give you the number of your mess!" And thereupon hurled himself at Acton like a shot from a gun.

Acton, as usual, was drunk. If he had not been, instead of peeling off his own jacket and squaring up to Winter, he would, and could, have taken him by the scruff of the neck and handed him over to the proper quarter for disciplinary action. But he very foolishly permitted himself to invite Winter to "come on and see who's boss here!"—with disastrous results in the shape of a promising black eye apiece, an ugly cut on Winter's mouth, the loss of two of Acton's front teeth, a splat-

ter of blood on the saloon wainscoting, and the wrecking of a chair.

In the subsequent inquiry in the captain's room, Acton, with some justification, averred that he acted in self-defense, and Winter, duly disrated, spent three days in irons and was thereafter detailed for the most menial and unpleasant duties that could be found for him.

Ignorant of what had happened, Heather inquired at lunch what had become of Winter.

"He's on the sick-list," her father told her. "Touch of fever, I understand."

"I'm sorry," said Heather. "He's such a decent sort. I hope he'll have everything he needs."

"I think he's got it already," returned the owner with grim humor.

"And look at Acton," Heather persisted. "His face is a mass of bruises."

"Yes. He's had an accident, I understand. Slipped and fell down the store-room ladder."

But Heather was neither convinced nor sympathetic. Intuition told her that unpleasant things were happening on board the *Galatea*—things that were being screened from her eyes and ears.

The knowledge left her with a feeling of uneasiness which grew daily more acute.

It was as though she had heard a distant muttering in the heavens, heralding the coming of a storm.

Yet, excepting only Winter's absence from his accustomed duties, and Acton's facial disfigurement, everything appeared the same on the surface. The normal routine of the yacht went on with clock-work precision.

Possibly Heather was the only soul on board with whom some other person or persons had no bone to pick. Winter found relief in the evil days that had befallen him in remembering with gratitude all the kindness and consideration he had received at her hands. Given the chance, he would show her one day that he had not forgotten. . . .

UNTIL now, the weather had been ideal, with long hours of brilliant sunshine and zephyr breezes by day, and by night starry skies and a slumbering sea silvered by the moon.

But, on the fifth day out, the rapidly falling glass presaged heavy weather.

It came with a vengeance, bursting upon the yacht in all its unbridled fury long before gray dawn—a screaming inferno of wind and thundering seas white-fanged like maddened wolves.

With a shift of helm, the *Galatea* met the hurricane head-on, now plunging and rearing like an unbroken colt; now rolling



her cabin ports clean under; now shipping hungry green seas that carried away lesser deck fittings and stove in two of her boats, whose covers, in common with every stitch of canvas on deck and bridge, had long since vanished in ribbons.

Muffled to the ears in oilskins, with the strap of his sou'wester lashed tightly under his chin, Captain Burton remained on the naked bridge throughout the interminably long day, leaving it only long enough to swallow a cup of steaming coffee and a sandwich in the wheel-house.

Meanwhile, all movable furniture below had been lashed and secured. Otherwise there was little interference with the normal life of the yacht below decks. Miracles performed in the galley and pantries resulted in full-course meals appearing on the fiddled table at the appointed hours; stewards, walking at impossible angles, or swinging like reversed pendulums, waited on the owner and his daughter as phlegmatically as though they had been waiting on them in a first-class hotel ashore.

Neither John Crawford nor the chief steward allowed anything short of disaster to hinder ordinary routine, or accepted excuses for a moment's delay. The rougher the weather, the greater the need, with a lady on board, to maintain an air of calm indifference to external conditions. And this, indeed, did as much to allay any qualms on Heather's part as her father's assurance that there was nothing to worry about—that it was “just a bit of a blow that had come up too quickly to last. . . . I'm glad that you're such a good sailor, Heather,” he added. “If you can stand this, you can stand anything. That's right. Make a good lunch. It's half the battle.”

Nevertheless, Heather had many uneasy moments when, after lunch, she sought the refuge of her bed as the only safe and comfortable place. The dead-lights, clamped over the ports, excluded both the leaden-hued daylight and the tumult of the storm, and there was comfort and an air of calmness in the steady glow of the shaded electric lights which softly illumined her snug room. It was queer, now, to compare its comfort and warmth and brightness with the outer furies of howling wind and the raging seas which crashed incessantly with dull, reverberating thuds on the deck over her head.

In the main galley, the chef, M. Lacroix, began after tea to prepare a full-course dinner. Iron fiddles, which had been fitted over the tops of the cooking-ranges, confined the erratic movements of sauce-pans, stockpots, and kettles to the narrowest margin. The steamy air was heavy with savory smells. A fair-haired youth, in white from head to foot, calmly chopped suet on a board at the spotlessly white table, and sang as he worked. M. Lacroix gave the finishing touches to a galantine of veal, and, this done to his evident satisfaction, drank a glass of sherry with obvious relish before opening the main oven to baste a huge sirloin of beef.

Thus, throughout the yacht below decks, the usual activities continued with little or no interruption. There was life there, and warmth, and a feeling of security bred by long familiarity with the sea in all its moods. Certainly there was no thought of danger; no doubt but that the *Galatea* would weather the storm as she had weathered others equally ferocious more than once in the Western Ocean.

Excepting only the empty guest-suites, every room, alleyway, lobby and saloon was brightly lit.

And down in the engine-room Alec Mackenzie pulled at his old briar pipe, while, for his engines' sake, he hoped that the weather would soon mend. Automatic throttle-controls were all right, of course, and saved a deal of racing when a bucking ship kicked her heels clean out of the water. But it was no way to treat engines to give them a full head of steam one moment, and throttle them hard down the next. After all, engines were only human. Or they were to Mr. Mackenzie. And what other force on earth—animal or mechanical—was expected to, or could, function in jerks and snatches like that?

Reassuring as was the opinion he belloyed into the owner's ear late that afternoon, Captain Burton saw no signs at all of the storm blowing itself out. Rather the contrary, if anything.

At nightfall he reduced speed and posted a look-out forward. For no human eye could pierce for more than half a cable's length the dense pall of sea-smoke and flying spume driving down upon the laboring vessel.

As the night wore on, the hurricane increased in fury.

It was while it was at its height, in the second hour of the middle watch, that the commander heard the dread shout:

“*Breakers ahead!*”

“*Breakers!*” stabbed the thought in Burton's stunned mind. “Where in heaven's name have we got to?”

Adventurers All



A LITTLE TOO CLOSE

DURING the construction of the auto road from Jasper to Mt. Cavell glacier in Jasper National Park, the construction camps were placed well ahead of the graded road and connected by little trails through the timber. These trails were little more than foot paths. As the construction progressed, my wife and I were in the habit of driving to the absolute end of the passable road, then walking up these little trails in order to see more of the mountain beauty. These trips were taken on Sunday, of course, when the crews were not working.

We had been patiently waiting for the road to progress to a certain point where we could enter one of these trails and make a short climb to the camp and get a very good view of the surrounding country. The road from this point led around a series of hairpin curves while the trail went straight up the mountain through dense forest. This meant that the trail was in virtual darkness while the right of way at the top was in bright sunlight. A few moments after starting the climb, we heard a shot and as all game is protected in the Park, we remarked on this and were offer-

ing each other conjectures as to what had taken place. The climb being very stiff, we were walking with heads lowered in the dark lane when we saw fresh blood on the trail as though some wounded animal had been dragged along. I was dressed in khaki cap and trousers with a gray wool sweater while my wife was in all khaki. We were still walking with lowered heads and wondering about the blood when I looked up and into the muzzle of a .30-.30 rifle about twenty-five feet away and in the sunlight. Of course, as I lifted my head, my face showed me to be human in the twilight of the trail. It has never been my experience to see a face change to such abject fear as the one behind that rifle when its owner saw that his bead was on a human being instead of an animal. The poor devil was so scared he could only stutter when we came up to him.

This is what had happened. A bear had been consistently robbing the camps' food cache and, being short of wardens at the moment, the Park officers had given the crew the rifle with instructions to shoot the marauding bear. This they had done and was the shot we had heard. The bear had been in the darkened trail. It was a

dead center shot and the animal had dropped in his tracks. After standing a moment to see if the bear really was dead, the boys had started into the trail after the carcass when another bear came out of the trees, seized the dead bear and dragged it away. This was the blood we had seen on the trail. Naturally the men were frightened and when they saw me, with head down and my wife close behind, laboring up the steep trail, we being in the semi-darkness and the riflemen in the glaring sun, they jumped at the conclusion that we were the bear's mate once more returning to get vengeance. When I looked up,

the rifleman had drawn a bead and was just starting to squeeze the trigger. Looking over the sights and seeing the supposed bear resolve itself into a human face gave that boy just about the worst fright he ever had in his life. And incidentally gave the wife and me just about the closest thing to a through ticket to the great beyond we ever want. If he had pressed the trigger on that high-powered rifle, the slug would have passed through me and my wife both as when I looked up, I looked square through both sights into the rifleman's eyes.

—Frank Williams



\$15 For True Adventures

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*The Constable and the Corporal of the Mounted Both Read
a Certain "Wanted" Placard*



THE RESCUERS

By FRANK J. LEAHY

*Author of "Borneo Diamonds,"
"The Terrible Mr. Terry," etc.*

Seven hours ago he had been one of three men standing in the office of the Royal Canadian Mounted post at Moose House. The two others were Corporal Galoway and Inspector Farr.

The inspector, a graying veteran of two wars, with the rigors of the frontier imprinted deeply on his bronzed countenance, had dynamite in his makeup when he ordered tersely: "Bring in John Kelleher—alive if you can, dead if you must."

And Corporal Galoway had echoed the concussion when he replied, with a nod, "Yes'r."

A strong man, the corporal; a soldierly blonde of a man, with a hammered-copper mask of a face, beaten into shape by the sun and cold of the dozen years he'd served on the Force. His eyes, gray as ice, had that look in them of defiance of all odds. The inspector knew a thing would be done when he commanded Corporal Galoway to do it.

Constable Neilan was of a deeper shade than the corporal, of a softer texture.

CORPORAL GALOWAY'S set gaze focused upon the twisted mass of wreckage far down on the opposite slope of the wooded ravine. Then he looked at Constable Neilan, at the head of their string of panting dogs, and shook his head.

"No," he said, with sudden grim decision. His grip tightened on the gee-pole and the dogs sprang to alertness in the traces. "We've no time to bother about that now. Let's go."

But Constable Neilan stood fast.

There was nothing sheathed about his dark eyes; they were warm without being too friendly, direct without being penetrating. One might say that he had not yet grown cold in the crucible of Life; he was still pliable, human. A youth, he was inclined to inquire into the nature of things; to investigate, even at his own expense. He was new on the Force. Corporal Galway was capable of bringing in his man alone, if the thing were at all possible, but the inspector chose to send Constable Neilan along for the experience.

THE inspector turned to the bulletin board and tapped once a "WANTED" placard, on which, below the rogue's-gallery photograph of a hard-faced, dark-haired man, thirty-two years of age, was set down in black and white the crime career of John Kelleher, escaped convict, murderer, bank robber, "phantom desperado."

The younger officers had read the notice a dozen times before, but they read it again now, studied it carefully, without remark. The inspector turned back to his desk, picked up a slip of paper.

"Here's something else," he said. "The words—verbatim—telephoned, long distance, from Prince Rupert, just a few minutes ago." On the slip was scribbled, "*If you want John Kelleher, he'll be at his cousin, Ed Donnel's place, on the Turnagain River—tonight!*" He handed it to the corporal. "It may be just a crank's idea of fun, but I rather think it's a red-hot tip."

Constable Neilan was reading over the corporal's shoulder.

"So do I," he vouchsafed.

"A tip," the inspector added, "from some Kelleher henchman-turned-rat, perhaps. It's worth investigating, anyway."

"We'll do our best," averred Neilan quietly.

Corporal Galway glanced icily sidewise at his subordinate, without registering other eagerness of expression than a short nod of his head.

"Let's be starting," he said.

He turned to go. Neilan followed.

"Ah—Corporal," called the inspector. They halted. "There might be a sergeancy in this for you."

The faintest of smiles crossed the corporal's lips. Constable Neilan's ready grin, however, was broad.

"I'll see that he gets it, sir," he promised.

THEY started while the morning was still young. A string of wolfish dogs, harnessed to a birch-bark sled, suffered the burden of their scant trail equipment and what arms and ammunition were thought might be necessary should Kelleher choose to fight it out. On snowshoes, in advance of the dogs, toiled Neilan; at the rear of the sled toiled the corporal; and change about when, after a while, the last rooftops of the far-flung post faded out behind them.

They traveled on without speech; here crossed a level plain, there entered a dark spruce forest; once followed, until it horse-shoed, a frozen waterway; became swallowed up by the unqualified desolation, where the crunch of interlaced frames and the swish of sled-runners seemed an impertinent traffic without license. As the day advanced the trackless solitude became more rugged. Trackless, but the corporal knew the way.

He called a halt for a nooning in a wooded valley walled in by bald peaks. Neilan tried to converse over their little fire, but was encouraged by no more than a nod, a shaking of the head, or a succinct monosyllable.

The constable believed that Corporal Galway was thinking hard—mulling over plans which, on rare occasion, he voiced—about a certain dark-eyed girl, daughter of the Moose House Trading Post's factor. She'd waited a long time for him; a long time had he waited for a sergeancy. Once the corporal had said, in that terse way of his, "It's love versus hard times."

Well, chances were now he could set up that man's castle. The taking, dead or

alive, of John Kelleher should certainly warrant an extra bar on the sleeve, the inalienable right to marry. Corporal Galoway was a tempered-steel tenon on the tradition of the Mounted at any time; now with his career at a crossroads it seemed as though Kelleher's time was short.

Into the sunless afternoon they mushed over the glaciers, where trembling avalanches hung and the snow in the black, sharp shadows was hard-packed by the centuries. Up there the air was bitter cold. Tiny whirls of gritty snow blew like sugar and dusted their furs and the bristly coats of the dogs with frost. They topped the height of land; without pause descended to where pines, bearded with alabaster moss, grew again. Then, where a vast stretch of lower country, criss-crossed with ravines, lay open before them, they stopped, panting steam. Below them—frozen, motionless, silent, like a thread dropped carelessly from the sky's gray loom—lay the Turnagain. But, as far as the eye could reach, not a wisp of smoke, not a roof-top.

Powdered snow streamed in the wind; they turned their backs to it and, in so doing, brought their scrutiny of the lonely panorama to focus upon something strangely out of order amidst the neat cleanness of the pine-tops. Far down, on the opposite slope of the wooded ravine yawning below them, was that twisted mass of wreckage.

It was a plane. A silver-winged monoplane. Its single motor was buried, its fuselage was distorted, its wings were crumpled. Because it was of the cabin type nothing could be seen of its occupant, or occupants. One thing, it hadn't burst into flame; its pilot must have cut the switch at the last moment. How long it had been there there was no way of telling. Not days, because it was bare of snow. Perhaps only hours, or minutes.

"Tough," murmured Constable Neilan.

The corporal nodded, said nothing.

AS THEY stared, a slight movement amidst the wreckage suddenly caught their attention. Corporal Galoway quickly

brushed the ice crystals from his eyelids, sharpened his glance. Neilan started, involuntarily took a step toward the abrupt downward slope of the flat-topped mountain they were on, pulled up.

"Someone alive down there!"

They stood quite still for a minute, watching. Finally the corporal shook his head.

"I guess not."

But the constable was insistent:

"I'll bet money on it."

The corporal shrugged, turned, took a gun from the sled and fired it into the still air. At the sudden sharp crack something scurried away from the wreckage into the trees.

"Timber wolf." He put the gun away. "Let's go."

"Wait." Neilan continued to stare down. "That was a wolf, all right, but just the same there may be someone——"

"No." The corporal's grip tightened on the gee-pole and the dogs sprang to alertness in the traces. "We've no time to bother about that now."

"Then we can take time."

Corporal Galoway glared gravely at the constable.

"Are you trying to give me orders?"

Neilan shook his head, but none of the quiet determination went out of his eyes.

"We can't let a flier die—if he is alive—just 'cause we're after Kelleher." His tone was strained and hard. "Kelleher and his whole gang don't mean that much to me."

The corporal blinked.

"What he means to you doesn't count," he replied harshly.

Neilan's eyelids narrowed. He nodded curtly.

"All right. If that's the way you figure, go on to Ed Donnell's alone, then. I'm goin' to look over that plane, if it's the last thing I ever do."

The corporal's jaw set hard. He started toward Neilan, reached and gripped the younger man's shoulder in steel fingers.

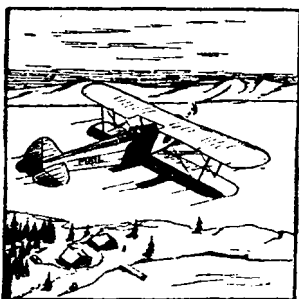
There was ice in his eyes, defiance stamped on his whole countenance.

"Get going," he commanded. "Yes or no?"

Neilan's jaw was set, too. He looked straight into the corporal's eyes, his own dark glance saying plainly, "You may be Corporal Galoway, but you can't bluff me." While his lips built the one word:

"No."

But the corporal was determined otherwise. Inspector Farr's words, "There might be a sergeancy in this for you," rang



in his ears. He had memory, also, of Neilan's promise. "We'll do our best." Their best, in the case of John Kelleher, meant the wasting of no moment in closing in upon him. It was a sheer, perilous descent into the ravine; it was still many a weary mile to Ed Donnell's place; and night wasn't far off. He wasn't the man to argue beyond a certain point; he suddenly closed a fist and brought it up like a rocket to take Neilan on the point of the jaw, a cracking blow.

Neilan sagged, fell heavily, out cold. For a moment the startled dogs kicked up a fuss in the traces. The corporal quieted them, straightened them out, dragged Neilan to the sled and piled him on. Then, without so much as another glance at the wrecked plane, he bawled "Hi-yaw! Mush! Billy!" and drove on over the sandpaper crust of a trail for Ed Donnell's place on the Turnagain.

For several minutes he avoided a direct glance at Neilan.

He'd put all he had into that punch. Fair enough; when the youth came out

of it, perhaps he'd realize that a corporal was not to be crossed by a boot constable. But, somehow, as the dogs raced along the mountain, the corporal's conscience began to hurt him a little. He tried to concentrate upon nothing foreign to Ed Donnell's place, but Neilan's words, "We can't let a flier die—if he is alive," kept throbbing in his brain to the tune of the dogs' fleeing pads.

In spite of himself, he had a memory flash of a day down the years—when, on the long trail, while bringing in a prisoner—a fur thief—he had tumbled over the bank of a frozen waterway and broken his leg. He saw again the thief pouncing upon him, unarming him, making away with dogs and all, leaving him to suffer and die; saw again the thief's deliberate return; heard again the fellow's words, "I can't do it, Galoway; somehow I can't believe my freedom's worth more than your life."

A thief! With a long prison term facing him, he'd set his captor's bones and taken him in to the post. Measure that lawless chap against his own self now! Corporal Galoway, of the Mounted, deserting a cracked-up flier who might, as Neilan believed—might!—be alive; turning his back on one police tradition to serve another—and his own selfish ends. Neilan was right. A possible act of mercy came first. Kelleher could wait. And if Kelleher didn't wait—

WITH a shout at the dogs and a dexterous handling of the sled, the corporal swung over the back trail. The action brought young Neilan out from behind that stiff uppercut. The constable felt of his chin for a minute, looked around, and a light of satisfaction finally dawned in his dark eyes at perception of what the corporal was toward. In no time they were back at the point where the wrecked plane could be seen again.

Neilan stood up. The corporal approached, laid a mittened hand on his comrade's shoulder for a brief instant.

"Sorry I did that, fella," he said.

Neilan's grin was ready. He nodded.

"S all right. I can take it."

They peered down the slope dropping away at their feet. It was a breakneck place. And even if they succeeded in getting to the bottom without accident, the ravine was so arranged by the gods as to wind off at right angles to the valley of the Turnagain. Which meant they'd have to climb straight up again; and that—with a wounded, if not dead, flier on their hands—promised small possibility of their reaching Ed Donnell's place tonight.

"It means good-by to Kelleher," said the corporal ruefully.

"Oh, maybe not," replied Neilan. "He certainly won't leave the minute he gets there."

"He might. He's probably only stopping there to cache—or get—some of his loot."

"Then I'll tell you what," said Neilan suddenly. "I'll go down to that plane alone. If the pilot's not dead, only broken up a bit, I'll stay with him and you can go on to Ed Donnell's. Then, when you've put the screws to Kelleher, you can drop by this way for me—for us—see?" He started away. "That's the way we'll do it," he added, with finality.

The corporal grabbed him.

"Hell, fella, I know you've got guts. But we started out together, and we stick." His fingers tightened warmly on Neilan's arm, let go. "Ready now? Lead off."

They went over the verge of the steep place like driftwood over a wave-crest. Almost immediately Neilan slipped. His snowshoes flew away, and he bounced back up just in time to veer off from crashing into a snow-laden pine. But his task of picking a trail for the dogs was child's play. It was the corporal who had the worst of it. That sled pulling at him was a live thing; it fought him; and his heels plowing into the frigid crust of white were no brakes at all.

The end came quickly. The sled suddenly turned over, sideslipped, jerked to an abrupt halt. And there the outfit hung by the traces, the sled on one side of a

stark tree hole, the enraged dogs on the other.

It was amidst that confusion that a mysterious something began to be felt—a terrible something, soundless at first, its voice rising as, on a sudden, the snow began to shoot out from under the men and the hung-up team. It seemed as if the whole mountain were moving.

It was an avalanche!

The snow of the winter, and of other winters, bristling floodlike with fallen pines and pines which it felled, roared down the slope with swift-gathering momentum. The corporal and Neilan, torn away from their outfit, were whirled into the monstrous cataclysm. A fire-blackened stump slithered between them; like drowning men grasping a straw, they grasped it and tumbled with it, amidst all the rest of Nature's débris, down the mountainside. One moment they were immersed in the avalanche, the next they tobogganed along the surface, and in another they were whirled into the air. Down and down, faster and faster, they dropped, with the thunder of fighting logs in their ears, with the winter's moving carpet choking them with white dust. And then, at long last, the bottom of the ravine—and blackness.

A minute passed, and then Neilan, worm-like, crawled up from oblivion into the world, his face blue in ghastly contrast to the hoariness of his furs. He gasped for breath, smeared at his eyes, looked all around him, dazedly.

"Corporal!" he shouted suddenly.

No answer. Silence—save for, far up the mountainside, the pitiful yelp of a sled-dog; and even that quickly weakened and ceased.

"Corporal!"

The frozen wind howled at the word. There was no Corporal Galoway. A great loneliness seized upon Neilan; he threw it off as the up-tilted stump to which he'd clung suddenly drew his attention. The corporal, too, had been clinging to that! A hope sprang up in Neilan, and he bent at once to pawing snow, down the trend

of the stump, like a dog for a buried bone. His fingers weren't claws, however, and pretty soon he was spraying spots of blood behind him, as well as snow. But he kept on, burrowing deeper, frantically, dreading—hoping.

The top of a head finally appeared. He scratched around it and the corporal's face, blue and strained, twitched; and ice-gray eyes opened—only there wasn't any ice in them as they lifted to Neilan. After a little the two men crawled out of the hole.

THE corporal sized up the situation. "Outfit buried, eh?" he asked.

The constable nodded.

"I heard Billy—sayin' good-by."

The corporal shook his head sadly.

"Billy always was a friendly dog," he muttered.

And that was the epitaph of the lead-dog Billy, less scant, perhaps, than their own was likely to be.

Neilan pulled himself erect, started off suddenly through the loose swell of snow. The corporal watched him quizzically for an instant before he understood. The wrecked plane on the farther slope still worried the constable; their own predicament was of secondary importance to him.

The corporal followed. It was a man-sized struggle floundering through that log-hampered accumulation from the tall mountainside; and when they were finally out of it, where the crust was still unbroken, it was every inch another struggle up to the twisted mass of wreckage.

It was a small plane. The wings were so crumpled the numbers on them were all jumbled up, but along the side of the fuselage ran a black arrow pointing to the name, Firefly.

"Why, say!" blurted the corporal. "I know who this is."

Neilan was pulling at the cockpit door.

"Who?"

"Bart Mason. Carries mail, or anything, for a piece of change."

They both had to strain at the door to get it open. It might have been their

imagination, but, besides body-warmth, there seemed to be a not-yet-cooled engine-warmth inside the cockpit. That was possible; the whole front end of the ship was nosed into the snow, out of the frozen wind. Possible, too, that that warmth had saved the pilot from freezing.

He was still alive—just barely breathing. They extricated him from the jam he was in down under the instrument panel; straightened him out and felt him for broken bones; found the only things broken were two rows of front teeth. There was



an ugly wound over one ear and a bad cut over one eye, and the blood from each, although it had ceased flowing, streaked his whole face like Indian war-paint and spotted his swaddling of fur and soft-tanned leather. His hair was a rusty red. In a shoulder-holster he wore an automatic pistol.

"So you know him?" queried Neilan.

"Not personally, no."

"Oh, I thought you said——"

"I said the plane identifies him. Bart Mason's been barnstorming the Firefly over these mountains a couple of years."

WHILE the corporal set about building a fire in the snow, Neilan rummaged around inside the ship. There was a partly-filled mail sack, which he didn't attempt to open. There were two vacuum bottles, one of them empty; a box of sandwiches, a carton of cigarettes, a bear-skin robe and a pair of snowshoes. These things he tossed out to the corporal. Then both of them lifted out the flier and bundled him snugly in the robe; laid him by the

fire. The corporal washed the fellow's head wounds with snow, forced a little warm coffee between his lacerated lips. But the man didn't come out of it, even then.

"Good thing we came down," remarked Neilan.

The corporal grimaced.

"Yeh. Rescuers in need of rescue ourselves."

It was growing dark in the ravine and it was starting to snow.

"We'd better erect a shelter," suggested the corporal.

They wrenched one of the battered wings from the plane and set it up as a wind-break. They'd completed the task before they discovered that the flier was watching them. His eyes were black—dark with pain and fever, probably. His lips moved, but the sound that issued from them was unintelligible, because of his broken teeth and swollen lips. However, the corporal gave him an answer:

"We're Galaway and Neilan, of the Mounted. You're Bart Mason, aren't you?"

The man's head nodded a little.

"Bad crack-up you had. I don't s'pose you could tell us how it happened?"

The man tried, but it was no use. Thirst-fever, risen from pain, had dried his tongue, and his lips shaped an appeal for water. But there was no water. The corporal gave him a mouthful of snow, but the man spat it out and pressed his jaws with his mittened hands to warm the ache of his broken teeth. Shortly he closed his eyes again and lay quiet.

PITCH darkness came, and they huddled, in the bitter night of mountain stillness, round the chilled warmth of their campfire. The snow, like a pall, came down about them in a silent, soft descent. Presently, far up one glooming slope, a wolf howled dismally. The flier stirred and the corporal administered another sip of coffee. They had no food of their own, so the corporal and Neilan wetted their own tongues with the bottled liquid and ate a sandwich

apiece; then, turn by turn, they stood watch over the sick man and the fire.

It snowed all during the night, and it was still snowing when dawn broke to reveal, away in the sky, the cloud-fleeced heads of their mountain jailers.

"Got to get out of this now," said the corporal.

"Where to?" asked Neilan.

"The post, of course."

"We're not goin' on to Ed Donnel's, then?"

The corporal snorted.

"With no dogs, no food, and this chap on our hands? Oh, no. And, don't forget, our guns are buried with the outfit."

Neilan nodded, glanced down at the grounded flier.

"He's got a gun."

At that instant the flier struggled up to a sitting posture, sat weaving, holding his head in his hands.

"Think you can travel?" asked the corporal.

The poor chap didn't seem to hear.

"Well, you've got to try," bluntly.

The three of them breakfasted on one of the four remaining sandwiches—scant fare, indeed, for men, one with a head cracked several ways, and two with many dull pains in their bones and joints. Then, without word, they started, heading in the direction that should, eventually, give them exit to the post trail. The corporal wore the one pair of snowshoes, pressing out a footpath for the others. The flier followed him, at first staggering like a drunken man, then just limping along painfully, with an injured hip. Neilan brought up the rear, carrying the mail sack, sandwiches, vacuum bottle and cigarettes in a robe-bundled pack.

It continued to snow. The hurrying flakes soon veiled all sight of the wrecked plane and of the mound of debris-bristling white that had brought this Kelleherless return to the post to prick the rescuers' consciences. Return? Would it be their fortune, good or bad, to ever again stand in the cozy warmth of the post's office—to hear, perhaps, Inspector Farr's repri-

mand, "Did I send you out as Good Samaritans, or did I send you out as policemen?"

But the business of helping one in trouble didn't end for the policemen with having merely pulled the flier from the plane. The fellow's hip, it turned out, really had him in a bad way. His limp became more pronounced and slowed the march to little better than a crawl. Several times he stumbled and fell headlong. Often he stopped to rest, and, finally, his crash-awful features became so distorted with pain that it was plain to be seen he could not go on that way.

"But you've got to go on, somehow," the corporal told him grimly. "You're our only alibi for making a mess of our jobs."

Thereafter the corporal broke trail and shouldered the pack, too, while Neilan made a human crutch of himself. And change about. In that way, footstep by floundering footstep, they pressed blindly on through the ravine—three lonely figures, leaning forward in the universal grayness, slowly drinking up the endless distance.

Along about noon they halted, built a fire, drank the last of the coffee and broke another sandwich among them; and went on. The ravine gradually broadened out, one slope lowered its summit to them and, in the deepening afternoon, they climbed up to where the frigid wind whipped them cruelly and the ceaseless flakes pelted them like bird-shot. Heroic toil, that helping a fellow and bucking the winter on a morsel of food.

THE flying chap's bad hip didn't get any better with the miles they were putting behind them. He favored it all he could, hung like a millstone about the shoulders of one or the other of his rescuers, but he groaned with each step, and these groans turned at last into rasping oaths, which the wind tore to shreds and scattered over the Northland trail. At the fall of darkness, when a bleak camp was made, his many agonies had him out of his head, and for a while it took every ounce

of the corporal's and Neilan's strength to hold him down. Then, when he did sink off, he raved all night in delirium.

"Some fun!" commented Neilan.

"We'll have to build a sledge," asserted the corporal grimly.

They hacked down several wind-swept saplings with their pocket-knives, then, to the stoutest two, laid parallel to one another, they bound cross pieces with strips sliced from the bear-skin robe. Of some vines which they found they made hauling traces; and they had their sledge.

They were weary enough then as they flumped down on a coverless couch of pine-boughs they'd laid by the fire.

"We might go into the knick-knack business," remarked the corporal. And he added deliberately, "We certainly missed our calling as policemen."

"Oh, we're not doin' so bad," replied Neilan.

"Think not? You don't know Inspector Farr. He'll eat us up."

"Let him. This poor guy would be dead now but for us. That oughta mean something to the inspector."

"It will," averred the corporal sardonically. "It'll mean to him we've missed the best chance the police have yet had to corner Kelleher."

Neilan shrugged a little.

"I have no regrets."

"Well, I have," bitterly.

"You mean about the sergeancy?"

The corporal said nothing.

"You may get that yet. At least, we're savin' the mail."

"The mail!"

"Well——"

"Probably some newspapers and a half dozen picture post cards."

"Maybe," said Neilan. His eyes were on the sick man, whose head was pillowed on the mail sack. "And maybe not. We might take a look."

"No. Get yourself some sleep. It's all we have to go on—sleep—and one more sandwich."

THROUGH another endless night they suffered the tortures of men put to the test of endurance. They hugged the fire—scorched one side and froze the other; listened to the triumphant howling of the wind; dozed; wakened with a start, to automatically feed the dying blaze; got up, beat their blood into circulation; packed snow into the vacuum bottle, heated it, drank a little themselves and ministered to the feverish thirst of their patient; time and again.

And they cursed the tardy dawn.

The storm ceased, to cheer their starting. Only the sun appeared, to burn away the clouds and stab their eyes with snow-glare. Across the wilderness, where peaks and ridges glowed primrose and misty gold and ice crystals flashed back the morning flare, the corporal and Neilan toiled in the traces of their improvised sledge, doing the work of dogs. The flying chap lay quiet behind them, eyes half open, seeing nothing, saying nothing, for all the world like a dead man. It was a stiff, crawling climb to the height of land, then, once they were on the other side, it was a case of floundering through drifts and picking a trail through thickets of timber and crossing valleys from range to range.

So through the second day the policemen-turned-Good Samaritans matched themselves against the Northland. As the sun vanished, the pace had become a stumbling shuffle; and as another darkness rushed over them they were exactly nowhere but in another camp—with a fire and nothing to feed their exhaustion but snow-water, boiled a vacuum-bottleful at a time.

"See here, Mason," the corporal said suddenly, "how about sharing that robe with us tonight?"

But the man was in a coma, eyes like glass, just hanging on to life by the fingers of his pain.

The corporal and Neilan shared the robe with him, notwithstanding; bedded down, one on either side of him, and in an instant both were asleep. The fire died down, the wind crept into their hearts, and in the

morning it was Neilan who awoke first and built a new fire to melt the ice in their blood. Daylight was still an hour away, but they started off in the darkness to haul again, dog-like, the man who couldn't help and wouldn't die.

PRESENTLY the sun had them again, to blind them with the sheen of white. Slowly, with miseries crackling all through them, they struggled on. They paused often to rest, but for them there was no rest. Coupled with the pierce of the cold were the pangs of their starvation. Feverish, they many times cupped snow to their mouths, only to feel the hot-cinder burn of it. Thought blanked out in their brains. By rights they should have been worrying about deferred sergeancies and uncaught desperadoes; but they felt only a sullen will to save the life of the wretched flier, keep their legs moving, one after the other, hour after hour, to the exclusion of everything else. Blasts of snow-sand caught them, as if shot from a battery; grimly they shouldered through, sucking air into their lungs. They tottered, they stumbled, they clambered over obstructions on the trackless trail; they were dying on their feet, but they wouldn't give up. Iron men against the wilderness, with a fluttering life for a stake.

On a sudden, though, Neilan's attention quickened. His whole body stiffened. He stopped, and his hauling comrade stopped with him. He blinked his nearly frost-locked eyes and stared fixedly ahead.

"Look!" he shouted.

The corporal's lowered head snapped up. "What?"

Neilan pointed off across the hummocked plain of white that sloped away before them.

"Can't you see? A dog-team! Two dog-teams!"

"Coming our way?"

"Sure are. Can't you——" Neilan broke off, peered around at the bewhiskered, grimy face of the corporal. "Say! Snow-blind?"

Corporal Galoway nodded slowly.

"Can't even see you, fella."

"Ah, gee, that's tough."

"Funny you didn't get it."

"It's the best man always gets the worst of it," said Neilan. "I've been keepin' my eyes closed all I could, leavin' it to you to show the way."

"And I've been leaving it to you," replied the corporal. "That means we're only maybe on the trail to Moose House."

"Well, anyway, we didn't do so bad."

The corporal wavered on his feet, suddenly sat down in the snow.

"You promised," he muttered, "we'd do our best. You promised the inspector that." There was a sardonic note in his voice; he lost it with the query, "I wonder if that's the inspector coming?"

Neilan slumped down beside him.

"I wonder. Too far off yet to see."

They continued to wonder for a minute more. A minute and no more. They tried to stay awake, but inaction got the better of them, and curiosity and snow-glare suddenly blacked out.

TWENTY-ODD hours later they found themselves standing again in the office of the Royal Canadian Mounted post at Moose House, facing Inspector Farr. There was dynamite in the inspector's makeup, but, strangely enough, it didn't explode, even after Corporal Galoway—from behind dark glasses—had given a condensed report of a cracked-up plane, an avalanche, and named the man brought in as not John Kelleher but Bart Mason.

"Bart Mason," replied the inspector finally, "took off from Prince Rupert an hour or so before you fellows left here for Ed Donnel's place. He had a passenger for the Moberly Mine, on the Finlay. He also had mail, to be dropped off at several points."

The inspector picked up a packet of printed leaflets from his desk, tossed it down again.

"That was one piece of mail," he explained. "A notice that the government is now offering a reward of ten thousand dollars for the capture, dead or alive, of John Kelleher." Again he paused, this time to open a drawer and take out a packet of currency and waggle it before the eyes of his subordinates. "I'm sending this south today. It's loot—twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of loot—from a Vancouver bank recently held up by Kelleher. It, also, was in the mail sack you salvaged from that plane."

The corporal's brow furrowed, Neilan's mouth fell open, and a little smile weltered across the inspector's lips.

"Bart Mason's passenger, holding a gun, ordered the plane landed soon after the take-off. He kicked Bart out and himself flew the Firefly away—for Ed Donnel's place. I got the story, by telephone, only yesterday—right before I started out, with Chinook Charlie, to see what had happened to you fellows."

"Then——" the corporal began excitedly.

"You've brought in John Kelleher, yes. No wonder you didn't recognize him, all banged up as he is, and with his hair painted red. Furthermore, who ever suspected Kelleher could fly? It certainly solves the puzzle of his phantom disappearances." The inspector stood up, rounded the desk, held out his hand to the corporal. "Congratulations."

But Corporal Galoway shook his head.

"Neilan first, if you don't mind, sir," he suggested.

The inspector's smile broadened. He nodded, took one of Neilan's hands; and the corporal took the other. The constable grinned.

"Gee—what the hell?" he said. "I—that is—well—Kelleher woulda died, anyhow. I——"

"That's just it," Inspector Farr cut in. "If you hadn't been the Good Samaritan, Kelleher would have died and the law wouldn't be able to hang him."

*Doc Sewell and Casaldy Are Not so Sure They
Believe in a White Australia*



SIAMESE TWINGE

By DOUGLAS LEACH

Author of "River Hate," "The Country of Walking Trees," etc.

AFTER that affair with the Chink, and Miss Annie Burlap, and Seyen Smith, the half-caste Siamese, me and old Doc Sewell was never the same. No sir, it sorta destroyed our faith in human nature.

It was in Port Barron, a little mining and pearling town way up on the Cape Yorke peninsula, Northern Queensland, that we tried to do this Chink a good turn. Of course, there was a few simeoleons in it for me and Doc. Leastways, there

would've been if it hadn't been for the Burlap female.

The most you could say about that old dame was that she was very kind hearted and she meant well, but in all other respects she was one of Nature's mistakes. She was tall and stringy, with big feet and hands and a face like a good natured horse, and she'd believe anything you told her. Anything! In fact, she was so simple-minded there wasn't any fun at all in kidding her. That was funny, too, because she was full of book-learning and in some

ways she was more educated than Doc.

"Just a little something missing somewhere," Doc useta say.

She belonged to some outfit called "The International Improvement Society," and as far as I could make out she was a kinda cross between a missionary and welfare worker. She spent her time trying to improve the tough bunch of Aussies that hung out in Port Barron, and when she wasn't doing that she was spreading light and good works amongst the Chinks and Japs in the native quarter. She even tried to improve me and Doc, which shows how simple she was. Me, I useta duck when I seen her in the distance, but Doc wouldn't. He said she amused him, and he'd chin away with her for hours, and kid her along till he had her thinking she was doin' him a lotta good.

Well, about this Chink. It was Doc that first heard of him. I don't know how it was, but when we was down to our last nickel Doc always scared up something or other. He come into the saloon of the Bay Hotel one morning looking very thoughtful and says to me, "Casaldy, what do you think of the White Australia policy? You know, Australia for the White Man, that the government here are so strong on."

"Well, I ain't never give it much thought," I says. "Why?"

"Oh, I've just found out that a certain Chinaman, Ah Foo, has been trying to land in the Port, and the immigration officials won't let him," says Doc.

"Maybe he's lucky and doesn't know it," I grunts, starin' out across the veranda at the dusty street and the tin-roofed houses that fairly sizzled in the sun. Hotter than the grids of hell, Port Barron. Yeah, even the beer they sold there was always warm. I'm not knocking Australia, mind! They got some swell burgs there. But Port Barron ain't one of 'em. "What does he want to come to a lousy hole like this for?" I asks.

"To see his father," says Doc. "Apparently the old man has been settled here for years. They let him in before the restric-

tions were tightened up. And this Ah Foo, like most Chinamen, is very filial. You know, Casaldy," he goes on, "I don't approve of drawing the color line against any man. A narrow, short-sighted policy. I think, as a matter of common humanity, we ought to help this yellow brother."

I BEGUN to see light. "Has Ah Foo plenty dough?"

Doc almost smacked his lips. "Lousy with it," he says.

"Well, maybe you're right," I says. "Maybe we ought to extend the hand of friendship. Anyway, I'm always willing to help the Chinese because I reckon they're just about the most misfortunate, down-trodden race on earth. If they ain't bein' bulldozed by the Russians, the Japs are licking hell out of them. If you read of a big earthquake or a flood or a famine, you can bet your life it's somewhere in China. In fact the whole darned nation seems to spend most of its time in dying in countless millions; and still and all they're terrible crowded over there, by all accounts."

"A remarkable race," agrees Doc. "One of the oldest civilizations in the world."

"Just shows you can't keep a good man down," I says. "Any race that can live almost exclusive on boiled rice gets my vote every time. How much is he willin' to pay?"

"Three hundreds pounds," says Doc. "Cash."

"M'm, sounds all right," I says. "What's the risk?"

"Anything from three to five years, if we're caught," comes back Doc. "But we won't be caught."

"What's the layout?" I wants to know. "And how did you hear about it, anyway?"

"Some Chink came up and spoke to me down by the wharf," says Doc. "No, not Ah Foo's father. A pearler. Don't know his name. He beat about the bush at first, sounding me, and then he came out with the proposition. He's acting as a go-between. It seems that Ah Foo is in a lugger off Cray Point—well outside the ter-

ritorial limit, of course. The owner of the lugger was supposed to bring him in, but got cold feet at the last moment. That's what's the matter with most of these Chinks—they're scared of the law. All we've got to do is to take our launch out, locate the lugger and land Ah Foo down the coast at some point far enough away to be safe, and yet not so far that he won't be able to hoof it back into town."

"All?" I snorts. "That don't sound so easy to me!"

"Why not?" says Doc. "We can run the launch through the gap in the Baloundra Reef. That part of the coast is as desolate as hell. We could do it in broad daylight with the odds against us being spotted, but to make doubly sure we'll do it at night."

I thought of our old launch, the *Zara*, that we kicked around on. She could be a clumsy old scow at times, and though she was pretty seaworthy she wasn't too good at shooting reefs, and the Baloundra was a bad one. It wouldn't be no cinch.

"How will Ah Foo know when to expect us?" I asks.

Doc shrugs. "This pearl-diver will have to get him word. Ah Foo will hang around till something turns up, anyway. Waiting won't worry him. A very patient people, the Chinese."

So I left it to Doc to fix the details. He could speak Chinese and I couldn't, so he was the guy for the job.

That three hundred pounds sounded good to me, mister, but somehow I felt kinda uneasy. Y'see, me and Doc was pretty well known all over Northern Queensland, and if them small-town cops got an idea there was something funny goin' on, they'd just come and pinch us on principle. And if they ever got us for Chink smuggling—well, five years is a long, long time!

A COUPLA evenings later we had things pretty well fixed to make the trip the next night, and we was talking over

the final arrangements at a corner table in the Bay Hotel saloon when a yeller-skinned bozo that we'd seen around before and that we'd heard was a half-caste Siamese, come up and sat down opposite us without as much as a "by-your-leave." He was dressed in flashy white ducks, with collar and tie and everything, and he walked very soft, like a cat. It wasn't only his yeller color that showed he had mixed blood in him; you could see it in his brown slit-eyes and high cheek-bones. Siamese have all got a Chinese strain in 'em, and it had come out strong in this bird.

"Well, boys," he says, talking real American like he'd been bred and raised back home in the States, "you're taking mighty big chances, aren't you?"

We stared at him.

"Who the hell are you and what are you gibbering about?" snaps Doc.

"My name's Smith," says this guy. "Seyen Smith. And I'm a—well, I guess you might call me a social worker," and he grinned. "And I'm talking about that Chink."

Me and Doc looked at each other kinda blank.

"Say, what is this?" I says, bluffing hard, though it was a helluva jolt he'd handed us. "Some sort of a con trick? What Chink?"

"The one who's tryin' to dodge the immigration laws," comes back Seyen Smith. "I heard you two were going to help. You're not trying to tell me you don't know anything about it?"

"Not a thing," I says, shaking my head. "Listen, feller, you're makin' a mistake, and a bad one. We're not fussy about what we do for a living, and we don't pretend to be, but we wouldn't touch a thing like that!"

The half-caste got to his feet, and that grin of his went a bit cold. "Oh well, in that case you won't mind if I warn the sergeant of police here that *somebody* is aiming to run a Chink ashore? Just to sort of put 'em on their guard. If you don't know anything about it, why, it won't

be any business of yours, will it? I mean, my telling the cops?"

Me and Doc looked at each other again. This yeller rat had it all over us like a tent!

"Sit down again," I says, swallowing hard. "Maybe we'd better have a little talk."

"Sure, a little talk," beams Seyen Smith, and he drew his chair right up close till he was almost breathing in our faces. "I'm glad we're going to get together. It's a long time since I've had a chance of chin-ning with fellow Americans, and——"

"Fellow Americans!" splutters Doc, the veins beginning to stand out on his thick neck. "Why, you dirty little mongrel,



half-bred son of a polecat, you're no more American——"

"Wait a minute!" I says, trying to calm Doc down. For all his fat he was a mighty quick mover, and he was so mean tempered you never knew what he was gonna do next. "Let's get down to cases. Just what do you know, Mr. Smith, and where did you get your info from?" After all, when a guy knows too much you gotta treat him soft and diplomatic, whether he's a copper, a Russian count, or only a cockeyed Hottentot.

SMITH chuckles. "I get my living by finding things out, and I get out among the pearling fleet. I'm pretty well known in the Chink quarter of the town, too, and I hear things. You know how it is?" and he winks. "I don't know where the boat is that this Chink is on, but I know you're

getting three hundred pounds for fetching him."

Doc quietened down a bit, but his hard old eyes nattered. "Well, come clean!" he raps out. "What is is you're driving at?"

"I was thinking you might like to let me in on this deal," says this Siamese bozo, cool as you please. "A third share. After all, there's three of us, and a hundred pounds is a nice easy chunk of dough to remember."

"Cheest—blackmail!" I husks.

"No, just business," comes back the half-caste. He spoke soft and slow. "A hundred pounds, or I spill the works."

Me and Doc didn't say nothing for a bit. Doc tilted his chair back against the wall and stared up at the ceiling. I couldn't see his eyes, only that heavy jaw of his, and I wondered what he was cooking up. He wasn't the kind to take a thing like this lyin' down. Suddenly he brung his chair down with a bang as though he'd made up his mind.

"All right," he tells Smith, "you've got us where you want us. But if you come in with us you can take your share of the risk."

Seyen Smith lights a cigarette and blows a coupla smoke rings. "Meaning what?" he asks.

"You'll come with us on the launch when we get this bird," says Doc. "You'll have to wait till Ah Foo pays us before you get your cut, anyway, because we're broke. He's paying half before he leaves the lugger and the other half when he's safely ashore. You can be right along with us and see we don't doublecross you."

The half-caste shot Doc a quick look, and I seen his slit-eyes sorta flicker. You could see he wasn't no easy mark.

"Suits me," he says.

WE TALKED things over and arranged where to pick him up the next night, and finally he left.

When he'd gone I says to Doc, "Well, whaddya make of him?"

"Haven't got him quite figured out," says Doc. "He's spent most of his life back in the States, you can see that. His father might have been an American—a sailor, or something—and his mother a full-blooded Siamese."

"About that hundred," I says, "we ain't gonna let him get away with it, are we?"

Doc stared at me like he couldn't hardly believe his ears. "Don't be a damn fool, Casaldy!" he snorts.

"How'll we work it?" I wants to know.

Doc rubbed his chin thoughtful. "Should be fairly easy. Personally I think that once we've landed Ah Foo and collected the cash it would be wiser not to come back here at all. It's only a short trip across to the nearest point on Dutch New Guinea. We've made the trip before in our old tub, and we can do it again."

I grinned. "This half-caste bozo mightn't want to go to Dutch New Guinea."

"Won't that be just too bad?" chuckles Doc. "The blackmailing little rat! And the beauty of it is, Casaldy, that once we get him on Dutch territory he can squawk all he wants to. I can't imagine those Dutchmen getting excited over something that's supposed to have happened in Australia."

"And if he cuts up rough?" I murmurs.

Doc opened and closed his big hands and a sorta blissful smile spread across that hard mug of his. "Well, I guess we can take care of that end of it too," he says.

THE moon was just coming up when the three of us in the launch headed out from Port Barron harbor and turned south. Me and Doc had often left the harbor late at night to shoot sharks beyond the reef, so them harbor police didn't take much notice even if they seen us, which was doubtful, them being a sleepy bunch on the whole.

Seyen Smith seemed as pleased as a pup tickled behind the ears, and all the time I was at the wheel he was chatterin' away to me. I didn't pay much attention to him, me bein' on the lookout for the mast-

head lights of the lugger, but he kept talking an awful lot about Chicago, which he seemed to know mighty well, especially the tough parts of it. Yeah, to hear that bird talk you'd think him and Al Capone had went to school together! Guess it was that easy hundred pounds he thought he was gonna get that was making him feel so good. When I thought of the horrible shock he'd have pretty soon I almost felt sorry for him.

We was cruisin' around off Cray Point for about two hours before Doc finally spotted the lights and we picked the lugger up. We flashed a lamp five times, like we'd arranged, and when we got the five answering flashes back we headed up alongside and collected this here Chink.

He come aboard carrying a big bundle, and almost before he'd reached the deck Doc made him produce half the dough as promised. Always a great guy for doin' things business-like, Doc was. It was paper-money, of course, and Doc examined every bill very carefully. While they was palaverin' together I got a good look at Ah Foo in the moonlight. As far as I could see he was just like any other Chink; medium sized, with a flat, wooden face that didn't show what he was thinkin'. He didn't have no pig-tail, and he'd had the sense to put on ordinary bluc denims and shirt like most of the Chinks in Port Barron wore.

As soon as Doc give me the high-sign I turned the launch about and churned off towards the shore. It was a good job the moon was near full or we'd never have got through the reef gap. Even as it was it was tricky work, with foam boiling and thundering on either side, and the tide-rip tossing the launch about like a cork. She yawed and bucketed, and looked like she was gonna capsize more'n once, but through it all that Chink squatted on his bundle, holding onto the rail round the cabin-housing, and never turned a hair. As for Seyen Smith, he didn't say nothin' neither, but you could see he was considerable relieved when we got through into calm water.

I ran her in as far as I could, and then a argument started between Doc and Ah Foo.

"What's the matter?" I asks.

"He says we ought to take him up the cliff and show him the trail into town," says Doc. "Oh well, I guess that's fair enough."

So Doc took the rest of the dough and stuffed it into his pocket, and led the way through the shallow water onto the sandy beach. I went with 'em, leaving the half-caste in the launch. At the top of the cliff was thick bush as far as you could see, but we knew there was a old mining trail back a few hundred yards. It was all second-growth gum and thorny *lantana*, and before we'd gone fifty yards I'd tore my pants to hell and my shins was running blood.

"Hell, what's the use of both of us goin'?" I snorts. "You take him, and I'll wait for you at the cliff edge."

CUSSING beneath my breath I picked my way back and sat down on the edge of the cliff. I could see the launch a long way below, with Seyen Smith leaning against the rail. The rest of the coast, as far as you could see, was dead empty. Nothin' but bush and sea and the reef crashin' like thunder.

I'd sat there some time when suddenly, above the noise of the reef, I heard somebody cry out. It was a cry that sorta broke off in the middle, and it brung me to my feet in a flash. I drew the little Smith and Wesson that I always kept in my pocket and dashed off through the scrub. I could see where Doc and the Chink had gone by the brush and vines that had been trampled down, and this time I wasn't taking no notice of the *lantana* or how much I was tore. Finally I come out into a little clearing among gum and bulwaddy trees, and there was Doc lyin' on his face.

I couldn't see no signs of the Chink, and I couldn't hear nothing. I bent over Doc. There was a blue lump on the top of his bald old head, with a thin trickle of blood

running down over his temple. He had been slugged!

I felt his heart. It was beating pretty good. Mister, he was one tough old helion, always had been, and he could sure take a lotta punishment. I felt in his pocket, and of course there was nothing there. Ah Foo had took all that dough back and beat it!

I put my gun down and begun to search through his other pockets, tryin' to kid myself that maybe the Chink had overlooked some of it. You know how it is—a guy'll never give up hope, even though he knows it's plumb useless. Then I heard a rustle behind me and I grabbed for my gun and whipped around. But I was too late. I caught a glimpse of Ah Foo almost on top of me. He had some sort of a black-jack in his hand, and I c'n remember seein' his mouth all swollen and bloody. Then the club cracked down and the ground seemed to go shooting up amongst the stars, and I didn't know nothin' more.

AS IT happened Doc was the first to come to, for the next thing I knew he was helping me to sit up against a tree. I felt sick and dizzy, and there was Doc cussin' me from hell to breakfast! Yeah, me!

"He took me unawares," rasps Doc, "but you ought to have been on your guard, you pin-headed little wart! You must've heard me yell out, or you wouldn't have come after us. Come on, what happened?"

I told him.

"A fine pair of saps we are!" he mutters, bitter. "Letting a yellow heathen like that put it all over us! And they say the Chinese are an honest people!"

"He looked such a mild, quiet feller," I says.

"I left my mark on him, anyway!" grits Doc. "He hit me from behind, but the first blow didn't lay me out; it only half stunned me. I caught him a beauty on the mouth that knocked half his teeth out," he says, shovin' out his fist and showing me

his skinned knuckles. "Still, it wasn't any use, he got me the second time."

He'd took Doc's gun, and when we looked around we couldn't find mine neither. Oh, he'd made a good job of it all right!

"What do we do now?" I wants to know. "Think we could follow his track?"

"We might be able to, but it's not worth trying," says Doc. "He's got a good start, and I don't know about you, but personally I don't feel in very good trim for a long chase," and he fingered the lump on his head which stuck out like a duck's egg. "Not only that, but he's got our guns and we haven't anything but our fists. No, our best plan is to get him the other end, back in Port Barron."

"But we don't know for sure he's headed there," I says.

"There isn't anywhere else he could go to," points out Doc, "especially as he doesn't know the country. He'd perish in



the bush. He's probably figuring on lying low back in the Port for a week or two, but we'll get him, Casaldy!"

There was a hard edge to his voice that meant large gobs of grief for somebody. When anybody crossed Doc Sewell they was runnin' a helluva risk, believe me mister! Yeah, that old hellion was dangerous, and I remember thinking that if Ah Foo had had any sense he would've shot Doc while he had the chance. Still, I was glad he hadn't, because he'd've probably shot me too while he was about it.

In the general excitement we'd forgot about the half-caste, Seyen Smith, and

when we got back to the launch he was beginning to get impatient.

"You've been a long time," he says, sorta suspicious.

We didn't say nothing, but climbed aboard and started the engine up.

"Well, how about paying me my hundred now?" he says.

"Too bad about that," Doc tells him, and breaks the sad news to him.

SEYEN SMITH took it quiet. Too quiet. Almost like he'd expected something like that. He only grunted, but a look come into his face that I didn't like. I thought to myself that he was lucky if he only knew it, for he wouldn't have got none of the money anyway, and if it hadn't been for Ah Foo he would've been on his way to Dutch New Guinea. As it was, we'd had to change our plans.

Well, Seyen waited till we was safely through the reef passage before he made his play. Guess he knew he couldn't've took the launch through there on his own. When we was well clear he suddenly barks, "Get away from that wheel!"

I looked around, startled, and there he was with a gat in his fists.

"Stretch 'em up!" he snarls. "Both of you!"

Me and Doc elevated as requested, that half-caste bozo lookin' as if he meant business. He was half crouching, and he held his gun like he knew which end the bullet came out of. After all, when you get a Siamese what has imbibed his civilization in Chicago, you got something!

"You'd better hand over that dough, and hand it over quick!" he says.

"Don't I tell you that we haven't got as much as a dime!" snaps Doc.

"Then you're just plumb unlucky," comes back Seyen Smith, "for if I don't get that hundred I'll fill you so full of lead you'll sink like stones! Come on, don't try and put me off with any phony yarns about fake hold-ups!"

I'd been looking at him, but suddenly I looked away over his shoulder and my

jaw dropped and my eyes went wide as a coupla saucers.

"Look out!" I yells. "The reef—we're on the reef, you fool!"

He turned his head and his gun hand dropped a bit, and in a flash Doc was on him.

IT'S a old, old trick, mister. Yeah, it had whiskers on it when them old pre-historical guys was living on stewed dragons and slugging each other with stone clubs, but even now it'll still work nine times outa ten. Doc and me had found it come in handy more'n once, and we was always ready for each other's play. Our team-work was good, if you get what I mean.

Seyen never had a chance. Before he could wink Doc had him by the wrist, and though he fired twice the shots went miles wide. Then Doc give his wrist a twist, and Seyen yelped and dropped the gun. I picked it up and stuck it in the small of his back while Doc frisked him to see if he had another hidden on him anywhere. He hadn't.

Doc was getting mean tempered. "I've let a Chinaman fool me once tonight," he says through his teeth, "and that's plenty! I don't figure on letting a lousy little half-caste Mongolian Hindu like you get tough with me!" and he hauls off and knocks him flat on the deck with a punch fair in the mush.

Seyen Smith got up very slow and wiped the blood from his mouth. He looked kinda cowed.

"Listen here!" rasps Doc. "If we thought you could make trouble for us by going to the police we could drop you overboard and nobody would be the wiser. Still, we're soft-hearted in some ways, and we'll take you back to the Port. But remember that you're in this just as much as we are. Whatever else you can say about these Australian cops, there's one thing in their favor—they've no time for squealers. Sure, you could get us a long stretch in the pen by opening your mouth about tonight's

work. We know that all right. But you'd go to the pen right along with us! Now get along over there, and don't let's have any more damn nonsense!"

Well, Seyen didn't give no more trouble, and when we got back to the harbor and landed he slid off like a scared cat. Still, somehow I felt we hadn't heard the last of that bozo.

WHEN Doc had first spoke of finding Ah Foo in Port Barron I knew it wasn't gonna be so easy as he seemed to think. Boy howdy, it was like looking for a flea in a desert! I'd never realized before how many Chinks there really was in that little town, and for three solid days we hung round the Chink quarter and the docks without raisin' hide or hair of Ah Foo. Yeah, we was round there so much that the cops got suspicious, and more'n once I seen Sergeant Grogan and another flatfoot called Shale looking at us very thoughtful. Me and Doc had found out by bitter experience just how cops look when they're gonna make a pinch.

The trouble was that we didn't have no authority, and naturally we couldn't go searching through every house in the Chink quarter as we'd like to've done. And we couldn't fake up warrants and pretend we was dicks because we was too well known. No, all we could do was nose around and hope for the best. We couldn't find the Chink pearler what had acted as the go-between, and though Doc questioned a lotta Chinks, not one of 'em seemed to've even heard of Ah Foo, let alone know who his father was. And all the time we was so broke that I don't know what we'd've done if Doc hadn't raised a few dollars by selling his watch.

I got so low spirited one way and another that one afternoon, when I suddenly seen old Annie Burlap bearin' down on me, I didn't even have the heart to run away. I was watching outside a Chink hash-house while Doc was prowling around the docks, and that meant I'd have to handle her on my own. But I was past caring.

She started in to gush about how she hadn't seen us for a long while, and naturally she asked after Doc.

"I like Mr. Sewell," she says. "I think there's a lot of good in him, and I'm sure that one of these days we shall have him on our side. We need men like him to help labor in the vineyard," she says.

Can you imagine that? She really meant it too. The thought of Doc doin' good works among the natives was pretty near too much for me. Then she went on to say how interestin' it was working with the Chinese, even though she couldn't understand 'em very well count of them not speaking much English, and how she knew most of 'em by name. It was then that I got a great idea.

"I suppose the only new faces you see is among the children," I says. "I mean, you don't often get any strange Chinamen, do you?"

"Why, how funny you should say that!" she bleats. "Only the other day I was in Li Whang's—you know, the laundryman—when another man I'd never seen before came into the room. He was very shy though, poor man, and when he saw me he scuttled upstairs again as though he were frightened of me. Just children they are, really."

Mister, was I interested! I described Ah Foo as well as I could, and she said it sounded just like him.

"You didn't happen to notice whether he had any front teeth missing?" I asks. "Or anything the matter with his mouth?"

"That's right!" she says. "His mouth was all swollen up as though he'd met with an accident. Why then, you must know him?"

"Only uh, in a business way," I says. "Excuse me." And I left her standing there and hightailed it for the wharf.

When I found Doc and told him, he got very excited. "Come on!" he says. "We haven't any time to waste." Gosh, he was like a tiger scenting blood! "Li Whang's?" he mutters. "Who would ever have sus-

pected that feeble-minded old cuss of harboring a man?"

When we reached the laundry we didn't argue with old Li Whang. We just pushed past him, left him fluttering and clucking like an excited hen, and marched upstairs.

We found Ah Foo all right. He was asleep on a bed, and Doc woke him by hauling him out on the floor. Ah Foo gasped, and before he could savvy what it was all about Doc clamped a arm-lock on him and begun to speak to him in Chinese. I couldn't understand what he said, but it sounded very earnest. Pretty soon Ah Foo was jabbering back at him. Doc listened to what he had to say, then he jerked him to his feet and handed him a open-handed clout that knocked him in a heap. Then he put the arm-lock on him again.

HE DONE that three times, and the third time Ah Foo must've give the right answer, for Doc let him go. Believe me, that Chink looked pretty groggy. He staggered acrosst the floor, knelt down, pulled up a loose board—and there was our three hundred pounds! Doc counted it, nodded, pocketed the wad, and as a sorta farewell gesture he knocked Ah Foo down again. Then we left.

But it looked like the luck was too good to last, for as soon as we set foot in the street we almost bumped into Sergeant Grogan, Shale and another cop.

"What are you doin' here?" says Grogan, kinda menacing.

"Just, uh, leaving a little laundry," says Doc.

"Well, well, I didn't think bums like you ever washed your clothes," says Grogan.

I didn't like the way they was looking at us, but as they didn't make no move to pinch us then and there we beat it. Just before we turned the nearest corner we looked back and seen Grogan go into Li Whang's.

"We're going the wrong way," says Doc. "Let's head back for the wharf."

"There ain't no gas in the engine," I

says. "We'll have to get some, and some stores too."

"Y'see mister, there wasn't nothin' to keep us in Port Barron now, and the sooner we got away from that darned place the better."

"Hell!" mutters Doc. "They're following us!"

I turned my head, and there was Shale and the other cop. We stepped out a little faster.

"Supposing they've found that damned Chink?" says Doc. "Supposing Grogan's in there right now, getting the truth out of him? If they put the finger on him he'll spill the works, especially after what I've just done to him."

"Yeah, and supposin' they pinch us and find that wad of dough on you?" I says, putting on a little more speed.

But them Australian cops had long legs, and they kept right up with us. We was along by the Bay Hotel right then, and we ducked in there, hoping to give 'em the slip long enough to get rid of the dough.

THE saloon was fairly full, and who should be in there but the Burlap female! Seemed like I couldn't keep outa her way at all. She was distributin' leaflets; something to do with temperance. Naturally, soon as she seen Doc, she swooped down on us.

"Why, Mr. Sewell!" she bleats.

I could see Doc eyeing the door we'd just come through. Yeah, them cops was there. Just standing there sorta casual as though they wasn't in no ways interested in us.

"Let's—let's sit down," says Doc. "I've been looking for you, Miss Burlap."

We sat down at a table. I wasn't payin' much attention to what Doc was saying to the Burlap. All I seemed to be able to think of was Darlinghurst and St. Helena and them other Australian penitentiaries, and wonder which one they'd send us to. And I wished we'd been able to get rid of that roll of dough. I looked around, but there wasn't no place where we could slip it.

You ever tried to get rid of three hundred pounds without anybody noticing you, mister? It ain't so easy, especially if you want to leave it some place where you can pick it up again.

Then I heard Doc sayin', "Miss Burlap, there's something I want you to do for me."

"Why, anything, Mr. Sewell," she gushes. "I should be delighted, I'm sure."

"Miss Burlap," Doc goes on, "I'm a rough man, and it's very difficult to put into words just what I mean, but I've been thinking over a lot of the things you've said to me at one time and another. They've



made a great impression on me. I've led a roving, restless, useless sort of life, while you spend yours doing good to others."

"Why, I—I do my little best," she simpers.

"Miss Burlap," says Doc, "I'm going to do something that may seem a bit sudden, but I'm a very impulsive man. I'm going to do something to make up, in a very small way, for the, uh, way I've wasted my life. I'm going to give you some money as a donation towards some of your many charities. I'll leave the decision as to how the money shall be used entirely to you. It's a large sum—three hundred pounds."

"Oh Mr. Sewell!" gasps Annie Burlap. "This—this is breath-taking!"

I'll say it was! Me, I pretty near choked. Still, it wasn't a bad scheme of Doc's. I seen that right away. After all, we could get it back from her easy enough afterwards.

"No, no—don't thank me!" says Doc. "And please, whatever you do, don't tell anybody." He mops his head, then slips

the wad onto her lap slick and easy. "There are people watching," he says, "and I don't want them to see. Just put it into your bag. I don't want any fuss. Of course, though I leave it to you, I shouldn't spend it on anything till I'd thought it well over if I were you. I mean, don't be in too great a hurry. It's quite a lot of money really, isn't it?"

"It's wonderful of you!" beams the Burlap.

Doc and me got up. "Remember," says Doc, "not a word to anybody!"

We eased off towards the bar, and a guy in white ducks at a nearby table got up and made for the door. I seen who it was by the way he walked, and I caught Doc's arm.

"Look—Seyen Smith!" I mutters.

"It never rains but it pours," says Doc. "See if he says anything to those cops."

There was a lotta guys between us and the door, and we lost sight of both him and the coppers for a moment. When we looked again he was gone.

WE COULDN'T stay in the hotel for ever, so finally we walked out, and at the door they pinched us.

"Come along!" says Shale.

"What do you mean? What's the charge?" snorts Doc.

"Sergeant Grogan'll explain all that," says Shale. "Now you blokes be sensible, and don't let's have any bother."

My heart went down *plunk*, but I was glad we'd got rid of our roll. If they'd found that on us it 'ud have took a helluva lot of explaining.

When we got to the little shanty that was the police station we had a big surprise. Grogan was there, and the first thing he said to us was, "Let's have the real truth about that opium, boys. Tell me everything, and I'll do the best I can for you, dinkum."

Yeah, that was what they was suspectin' us of! Smuggling opium. For onct we was as innercent as newborn babes, and we made the most of it. It turned out

they'd found out that dope was being smuggled, and when they seen us hanging round the Chink quarter day after day they naturally thought we'd had something to do with it. They'd been watching us, and when they caught us coming outa Li Whang's they thought he was the guy we was working with. Grogan had gone in to question him, and lucky for us he hadn't even given a thought to Chink smuggling.

Well, they kept us there three days on a vagrancy charge whilst they put us through what was pretty near a third degree, but they didn't get nothing out of us. They couldn't; they was barkin' up the wrong tree, and finally they had to let us go.

First thing we did when we got out was to hunt up old Annie Burlap in her house near the Bay Hotel. Doc had his spiel all ready thought out. He was gonna say that he'd heard of a old partner of his that was in very low water, with his wife and kids starving, and he wanted the money back to help these here poor unfortunates. But he never got the chance to get it off his chest.

As soon as she seen us she cries, "I'm so pleased you've come, Mr. Sewell. I have some wonderful news for you. I know you'll be glad to hear that the money you so splendidly donated is being spent upon a most worthy cause," and she beams all over her horse face.

"Spent!" gasps Doc. "You mean—you've spent it already?"

"Yes," says the Burlap. "It's going to help found a mission for orphan Chinese children in Hong Kong. It's to be known as the Sewell Mission." She must've seen the look on Doc's face, for she bleats, "Oh. I do hope you won't mind your name being used!"

"I, uh, I—what—I mean how——" stammers Doc.

"It happened that very day you gave it to me," she babbles on. "A most charming man came up to me and got into conversation with me. He'd heard that I was interested in mission work, and he told me

about this scheme of his for starting a new one in Hong Kong. He'd been in China a long time, and one place he was in the authorities thought so much of him that they kept him there for years. Positively wouldn't let him leave! I can't think of the name of the place for a moment. Not Nanking. Ting Ching—Ming Ching—No. Oh well, never mind. The point is that he was so wrapped up in this scheme, and it's such a splendid work that I couldn't refuse to help. Coming so soon after your gift it really seems as if it must have been *meant*, doesn't it?"

Doc didn't answer. He was past saying anything.

"What was this guy's name?" I husks.

"Mr. Smith," she says. "A rather foreign-looking gentleman. I know he

would like to thank you, but he left yesterday on the Sydney boat."

"Seyen Smith!" croaks Doc.

It didn't take no detective to dope out what had happened. That damned half-caste had seen Doc slip Old Annie that roll of dough!

"And you believed he'd been a missionary in China!" I says.

"Of course I did!" comes back the Burlap, indignant. "At this place Ling Sing, or wherever it was."

Doc looked at her very sharp all of a sudden. "Are you sure it wasn't Sing Sing?" he barks, suspicious.

A smile come over that sappy face of hers. "Why of course!" she says. "How silly of me. Sing Sing—that was it! Do you know it at all?" she says.

SONG OF A ROLLING STONE

By Arlen Luvano

I'VE sat in the saddle a-ridin' all day
A-roundin' up critters to sell.
I've gone to the hills for the dirt that would pay,
And figured on oil from a well.
I've stoked in a boat on the tropical seas,
I've crawled through a jungle on hands and on knees,
I've worked with the lumberjacks fellin' big trees,
And just plain loafed for a spell.



I've whispered sweet nothings to blonde and brunette,
And laughed and ridden away.
I've knelt in a church I shall never forget,
Feelin' I needed to pray.
I've cussed in each language I ever could hear,
I've drank every booze from straight whiskey to beer,
I've gone into battle without thought of fear,
And called it all in a day.

I'm shiftless, folks say, and blame my content
In hours they figure a loss,
As if He who patterned our life never meant
A man to be his own boss.
I don't owe a dollar to friend or to foe,
I'm always good natured and ready to go,
Perhaps I ain't worth much; but then I don't know—
Just what could I do with moss?





The Hot Shot Was in the Hole Waiting for the Limited When the Brains Said, "Once a Railroader Always a Railroader. They Never Quit Until They Die. Or Get Canned."

But He Didn't Know——

GRANDSTAND MCGINNIS

By CLIFFORD KNIGHT

Author of "Tale Told in a Caboose," "The Fire Eatin' Fool," etc.

THE Hot Shot was in the hole waiting for the Limited when the Brains began to speak. "Once a railroader always a railroader," he said. "They never quit until they die. Or get canned." It was warm and cozy inside the caboose with the sound of rain on the roof.

"You never knew Grandstand McGinnis, then, Skipper," said Bill the Boomer, twisting together casually a cigarette in the fingers of his left hand. Bill was a rolling stone who long since had ceased to count how many railroads he had worked for.

"Never heard of him," said the Brains.

"You probably have and don't know it. He was a rail that didn't die and didn't get canned. He went Hollywood instead. Out on the California Central."

"Couldn't have been much of a railroader, then," said the Brains, shoving back from his little desk.

"You didn't know him like I did. He'd set down beside the prettiest gal in the day coach and make her think she was gettin' a personally conducted tour and at the same time never overlook a switch target or a semaphore for his report, and never miss pulling the hoghead down for a mail stop from the long list they had given him."

"I've seen his kind," I said. "Sooner

or later the Old Man hangs something on them——"

"Not on Grandstand McGinnis, kid," said Bill the Boomer to me patronizingly. "He came off the farm like many another good rail has done, but he shore learned fast. He was a wing-ding of a brakeman, but he was always playin' to the grandstand. Of course the depression just about got him; they laid so many of the boys off out there that we was all hanging on to the extra board by our eyebrows, me and Grandstand both." He went on:

The California Central, you remember I told you, got fed up on motion picture people from Hollywood before the depression hit. They was always wanting to make pictures on the California Central and when they did they messed up everything so that it was hard to do any real railroad-ing while they was around. The Old Man used to tear his shirt and run round in circles barkin' like a poisoned pup when he got instructions to give a bunch of actors a train and crew and start them out into the scenery to make a picture. He said what the railroad got out of it wouldn't pay the overtime for all the delays they caused, let alone the strain they put on the brains at headquarters, including his. After the big tie up that time at Cahuenga Pass

caused by a movie actress and which stabbed both the Limited and the fast mail, he finally got 'em to cut it out.

But, as I say, in the hard times we've had the California Central needed the dough. Also they got the finest scenery for movies of any railroad in the West. So they decided to let the movie people come back and make some more pictures, since their money has the old eagles on it.

We caught the call at Johnny Doolin's pool hall. Me and Grandstand was shooting a few games and wondering whether we would ever git another chance to climb a side ladder when the caller come in and says he wants us for a work extra. We says what's the idea, is something in the ditch, and the caller says:

"No, not yet, but probably they will be before you get back."

"Why?" I says. And he says:

"A movin' picture company is goin' on location and you are elected as chaperons."

GRANDSTAND'S cars picked up like a mule's does when he sees the nose bag coming. He got so excited he missed three out of four shots he made and we finish our pool game with me a dollar and a half winner.

"That's what I been wantin' to draw, Bill, ever since I been on this here pike," he says, all hopped up as we went down to the boarding house to get our grips and lanterns.

"You're crazy," I says. "What is there to it? They are a big lot of ham actors that don't know nothing at all about a railroad. They get up there in the scenery and they try to pull some of the ordinary stuff we do every day, and they can't do it. Then the people who go to see the show at the theatre gets a wrong impression of what railroading is. There ain't nothing that ever happens in a moving picture like it does honest to God out on the line. Why, I've even scen 'em giving back up signals when they want to go ahead."

"You're all wrong," says Grandstand.

"That's real acting they do, and it lets the public know what kind of heroes we are as we go about our daily tasks."

"Prune juice," I says, and takes a swipe at Grandstand for that, and I am sorry I miss, because he is serious.

We get down in the yards and find the train made up. There is a couple of baggage cars and a Pullman and a box car and the crummy and one of the big mountain jacks. There was a lot of guys running around loose in horse pants with their shirts unbuttoned. And there is one gal in the crowd that has yellow hair and baby blue eyes. She turns out later in picture to be Susie, the little telegraph operator. But you should ought to have seen Grandstand. He couldn't see nobody else but her; he was plumb google-eyed the minute he lamps her.

"Lay off that stuff, Grandstand," I says to him. "You're only a railroad brakeman," and he gets mad at me.

Pat Hinds was the skipper, and when he sees the layout he don't want to go, but he has got five kids now and can't afford not to. The engine crew is Sam Bean and Harry Evans, but the only thing they had on their minds as usual was where they was going to eat and when. Mostly when. I never seen a hoghead yet that wasn't hungry, or a tallowpot.

From the excitement in the yards you would of thought all the brass collars in the U. S. A. was there. There was guys running around and hollering but not saying anything important, and Rolls Royces kep' coming up bringing somebody else that was supposed to go but who looked like he'd just quit work at the ribbon counter. Honest, they didn't look like real folks. Pat Hinds says to me:

"My God, Bill, how do they think they can act like railroaders when they don't even look like us?"

"Search me, Pat," I says. "I ain't good at riddles."

"Well, if they can," he says, "I'm going to turn in my badge and lantern."

WELL, we finally got started. We runs up to Corona. They is some pretty good mountains there and other scenery which includes three lines of tracks one above the other on Strawberry Mountain where the California Central she winds up over the range. It takes three engines to get an average passenger train over the hump there, that's how stiff a job we have there every day, and here these birds is just going to play around and make a picture.

We get up there and unload, and the director says we will rehearse a few times. He hollers to a guy:

"Hey, Reginald, come here." And Reginald comes over and the director introduces him to us as Reginald Trevor, the actor. Maybe you seen him in pictures, Skipper. He is one of these here pretty boys with cute dimples and curly hair, but trying hard to be a man. I shake hands with him and his palms is soft like a piece of mush. And the director says to him pointing to me and Grandstand:

"These two gentlemen, Reginald, are brakemen. They can give you some of the points about the duties of a brakeman, if you don't know them. It's all quite simple, anyhow, because a brakeman doesn't have to know much."

And I says, "Not me. You ain't no brakeman, and you never will be." And I walks away. But Grandstand he jumps in and begins to coach him like he was a brother he was giving the lodge work to.

Maybe, Skipper, I best tell you what the picture is about so you will understand what happened. It's a lotta hooley to a railroad man, but it seems that this little yellow headed gal who is to play the telegraph operator, which I mentioned already, is supposed to be the ops way up at a lonesome station in the mountains. All the trainmen are in love with her and they wave to her as they go by and throw off papers and magazines and candy and cans of beans. When they get a chance they fog in there for a meet and take water when they might of made another station,

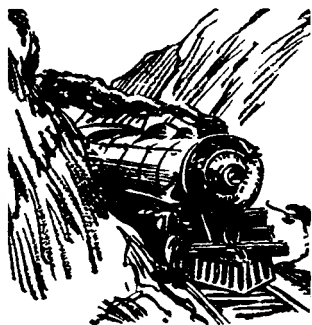
just to talk to Susie. There is a guy, a boomer conductor, who is in love with her although he is supposed to have a wife and family down in Dallas or Texarkana. And there is this guy Reginald Trevor who is just a student brakeman. He sees her and falls in love. When he gets a regular job he is going to marry her. This boomer conductor finds out about Reginald Trevor and is trying to beat his time. The gal is afraid of the boomer conductor; he says she will have to marry him and that he will kill Reginald if she don't let him alone.

Well, it seems this boomer conductor lays off and goes deer hunting up near the place where Susie is, and slips in to see her. The gal is frantic; she tricks him into going into her bed room and locks him in and then runs out on him. There is a box car standing on the passing track and when Susie runs out she sees that some how the brakes have come loose. Some dumb head has forgot to set the derail and the car has come out on the main line. The gal wants to get on the car and knows she can't swing on because it is going too fast. So she climbs up on the water tank and when the car comes by about fifty miles an hour she drops down on top of it. By now the boomer conductor has got out of Susie's bed room and comes running out. He tries to swing on the car, but gets throwed for a gool and Susie goes sailing down the mountain. The gal is supposed to try to set the brake but she ain't strong enough and so she is headed for kingdom come.

BUT here is where the hero comes in just in the nitch of time. There is a freight coming down the mountain on which is Reginald Trevor. The freight passes along the track only a couple hundred feet higher up the mountain than where Susie is shooting through on the track below. I told you how the track makes three loops on Strawberry Mountain and how there at Corona it makes a long loop up the valley where the depot is, and only gain two hundred feet altitude.

Well, that's why they pick the California Central to make the picture on. Because when the runaway box car comes running by, all the hero has to do is drop off the drag up above, run down the mountain and leap from a big rock beside the track on top of the box car to Susie's side. And he saves her by winding the brakes. And there is supposed to be a preacher to marry them when they get off after they stop.

Well, Skipper, you can see what us rails was up against; to help these actors



make their picture and at the same time keep them from killing their fool selves and us too.

The director says now that everybody knows what we are supposed to do, we will rehearse, and he orders Sam Bean to run the engine up the track a piece, but Sam says:

"Not me. I'm hungry. I'm going to eat first."

"No, you don't," says the director.

There is a fellow in the crowd who seems to be the angel that is putting up the money for the picture, and he waves his hands and sets up a big holler. "We're wasting time and money," he yells. "Especially money —"

But Sam cracks the throttle and opens the cylinder cocks and blows steam all over the director and the angel and goes down to Mesquite to the lunch counter where he has a sweetie slinging hash, and eats his supper. When he comes back it's too late to rehearse.

There is a crap game going on that night

in the baggage car. I got only the dollar and a half I win off of Grandstand, but I get in and takes sixty-five dollars off of Reginald Trevor, and he gets sore and quits. And I says:

"You ain't no brakeman; you're only a ham actor and a pore loser to boot." Grandstand calls me down hard for that later when we go back to the crummy to sleep. He says:

"You can't treat them people like they was railroad men. They ain't railroad men they are actors; they are different clay than we are."

I says that don't make them no better, and Grandstand gets mad; then we go to sleep. But I could see he is all hopped up about actors, especially the gal Susie. He just stands around and looks at her with his mouth open whenever she come out of her drawing room in the Pullman.

Well, Skipper, the next morning after the engine crew has et we get all set to make the picture. Part of the morning they have Sam Bean running the engine up and down the track while they take the engine pictures. Another cameraman is in the depot at Corona taking pictures of Susie at work and Susie making love to Reginald Trevor and the boomer conductor trying to make love to Susie and threatening to kill Reginald.

After they got the engine pictures made we take the box car we brought with us and set it by itself on the passing track, and take pictures of it and show the brakes after they come loose and the car begin to roll. They spotted a cameraman on top the water tank to take pictures of the car coming toward the tank and there is another one on the track down below. Sam Bean is below the depot a little ways with the engine and he catches the car on the roll and brings it back. They try it two or three times before they are satisfied.

All this time Grandstand McGinnis is hanging around in the way, and they have to wave him to get back out of the picture. He makes two or three grandstand plays just to get the motion picture people and

especially Susie looking at him. Finally the angel says to him:

"What do you think you are, Doug Fairbanks?" And Grandstand says:

"Hell, no. I'm a damn sight better actor than he is and a brakeman besides. Look now," and he turns a back flip and runs up the side ladder of the car and stands on his head. I was plumb disgusted with him. No self respectin' brakeman would act that way. But all the director says is:

"You may be good all right, but don't get under foot while I am busy." That don't faze Grandstand none, and he sticks his nose in everywhere it ain't wanted.

ALL this time they are getting ready to shoot the picture of Susie as she runs hollerin' out of the depot door trying to escape from the boomer conductor she has locked in her bedroom. Grandstand is so busy trying to prove he is better than Doug Fairbanks that he misses part of the preparations and all of a sudden we hear a screech and look around and here comes the little yellow headed gal bustin' out of the depot door. She wrings her hands and looks up the track and is supposed to see the box car coming out on the mainline from the pass.

So she starts running for the tank to climb up. The cameras are grinding at her. But Grandstand somehow misses out on this, as I say, and when the gal let out a screech he picks up his ears like a watch dog that's heard burglars and start running towards the gal and he runs up to her hollering:

"What is the matter, Miss Le Claire? What's wrong, Miss Le Claire?"

The director starts hollerin' like he is gone crazy. He throws a fit and slings away his megaphone and jerks off his cap and tears the bill off of it and falls down on the ground and groans. While the angel takes one gulp and swallows his cigar and it makes him sick and he tries to cough it up. About this time Pat Hinds takes a hand and grabs Grandstand by the

neck and starts him down the track towards the crummy with a kick in the pants, and tells him to stay plumb away from everything and everybody. And Grandstand gets sore and walks off down the track.

Well, they have to take the scene over again. They take it a couple of times for good measure, then go into the baggage car to develop it and see what they got. And there when they run it is Grandstand in the first scene. And the guys all laugh. But I seen the angel nudge the director and heard him say:

"The guy is better than he thinks he is; and that is saying a lot." The director growls, then he says:

"You're right. He photographs like nine hundred thousand dollars."

"Make it a million," says the angel.

"All right," says the director, "but that still leaves him only a railroad brakeman."

Well, Grandstand disappeared. They are ready now to take the big scene where the gal drops off the water tank on the box car. Sam Bean is supposed to be waiting down the mountain a ways, and one cameraman has gone down to where Reginald is to run down the mountain side to a big rock from where he is to leap on top of the box car when it goes by. And there is a cameraman named Walter spotted on top of the box car to catch everything that goes on on top, including Susie trying to stop the car and not being able to and the leaping on of Reginald to save her.

Since they had to have Sam Bean and the engine down below to catch the box car before it got to rolling too fast, they couldn't have Sam up on the pass to shove the car out. So Pat and I walks up and kicks the block from under the wheel and pinches her a bit with a crowbar and the car starts rolling. We see the man on top named Walter grinding away at Susie, and the one on the water tank is grinding too, and the third guy is down the track to catch the leap of Reginald when he jumps on.

Well, Skipper, Susie jumps. Of course

the car ain't rolling more than about ten an hour when it passes the water tank, so Susie can jump without gettin' hurt. Well, we seen the boomer conductor come runnin' out of the depot and try to hop on and get throwed for a loop. Of course any rail could of made it all right, because she is only going about twenty an hour then. But the guy was supposed to get throwed like that, and he done a good flop that looked natural, and the car went rolling on. We could see Susie wringing her hands on top of the car and Walter cranking. Then Pat begins to cuss, and his eyes pops out.

"Hell, Bill, where is Sam Bean?" I look down the track and don't see Sam. Pat jerks out his watch. "Look what time it is, Bill," he says. I grabs out my watch and see it's twelve thirty.

"What's that got to do with it?" I says.

"Do?" he yells. "Why, Sam Bean is always eating at this time. I'll bet two bits to a gold plated brake club he has dropped down to Messquite to eat at the lunch counter. I don't see him down the track there, do you?"

"No," I says. And we start runnin'.

"What if that fool Reginald misses his jump?" says Pat as we run.

"Sure, he'll miss it," I says. "They ain't done anything yet the first time. They always have to do it over two or three times. He'll miss his leap as sure as hell and the car and the gal and Walter is done gone for good."

THE angel is standing near the depot and the director, too. And we run by hollerin' at them, and they join in and we make a motion picture chase like the old days down the track tryin' to see what's goin' to happen.

Well, Skipper, we didn't think he would do it, but Reginald made his leap and managed to stick on, although he spun on his ear and rolled off to the edge and Susie had to grab him to keep him from killing his fool self. We could see he tried then to wind the brake, but the car kep'

going. He spun the brake wheel around and waved back at us and hollered. And we could see there was trouble sure enough by now. We hear him hollering for help. Pat Hinds groans and says:

"My God, Bill, do you know what's happened?"

"No," I says. "What is it?"

"The chain has come loose from that brake staff. He couldn't stop her if he was as strong as Max Baer. They're running wild down the mountain!"

There is a little sag, Skipper, down the track a ways from Corona, and the car can coast up into this and lose a little speed but not much before it dips around the curve and starts down hill and comes past Corona again four or five hundred feet down below the depot. There are three rows of tracks there, you remember. Corona being on the middle one.

THE angel has done give out by this time and sets down on a rail and holds his head. He's used up all his breath yelling, "Where was the engine? Where was the engine?" We don't have no time to stop and explain to him that Sam Bean is gone to eat, and that he is going to be out one good first class heroine and a ham hero and Walter. Because they are bound to get killed. They wasn't no two ways about it.

And Pat and I as we run along, could see our finish, too. The whole crew would get canned if anything happened, which it already had. I was thinking what part of the country I would strike out for next, wondering if I ought to try some place like Illinois where it's level country and this can't happen to me again. Just then Pat lets out a yell and stops and begins to point. I could see the car swinging up into the sag, but, going the way she was, it was sure as hell to go on around the curve without givin' anybody a chance to unload.

"Who's that?" yells Pat. And down there on a rock beside the track we see a man that looks like Grandstand McGin-

nis. We had forgot all about him. He had gone off mad when Pat sent him away and we thought he is in the crummy all this time. But it seems he walks on down the track and climbs on a big rock over the track where he could be mad all by himself.

Well, Skipper, you'll think I'm a cock-eyed liar and you'll say it can't be done, and that it happens only in the movies. This was a movie anyways, you understand. And it did happen. Grandstand saw this car comin', and he knew that Sam had gone to eat and he saw that things were wrong on the car, and so he ups and makes ready. The car is running fifty an hour by this time. When she roars by, Grandstand leaps like Reginald did. But he's that good he don't lose his balance. Instead he turns a back flip and then stands on his head just to show what he can do. About this time the director begins to holler to the cameraman:

"Get it, Walter. Get it, Walter." But Walter ain't missin' nothing; he ain't stopped grinding all the way.

The car pitched around the curve and started back our way on the track below. and Pat and me and the director started runnin' straight down the mountain so as to be there when the car passed. Then Pat hollered:

"Bill, what was the good of that? It's one more to get killed, and this time it's a brakeman instead of an actor. That brake staff is loose from the chain. You can't wind a brake on her when she's like that."

The director heard us talkin' and groaned. But we kep' on down the mountain. We had only four or five hundred feet to go, while before the car passed us it had to run a long ways down along the mountain side. We stand beside the track waitin' for them to come. Pretty soon we hear the wheels, and she is coming fast. Still on the track, but no telling when she would leave the rail. She came in sight and Pat grabbed me by the arm and hollered:

"Look, Bill. Do you see what I see?"

AT FIRST I don't see it, because I am looking on the top where they are only three people, meaning the gal, Reginald and Walter. I missed Grandstand.

"He's unloaded," I say to Pat. "He's a wise bird."

"Unloaded hell," says Pat. "Look down there on the drawhead." And sure enough, Skipper. I'll be any kind of a liar if it ain't so. There was Grandstand. He'd clumb down the brake staff and was settin' on the drawhead and leaning down and tinkering with the bottom of the brake staff. The chain had come off the end of the staff, but was still hangin' onto the bracket.

They shoot by us better than sixty an hour, and we have just a glimpse of Grandstand tryin' to hook the chain on the brake staff. It made me kinda sick to see them four people ridin' to hell like that. I felt sorry for old Grandstand. He was all right enough, except for his grandstandin'. But this was one time he overdone it.

"What happened?" asked the skipper.

Well, said Bill the Boomer, going on, we watched her around the next curve, and I ain't lyin' when I say we could see her tilt like she was goin' over, then she was out of sight. We didn't hear no crash, so we knowed she was still goin'.

Pat and me run for the office at Corona. "Tell 'em down below the car got away. Runnin' wild!" Pat could just about gasp and that was all. The regular ops jumps to the phone. "Tell 'em four people are on the car. Tell 'em to get ambulances ready. They're gone sure as hell."

Well, we waited and waited. None of us said nothin'. The movie director and the angel come in to the office and some of the actors, and we just stood around dumb. About twenty minutes and the phone rung. We jumped like we was shot, although we knowed there was only one answer. It was to tell us they was all dead.

"What's that?" the ops hollered. "They're there?"

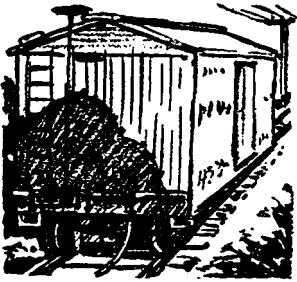
"Who's there?" yells Pat.

"They're all right, you say?" yells the

ops in the phone. "Bean's bringin' 'em back up? They're all right, fellows," he says hanging up the phone.

THE angel and the director hugged each other but Pat and me just went outside and waited. It wasn't until they developed the rushes in the baggage car that we knowed all that had happened. Old Grandstand managed to get the chain hooked on the staff and clumb back up on top, and in the picture we see him begin to wind. He bowed his back like a tom-cat and twist and twist, and we could almost hear the old ratchet clickin'.

You have to give it to this Walter, though; he ain't never stopped crankin' his camera all the way, and when Grandstand started down the brake staff he moved his camera and caught him goin'



down and comin' back up. That's what I call the old works, Skipper. That guy would have made a swell rail.

Well, Old Grandstand keeps on a windin' and we could see the scenery begins to slow up and we know he's stoppin' her. I ain't never seen no better piece of railroadin'. But they coast on down to Mesquite so Sam Bean can bring them back. It's perfect, the whole thing from start to finish from the time the gal leaps on. We see Reginald leap on and spin on his ear; then when he can't stop her he gets scared proper. He sure showed the kind of mush he was. Then on leaps Grandstand and the real thing begins. He acted like a real brakeman would act, and he does the job of goin' down the brakestaff and fixin' the broken brake and comin' back up and then stoppin' her like a regular brakeman

would. And then he begins making love to the gal. You ought to of heard the guys in the baggage car. They was yellin' and hollerin' before it was half done, tellin' each other it was the best thing they'd ever seen. I must admit, Skipper, that Grandstand done a good job of lovin' the gal. If he didn't play the rôle of the passionate brakeman then I never seen it done.

When the picture was through, the movie folks was crowdin' around Grandstand congratlatin' him, all except Reginald who went back to the Pullman and went to bed. But outside Pat is hot, and while there's nobody but railroad men around he jumps on Sam Bean all spread out.

"Why in hell wasn't you down there to catch that car?" Pat says.

Sam scratched his head and finally he said, "I went to eat."

"Eat? I didn't say you could go, did I?"

"The hell you didn't," said Sam. "You sent word down that they was all going to take time out for dinner, and so I dropped on down to Mesquite."

"I didn't say any such thing," yells Pat, getting red in the face.

"You did too," I thought for a minute they was going to mix, and I begin to get ready myself. "You sent Grandstand down to tell me," says Sam.

"Grandstand," yells Pat till you could hear him all over Strawberry Mountain.

"Yes, Grandstand. He brought me the word."

"Grandstand," says Pat to Grandstand McGinnis who was standing close takin' it all in. And Pat was harder'n seven hundred dollars. "How about it?"

"That's all right, Pat," says Grandstand. "No harm done as I can see. I just happened to have a cotter key in my pocket so I fix the brake——"

"Just happened? That key was in there not ten minutes before I kicked your pants down the hill. I seen it myself——"

"I said I just happened to have it——" and Grandstand grinned.

Well, Skipper, do you know what that

son-of-a-gun of a Grandstand had done when Pat run him off at Corona? He'd took the cotter key out of that brake staff and put it in his pocket so as he would have it ready. And he went down there in that sag where he knew the car would slack up enough to let him leap on. He knows that Reginald couldn't do nothin' by himself, so he planned to take Reginald's place, and he tells Sam Bean that everybody is going to eat and Sam pulls out and leaves the way clear for Grandstand McGinnis to do the biggest grandstand that any rail ever pulled off. The name of Grandstand sure belongs to that guy. He got away with it, but he might not of.

Pat goes up to him and says harder'n a keg of spikes, "Well, Grandstand, I'm turning you in to the Old Man for a trick like that. I'll recommend he tie a can to your tail."

But Grandstand only grins and then up

comes the angel who's been talkin' with the director.

"Well, my man," he says to Grandstand, "I should hate to tell you, but you are better than Doug Fairbanks after all. Just like you said you was. I will make out the contract. Would you work for me for five hundred dollars a week?"

"I'll say I will," says Grandstand. "Put her there, old kid," and he shakes hands with the angel like he was a lost uncle.

Well, Skipper, they make motion picture stars out of stenographers and hashers and butcher boys, so I don't see no reason why they can't make one out of a brakeman. Grandstand is ridin' round now in a custom made automobile that set him back ten grand, and he has a butler and a swell house in Beverly Hills. He sure was one rail-roader that didn't die on the job or wait to get canned. Oh, yes, I almost forgot. He married the little yellow headed gal.

*My idea of a good chow-line, says Elegant
Egbert, is what meets (or meats) my eye
in the next*

SHORT STORIES

CHARLES W. TYLER

H. C. WIRE

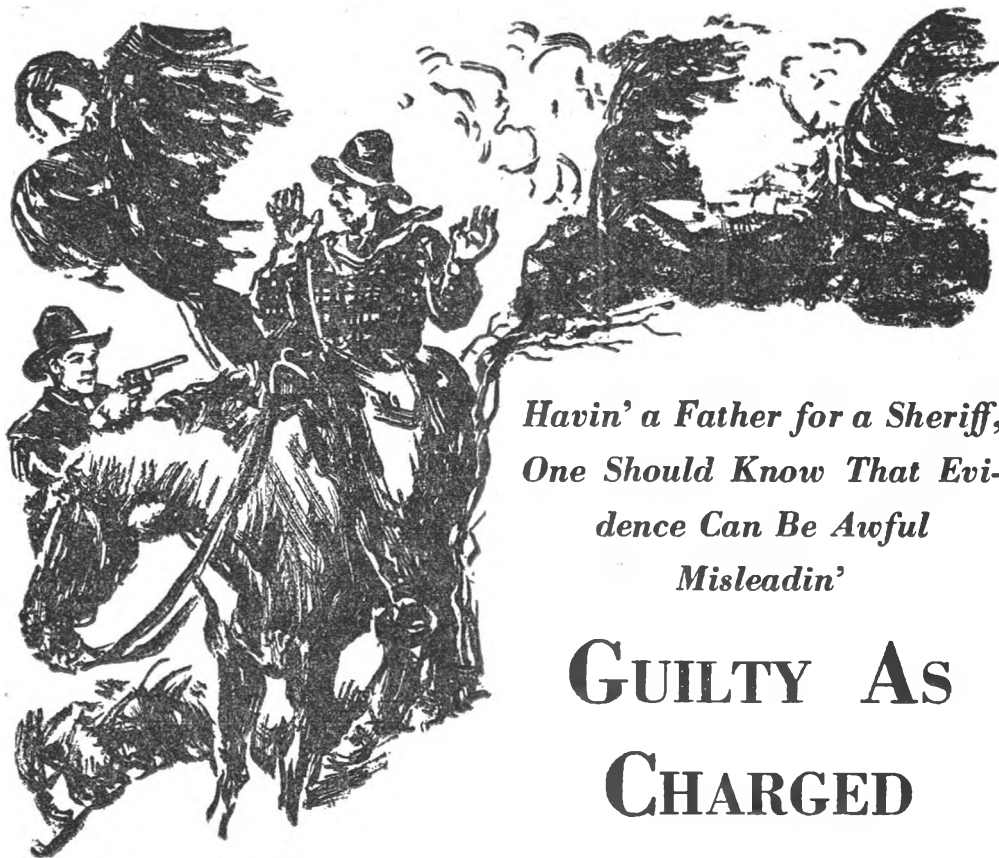
J. ALLAN DUNN

HOMER KING GORDON

DOUGLAS LEACH

WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN





*Havin' a Father for a Sheriff,
One Should Know That Evi-
dence Can Be Awful
Misleadin'*

GUILTY AS CHARGED

By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

Author of "Trigger Law," "Death Rides the River." etc.

I

RIGHT OF WAY

DOWN in the dusty cut a whistle sounded shrilly. Two men, waving red flags, ran back and forth. "Blast! Blast!" they yelled. "*La dinamita! Explosivo!*"

It was the signal for the construction gang to gather up picks and shovels and hurriedly move back out of danger.

"That's more life than they've showed in an hour," Corson muttered contemptuously. He stood back among the spectators, watching the work. Without exception the little crowd was composed of ranchers and people from Yellow Horse who had invested heavily in this little railroad that was to open up the Big Bend cattle coun-

try to the north and make them rich.

"You're not being fair now, Jim," said the dark-eyed girl who stood beside Corson. "Mr. Forsby is going right ahead with the work—just as he said he would." Her tone was reproving. "There's the evidence. You can't go back on that."

Corson forced a smile to his lips. He was a lean, narrow-hipped six-footer. Range bred, the sun and wind of Montana had tanned his skin the color of saddle leather.

"Havin' grown up with a father for a sheriff, Jean," he said, with a lightness he was far from feeling, "you ought to know by now that evidence can be awful misleadin'."

A faint flush of exasperation burned into Jean Graham's cheeks, and her pretty mouth tightened stubbornly. Corson could

not help thinking how much she resembled her redoubtable father at the moment.

"So all this means nothing to you, eh?" she queried, thoroughly provoked.

If Corson hesitated over his answer it was only because he realized how much the completion of the Yellow Horse and Montana Northern meant to her.

The flagmen now waved them farther back. He welcomed the interruption. Jean and he moved over to where his horse stood in the lee of a cutbank, reins dropped over its head. They were beyond earshot of the others now and somewhat protected from the knife-like wind that came howling down from the frosty ramparts of the Rockies. It was only late October, but already there was a threat of winter in the somber, leaden skies.

"Gettin' colder," he drawled. "You shouldn't be stayin' much longer."

Jean shook her head. "No, Jim, we won't discuss the weather. Suppose you answer my question. . . . Are you still as suspicious as ever of Mr. Forsby?"

"I'm still of the opinion that this railroad will never be built," he answered bluntly.

"Undoubtedly you are," she acknowledged. Although her tone was sharp, she was really very much in love with this bronzed six-footer. "You can be as stubborn as father! From the day Mr. Forsby came here with his plans for building the railroad you have been against him, and I don't suppose anything can change your mind."

"Certainly what I've seen here today in the way of buildin' a railroad ain't changed it none," Corson said doggedly. "They've been workin' a week, and aside from touchin' off a god-awful amount of dynamite, there's little to show for it."

HIS gray eyes narrowed as he gazed at the men, a nondescript crew that Forsby had recruited in Seattle: half of them Mexicans and Italians who knew their business; the balance, a miserable collection

of water-front loafers, so green at the job that they could not have told the difference between a spanner and a Johnson bar.

"They're not only green, but Forsby ain't even tryin' to get a day's work out of 'em," he continued. "They wouldn't last twenty-four hours on an honest job."

"Strange that father and a dozen others who saw the Transcontinental built have no fault to find," Jean retorted mockingly. "But I presume that owning a dinky little cow outfit qualifies you to speak as an expert when it comes to saying how a railroad should be built."

A twinkle dawned in Corson's eyes.

"Don't you go carryin' on about the Bar 8 bein' a dinky outfit," he protested. "It will be bigger directly. As for my expert opinion, I'd just like to remind you that snow ain't more than three or four weeks away. It'll put an end to all work. And yet Forsby proposes to finish this cut. Don't you know that he can't do it and protect the walls against frost, even though he works day and night? Your father ought to know it; but this dream has got in his way. Next spring, after the ground thaws and the snow water runs off, there won't be much left to show that a hundred men worked here for a month tryin' to build a bed for a railroad. But I reckon that long before then it will have served Forsby's purpose."

"Aside from forming a very important link in the work, I don't know of any other purpose it can serve," Jean challenged. Secretly, she was more impressed by his argument than she cared to admit.

Corson was silent for a moment, his expression as bleak as the day. He knew that the stand he had taken had turned people against him, especially her father, and he and old Pliny had formerly been the best of friends.

"I reckon before winter is very far along you'll be able to answer that question for yourself," he murmured tensely. "With three or four weeks to go, Foresby could have graded a good many miles of right-of-way out on the prairies. It could have

settled all winter and been ready for steel in the spring. But that didn't appeal to him, because he knew that the first heavy snow would blot all that work from sight. He wanted somethin' that could be seen; that he could point out to prospective stockholders as a visible accomplishment. He's said right along that he needed about twenty thousand dollars more. He knew it was here, if he could coax it out of folks, and he figured this was the way to do it."

"I suppose you're referring to the fact that father and the Stricklands put up the twenty thousand between them this morning," Jean murmured stiffly.

"That's exactly what I mean. All this blazin' was done to impress 'em—and it sure worked!"

Jean drew in her breath sharply and turned away to stare blankly at the cut for a moment.

"I didn't want father to mortgage the property in town in order to raise the money," she staid stonily, "but it's done, and I refuse to believe that he was tricked into doing it. So far Judson Forsby has lived up to every promise he's made, and you can't shatter my faith in him with your wild suspicions."

"I'm sorry," Corson muttered tonelessly. "I won't say any more."

FROM the first his opposition to the man had no other purpose than to keep her father and others from handing over their hard-won dollars until they had thoroughly investigated the stranger.

He realized now how dismally he had failed. Common sense told him that if any part of the money they had given him was to be recovered it would have to be done at the point of a gun rather than by due process of law, for the very men who had been duped were still Forsby's staunchest supporters.

"I'll play this my own way now," he told himself. "If he starts to run I'll stop him if I have to slap a gun on him."

According to statements Forsby had is-

sued, most of the money had been paid out for steel, ties and so forth.

"That's most likely a lie," thought Corson. "He's got the bulk of it cached away in some bank on the Coast. The rest is lyin' around where he can get to it in a hurry—and he'll be after it soon. Nothin' to keep him here now."

II

HANDLE WITH CARE

TWENTY yards away Forsby and old Pliny appeared. They were the last to climb out of the cut.

The sheriff's grizzled cheeks were a beet red from the buffeting of the wind. But he had long since become impervious to the weather; for he was of that indomitable, bulldog breed of peace officers who had brought law and order to Western Montana. A wilderness breaker, a fierce love of the land he had helped to conquer beat in his breast. With a railroad to serve the Big Bend country, its future seemed rosy indeed. That, as much as any thought of gain, had tempted him to risk his all. He was proud of his part in it, and it gave him a new air of importance.

His stubby white mustache bristled hostilely as he saw that it was Corson who was with Jean.

"Hi yuh, Sheriff," Jim greeted him.

Pliny answered with a grunt and an almost imperceptible jerk of his head. He was not only angered at finding him in Jean's company, but he bitterly resented his very presence on the scene.

"Kinda crusty of you, ain't it, showin' up here after doin' your damndest to keep folks from buyin' stock?" he blurted out.

"Don't take that attitude," Forsby put in hurriedly, his manner as affable as Pliny's was acrimonious. "I'm glad to see Corson here. It'll give him a chance to realize how badly mistaken he was." He had a hearty, booming laugh, and he resorted to it now. He turned to Jim. "No hard feelings on my part, Corson. A dif-

ference of opinion makes the world go round."

He was a big, florid-faced man with the guileless eyes of a child. For months he had been aware of Corson's hostility, but he had never acknowledged it by so much as lifting an eyebrow until now.

"I'm glad you feel that way about it," said Jim. His tone was velvety. "I've sure been gettin' an eyeful."

If the thrust disturbed Forsby, he dissembled it perfectly.

"Better grab your horse," he said, "we're going to let a little more daylight into this mountain."

"Go right ahead," Jim answered, with a wintry smile, "you won't find us a bit gun-shy."

Forsby whipped off his hat and began to wave it back and forth. In answer to



his signal the mountain erupted violently, the blast hurling tons of earth and rock into the air. The dust rose in clouds, filling the cut and blotting out the shoulder of the mountain.

"That's tearin' it down!" Pliny burst out enthusiastically. "The wind will soon whip the dust out of the cut. You can go down with us, Jean, and have a look around."

"No, father, I'm cold," Jean answered "I want to get back to town."

"You might as well run along at that," Forsby remarked. "The fireworks are over for today."

"Well—all right," the sheriff agreed reluctantly. "I'll go get the team."

FORSBY volunteered to go with him. The two men had been gone only a minute when Corson's attention was drawn to an approaching horseman. Even at a distance he recognized the rider. It was Vic La Belle, Pliny's chief deputy.

"Here comes another one of Forsby's stockholders—or so it is alleged," he announced, his mouth unaccountably hard.

"Why, it's Vic!" said Jean. "I'm surprised to see him here."

"No reason why you should be," Jim drawled. "He was the original booster for this railroad. It was La Belle who got your father interested, wasn't it?"

Jean felt that she understood the cause of his enmity to Vic. Since she believed it concerned herself, she took a peculiarly feminine pleasure in it.

"He may have used his influence," she admitted with provoking nonchalance. "Father is very fond of Vic——"

"So fond that he'd like to have him for a son-in-law," Corson jerked out fiercely.

He found her tinkling laugh maddening.

"Still jealous of Vic, eh?" she queried lightly.

"Not particularly." He scowled darkly. It was on the tip of his tongue to say that he had good reason to believe that La Belle had made a pretty penny out of steering money into Forsby's hands. "No," he told himself, "I'll handle that my own way too."

Vic rode up a moment later and slid out of his saddle with a flourish. It was typical of him. With his piercing black eyes he shot an unfriendly glance at Corson. He was obviously annoyed at finding them together.

"Well, you're makin' quite a stay out here," he said to Jean.

"It's been very interesting," she informed him, content to let him put what inference he would on her words.

"Evidently," Vic muttered. He would have been a rather handsome man but for the habitual sneer that twisted his mouth. His clean cut, aquiline nose hinted of some forgotten Indian ancestor. "You're pretty

far from home, ain't yuh, Corson?" he inquired insolently.

"Not too far," Jim answered, his manner equally hostile. He had never liked La Belle from the time he had first encountered him, a teamster then, overly fond of cheap jewelry, freighting supplies to the Flathead Agency.

Their eyes burned into each other for a moment. La Belle's mouth took on an uglier twist. He plainly longed to put into words what he was thinking, but something in Corson's icy stare cried a warning, and he turned to Jean.

"Where's Forsby?" he asked impatiently.

"Father and he went to get the team," she told him. "I think they're coming now."

Jim noticed that although for months Vic had harangued all and sundry about the undiluted blessing the new railroad was to be for Yellow Horse, his interest in this first bit of actual construction was limited to a very perfunctory glance today.

Pliny and Forsby drove up now.

"What are you doin' out here, Vic?" the sheriff asked.

"The Seattle authorities are askin' us to pick up one of Jud's Mexicans," La Belle answered. "Have you got a greaser by the name of Madero?" he asked Forsby.

"Why, yes, he's my cook!" Forsby exclaimed. "I never had a better one. Madero is a good man; I'm terribly sorry to hear this. What's he wanted for?"

CORSON thought he sounded overly concerned. It also struck him as strange that La Belle, who had eaten in camp several times, had to be told that the cook's name was Madero.

"They want him on a manslaughter charge," said Vic.

Pliny helped Jean into the light rig and handed her the reins.

"You just wait here a minute," he told her, "while I step over to the cook-shed with Vic. These Mexicans may get mean when they learn he's here to arrest one of 'em——"

"No need of your botherin'," La Belle insisted hurriedly. "Jean wants to get home. You just drive along, Pliny; it don't take both of us to make an arrest."

"I shouldn't think so," Forsby grinned. "I'll be in town tonight. Drop into the office for a minute."

"All right, we'll git along then," the sheriff grumbled.

Corson stared after them as they drove away. Forsby and La Belle had started for the cook-shed.

"They were mighty anxious to get rid of Pliny for some reason," he thought. "I'm goin' to stick around a bit. This Mex is beginnin' to interest me."

Down in the cut the men were going back to work as he climbed into his saddle. Without letting it appear that the cook-shed was his objective, he managed to maneuver his course so that several minutes later he stood within a few yards of the door, apparently interested only in the work.

III

ONLY HOURS TO GO

SOUNDS of commotion began to issue from the flimsy cook-shed.

"Let him have it if he resists arrest!" Corson heard Forsby urge La Belle. "The Law is on your side, Vic!"

"That's one way of shuttin' him up," Vic snapped. "You get started for the door now," he commanded the Mexican, "or I'll let you have it just for luck!"

Corson's interest in Madero began to soar. He fancied he understood now why Vic and Forsby had been so anxious to get Pliny out of the way.

"Evidently this Mex knows somethin'," he thought to himself. "That's usually the case when a gent threatens to start blastin' a man."

Without further ado, he slipped out of his saddle, and settling his gun-belt about his lean hips, started for the door.

"I may be askin' for trouble," he ad-

mitted, "but I'm sure goin' to invite myself into this game."

He could hear the Mexican excitedly protesting his willingness to submit to arrest.

"I go with you all right," he was saying. "But me, I am no fool; I know this boss Forsby bring you here. He is find this way to get rid of me 'cause he is 'fraid I make some talk."

"Shut up!" Vic barked at him. "Another peep out of you and it'll be just too bad!"

The door was not latched. Corson kicked it open and stepped in.

"What have yuh got, a riot in here?" he inquired.

La Belle whirled on him with a snarl.

"Why are you bustin' in here?" he demanded furiously.

"I thought you might need a little help," Jim said with disarming innocence.

"When I need any help from you I'll ask for it! Now suppose you git out of here the same damn way you busted in!"

"Yes, suppose you do," Forsby seconded. "This is private property; you haven't any business here."

"Well, that's gratitude for yuh," Jim exclaimed with bitter sarcasm. He was apparently very much aggrieved. "I figured this Mex was makin' you some trouble." He glanced at Madero, a little man with a pock-marked face. "If I ain't needed I'll be glad to step out."

Forsby was deceived to the point of melting to a semblance of good will.

"We wasn't having any trouble with him," he explained, "but Madero has the idea that I had something to do with having him arrested. You know better than that, Corson. I've got plenty to do without worrying about the law."

"Why, of course," Jim agreed, finding the observation truer than Forsby intended.

"It only means I've got to be bothered with finding a new cook."

"Absolutely——"

"*Sangre de Dios*," the Mexican burst out.

"You not needing no cook! By tomorrow——"

"That's enough out of you!" Vic cut him off. He grabbed the man roughly and snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. "I know you wouldn't harm a fly; but you tell that to the judge." He turned to Forsby. "Guess I'll be gettin' along, Jud." He gave his prisoner a shove toward the door. "I'll have to borrow a horse to get this hombre into town."

"Help yourself," Forsby told him. "There's three or four standing at the hitch rail."

"Fair enough!" La Belle flicked a glance at Corson that was murderous, and then barked at Madero, "Get goin' you!"

Jim was the last to emerge from the cook-shed. He found that the majority of those who had been watching the work were drawn up a few yards away, curious to know what was taking place. At sight of the handcuffed Mexican they began to edge closer.

Halfway to the horse-rail Vic and Forsby stopped to confer briefly. Corson could not catch what was said. After a word or two Jud advanced on the crowd by himself.

"You folks will have to get back beyond the mess tent!" he cried. "Just drop back!"

They did not move fast enough for La Belle.

"Go on get back! I won't ask you again!" he shouted threateningly.

Jim had reached his horse. He permitted himself a frosty smile as he saw Forsby shoo the crowd back.

"The little señor has got that pair of highbinders plumb scared to death that he'll bust right out with whatever it is that he's got on 'em," he observed. "Vic could hardly stop him by tappin' him to sleep with a gun barrel. That ain't such good form when there's witnesses."

HOLDING his sorrel to an easy lope, Corson disappeared across the prairie in the direction of town. He went no

farther than the ford at Otter Creek, however. There he pulled up to await Vic and his prisoner. He was determined to learn what knowledge Madero possessed that Forsby and La Belle so feared. The first step in that direction was to make sure that the Mexican reached the jail alive.

Ten minutes later, Vic and his prisoner rode down to the ford. The Frenchman was instantly suspicious at finding Corson there. The latter was pretending to be tightening his cinch.

"Broke a strap comin' off the bank," he lied glibly.

"Too bad you didn't break your neck," Vic flung back at him.

"Hunh! You sound pretty wrathy," Jim returned. "What's eatin' yuh?"

"You ain't kiddin' me a bit," La Belle ground out. He was leading Madero's horse. Tightening his grip on the reins, he sent the two ponies splashing across the creek. "You busted in back there thinkin' you was goin' to get an earful. That's been your chief occupation of late—tendin' to other folks' affairs. Every time I look out the window of late I see you ridin' into town."

"Business," Jim declared laconically.

"Yeah?" La Belle sneered as he rode on. "Reckon you won't have so much business in Yellow Horse after Jean and me get married."

Empty as he felt the taunt to be, it drove the blood from Corson's cheeks.

"At least I'll have plenty to do until the invitations are sent out," he declared.

La Belle muttered to himself. He had no intention of pulling up.

Jim mounted and soon overtook him.

"I'll just trail along into town with yuh," he announced.

"No you won't!" Vic snarled. "I'm on official business. I warn you not to interfere with me, Corson!"

"Well, I'll just stay behind and take your dust," Jim informed him. "Can't be no objection to that."

La Belle did not bother to answer. He was killing mad. Corson could hear him cursing to himself. As for the Mexican, all the fight seemed to have gone out of him. There was a trickle of dried blood at the corner of his mouth. His lips were swollen, and there was a mysterious discoloration about his right eye that had not been there when Jim saw him last.

"Vic's been workin' him over, all right," he concluded.

Corson began to consider just how he was to establish communication with Madero, and more particularly, how he was to do it without Vic's knowing about it. Certainly for the few hours the Mexican would



remain in the local jail, awaiting the arrival of officers from Seattle, La Belle would see that no one got near the man.

They were within sight of town when inspiration came to Jim. In his cowboy years, drifting from Canada to the Rio Grande, he had picked up a working knowledge of border Spanish. He now surprised the two men riding ahead of him by bursting forth in an earnest if not particularly musical rendition of "*El Conejo*," the old vaquero standby.

The verses were many, and the amorous adventures they related were certainly Rabelasian. But the song did not interest Corson. He was watching Madero. He saw the swart-skinned man straighten up in his saddle at hearing his native tongue.

Jim kept at it; but when he reached the third verse he began to substitute words of

his own that told Madero to take up the tune when he finished and tell him what it was that Forsby was so afraid to have him disclose.

The Mexican's effort to fit his answer to music left a lot to be desired, but Jim was able to gather that Madero, with wisdom gained in a lifetime spent in construction camps had not been on this job a day before he knew there was something queer about it, and he had told Forsby so, only to be threatened with the police if he opened his mouth, Jud having learned from the other Mexicans that he was wanted.

Madero was not through when La Belle bawled, "Shut up, you! You ain't got nothin' to sing about!"

"Not afraid to go to Seattle," Madero told him, brave again, now that he had an ally. "Not have anything to do with that business."

"Tomorrow is pay day," he sang on. "Maybe the men not get paid; maybe the boss be pretty hard to find. There is not meat or flour in camp; only beans enough for tomorrow. The dynamite is almost gone. There are no new drills——"

Vic stopped him again. He meant it this time. But Jim had heard enough—out of dynamite; the grub gone; a four-thousand-dollar payroll to be met; twenty thousand in cash turned over to Forsby that morning.

"You bet he may be awfully hard to find tomorrow," he said to himself.

He could understand Forsby's readiness to appear to believe his tale that he had walked into the cook-shed thinking to be of assistance to Vic.

"He didn't want me to hear anythin'—and he didn't want Vic to know too much," he mused on. "Gettin' rid of this Mex is one thing; the way things stand in camp is somethin' else—and I reckon it would sure complicate matters for Forsby if La Belle knew."

He realized that the truth could not be held back long now. But evidently a few hours were all Forsby wanted.

IV

TO CATCH A THIEF

YELLOW HORSE was little better than a one-street town. Following La Belle and the Mexican down the main thoroughfare as night fell, Corson passed the old frame building in which the offices of the new railroad were located. They occupied but one-half of the one-story structure, the now defunct Gem barber-shop having been established next door until its recent demise.

Forsby had had a rather pretentious sign made which extended across his part of the building. It gave the place dignity of a sort. When in town, he lived in the rear.

A block farther down the street stood the Yellow Horse Tavern; and across from it the jail.

Corson left his horse at the rail in front of the hotel and stepped inside. Upwards of a dozen men lounged about the lobby. He was acquainted with all of them, but the only sign of recognition he got was a curt nod from two or three.

"I'm as popular as the seven year itch." He smiled to himself. "I used to get the glad hand around here until I warned 'em not to put any money in the railroad."

Del Hendricks, the clerk, was behind the desk.

"See any of my bunch in town?" Jim asked.

Del said no, and the complete lack of courtesy with which he voiced it suggested that he would not have been out of place in a much larger hotel than the Tavern. But he had a hundred dollars invested with Forsby. Corson took that into consideration.

"I'll be headin' back to the ranch as soon as I get a bite to eat. If anybody asks for me you might tell 'em that."

The clerk nodded and took Corson's fifty cents for supper. The dining-room was open already. Jim entered and took a chair near the front windows.

Across the street he could see Pliny

seated at his desk, talking to Vic. But he had lost interest in the jail. In his mind there was not the least doubt that Forsby intended to say farewell to Yellow Horse before morning. He had promised himself that he would stop him, and he had only to think of Jean and her father, penniless, their home gone, to resolve all over again that he would not only stop Forsby but recover some part of the money that had been put into his wildcat scheme.

As he ate, he settled on how he proposed to do it.

Returning to his ranch had no part in his plans, nor had he expected to find any of his outfit in town. That had all been said for the hotel clerk's benefit, for Del could be depended on to pass the information along.

He took his time about eating, and even paused to smoke a cigarette in the lobby before getting into the saddle and riding back up the street, passing Forsby's office again.

A light glowed within. Corson glanced in casually and continued on. At the end of the street, he headed directly for the Transcontinental depot.

Chris Evans, who had the night trick, had just come on duty. He was one of the few friends Corson had left.

"Come in and set down a minute," Chris urged.

"No, it's a long ride to the ranch," Jim said truthfully. A careless glance around the waiting-room assured him that they were alone. "Just stopped in for a minute, Chris. Is 59 the only train through tonight?"

"Nothin' else till the local west in the mornin'. You aimin' to do some travelin', Jim?" Evans asked, a grin creasing his thin face. The green eyeshade he wore gave his skin a pale, waxy look.

"No, I've just got a letter I'm anxious to get off to Helena. You flaggin' 59?"

"Why, no one's asked me to yet," Chris declared. "Of course she ain't due for over an hour. I'll take your letter and get it aboard if I stop her; but chances

are I won't. I ain't flagged her in a week."

"Good enough," said Corson, satisfied with the information he had received. He managed to locate a letter, addressed to the State Engineer's office, that he had been carrying in his pocket for several days. "I sure appreciate the favor." He made as though to leave, only to seem to recall something that had slipped his mind. "By the way, Chris, has your mother got a tenant for that place the barbershop was rentin'?"

"No, not yet. What makes you ask?" Chris inquired with immediate interest. "You know someone who wants it?"

"I was speakin' for myself," Jim explained to Evans' surprise. "I've kinda been figgerin' how to make a few extra dollars this winter. Thought I might dabble around in the flour and feed business. Things will be quiet at the ranch till spring."

"It would be just the place for you," Chris declared positively. "Why don't you have a look at it?"

"I suppose I can get the key from you?" Corson questioned casually.

"You don't need a key; the back door is unlocked. We've been lettin' Forsby store some stuff in the back room—shovels and pick handles and the like. We can get it out in a hurry if you're interested."

"All right, I'll drop in the first chance I get," Jim promised. He felt it might be a great deal sooner than Chris had any reason to expect.

CORSON came out of the depot to find a fine, marrow-chilling rain falling. It was all to his liking, and he grinned as the wind whipped it into his face. The night was black now and the rain would keep men indoors and lessen the chance of his being seen.

As he rode away he passed the freightshed. He noticed that the door stood open as usual. Save for a few barrels of oil and a keg or two of nails it was empty at this time of the year.

"I couldn't find a better place to hide out

until I see whether Forsby tries to grab 59 or not," he decided.

Fifty yards beyond the tracks Yellow Horse Creek paralleled the railroad. The creek bottom was choked with alders. He could leave his horse there.

Accordingly, after riding east for a quarter of a mile, he turned off for the creek. Twenty minutes later he found himself in the freight-shed.

It was raining harder now. Presently it turned to sleet, and the dark shed became a cold, clammy ice-box.

As he waited, he had plenty of time in which to consider just what he would do if Forsby showed up.

"I'll just have to kidnap him," he concluded. "Wouldn't be any point in my arguin' with him. There's nothin' been proved against him yet; he's legally free to come and go as he pleases, and he'd claim he was off on business, no doubt!"

The minutes seemed endless as they dragged by. From the door he could see the lights along the street. A man hurrying toward the depot must be silhouetted against them momentarily.

Once he saw someone coming. He waited tensely. But the man turned off to the north. Corson could hear him stumbling across the rickety bridge that spanned the north fork of the creek. "One of them breeds stumblin' home to Injun town, with a skin full," he surmised.

He knew it was nearing nine o'clock. If 59 was on time she'd be showing up in a few minutes.

"He'd just give himself time enough to make it," he argued.

He half drew his guns from the holsters to make sure they were free and became more vigilant than ever.

Suddenly off to the west a whistle shrieked weirdly. It was 59, blowing for Yellow Horse.

"He's drawin' it fine if he's comin'," Jim muttered, his lips dry.

A minute more and the rails began to drum. Unseen hands seemed to shake the flimsy freight-shed.

Forsby would have been too late now, for without slackening speed, 59 roared through town and was gone.

Unconsciously, Corson licked his dry lips for a moment.

"I was all wrong about this," he scowled. "He's goin' another way. I might have known he wouldn't risk the railroad and take a chance of bein' picked up when he reached Butte tomorrow."

But what other way could he go?

The truth leaped at him.

"The river!" he jerked out. "He'll sure use the river! He's figgerin' to slip over to the Kootenai and have somebody run him across the line to Dungarry, catch the Canadian Pacific there and be well into Canada by daylight."

HE BEGAN to be glad that Forsby had decided against trying the train. It would be much easier to waylay him on the lonely trail to the river. There would be no chance of anyone interfering. Forsby



would not be able to stand on his legal rights nor even to explain his presence there.

But a man with a good horse under him could reach Dungarry in eight hours without having recourse to the river at all.

"No, Forsby doesn't know the country well enough for that," he decided. "He'll sure use the river. He may have it all arranged. Tite Gendron, or one of his breeds, would run him up for a ten-dollar bill, and for another ten would forget all about it so completely that you could never get anythin' out of 'em."

It suddenly occurred to him that Forsby might have flown already and be on the river even now.

The thought tightened his mouth.

"Damn it, I never should have waited here!" he muttered savagely.

Without bothering to make sure that he was not being watched, he slipped out of the shed and hurriedly made his way across a vacant lot on which stood several discarded wagons.

Only the livery barn stood between him and Forsby's place now. The sleet was coming down harder than ever. Thanks to it, the street was deserted. Throwing caution to the winds, he circled the barn and headed for the door that Chris had told him he would find unlocked.

V

NO HONOR AMONG CROOKS

CORSON paused with his hand on the knob. A jumble of voices reached him from the other side of the building.

A little grunt of satisfaction escaped him as he recognized Forsby's husky bass. Pliny, the Stricklands and several others were in the crowd gathered in the office, their talk all to do with the building of the railroad.

They were making noise enough to convince Corson that he could slip into the vacant store without attracting their attention.

He got the door open without difficulty and stepped inside. It was pitch black in the back room. He had to feel his way through the litter of stuff Forsby had stored there.

Careful as he was, he bumped into a bundle of pick handles. Luck was with him, however, and he caught them before they crashed to the floor.

On reaching the store room proper he discovered that he could hear what was being said on the other side of the partition almost as clearly as though he were seated among the speakers.

"If we get a late winter we'll keep the

dirt flying right up to Christmas," Forsby was saying. "We'll be through with the cut and well along on some of the fills. You wanted action, gentlemen, and you're getting it. I don't mind telling you that it'll be the happiest day of my life when the first train pulls out of Yellow Horse for the North!"

He was a thoroughly convincing liar. Corson could only marvel at the feeling of sincerity the man managed to pump into his empty words.

A scraping of chairs soon announced that the meeting was breaking up. Forsby exchanged good-nights with the others. Then, for at least half-an-hour, Corson could hear him pattering at his desk, punctuating whatever he was doing with an occasional grunt of satisfaction. Presently he began to tear up papers. It kept him engaged for some minutes. At last he got up and went to the front door, evidently to have a look up and down the street. He came back to his desk a few moments later and opened the safe that stood beside it. It was only a second or two before the heavy door closed with a muffled thud.

"He knew what he was lookin' for that time," Corson mused as he heard him step hurriedly into his living-quarters in the rear.

Forsby was still there when the front door opened to admit Vic La Belle. Forsby came out at once.

"It's a rotten night," he observed.

"Say, that's a gabby greaser I got locked up," Vic grumbled as he dropped into a chair, ignoring Forsby's greeting.

"Yeh? What's he got to say?" Forsby's tone said that he was not particularly interested. It was magnificent bluffing.

"How in the hell should I know?" Vic flared back indignantly. "I ain't interested in his bellyachin'. I just knocked the chatter out of him on general principles and let it go at that."

The irony of the situation was not lost on Corson. His lips parted in a mirthless grin at thought of Vic beating up the Mexican to keep the man from proving to him

beyond shadow of a doubt that Forsby was about to double-cross him along with the others.

After a minute or two they dropped their voices so low that Jim could not catch more than one word out of ten. Usually it was a very positive "no" from Forsby. Finally Vic lost his temper.

"Quit stallin'," he whipped out. "I want some money. There's plenty comin' to me—damn near ten thousand as I figger it. I ain't goin' to ask you for it again," he added ominously.

His tone appeared to have some effect on Forsby.

"You'll get your cut just as I promised," he insisted, "but I'm not going to turn all that money over to you here so you can go swelling around town and start people to asking where you got it. I'm going to Seattle over the week-end to deposit some funds and look after a little business. I asked Pliny to let you come along. He's agreed to it; I told him I wanted you to keep an eye on the money, in case anybody tried to lift it."

"Swell chance anybody would have liftin' that pile of jack off you," Vic observed insolently. His tone changed suddenly. It was almost amiable as he asked, "What's the real idea in askin' me along?"

"Why, I figure it'll give me a chance to settle up with you——"

"In full?" La Belle's tone was frankly incredulous now.

"In full," Forsby assured him positively. "You'll have it all tomorrow."

VIC'S skepticism persisted.

"That'll be swell," he said. "All I've been gettin' up to date has been the run around. If you're on the level about this, Jud, give me a thousand now to prove it."

Knowing what he knew, Corson expected Forsby to say no. Instead, the big fellow said:

"I don't mind giving you the thousand; but what good will it do you? I'd have to give you a big bill, and you couldn't use it tonight; it wouldn't be safe."

"Don't worry about my usin' it," Vic answered. "I'd just like to feel it in my pocket and know it was there."

Forsby was silent for a moment the windows rattling under the onslaught of the storm as he hesitated over his answer.

"All right," he snapped, "have it your way."

Corson could understand his annoyance. He heard Forsby step into his living-quarters. He was back in a few seconds.

"A thousand-dollar bill!" It was Vic who spoke. He was purring now. "That's the first one I ever saw!"

"Well, don't sit there playing with it," Forsby grumbled. "Do you want somebody to walk in and catch you with it in your hands?"

"Don't worry about anybody catchin' me with it," La Belle murmured.

He evidently pocketed the money. A chair scraped, and Corson surmised that Vic was ready to leave.

"Going so soon?" Forsby queried. Corson found his tone mocking.

"Yeh, I'm due down the street," said Vic. "I don't mind tellin' yuh I feel a little better about things, Jud," he added, apparently as an after thought. "I've sorta had an idea of late that you might try to walk out on me."

"Yeh?" Forsby's laugh was not pleasant. "Don't you worry, Vic, you'll get all that's coming to you. Believe me, I'll sure see to that."

In the darkness on the other side of the partition Corson smiled to himself, for he read a promise in Forsby's words that quite escaped La Belle.

"That's all I want," Vic said from the door. He started out only to hesitate and step in again for another word. "By the way, Jud, Corson was waitin' for me at Otter Creek this evenin'. He had a story that he'd broken a cinch strap. It didn't fool me a bit. He wanted to ride into town with me. He had it all figgered out that he was goin' to pump that Mex. He didn't get very far with that."

"That's good," Forsby acknowledged with scant interest.

"Do you suppose that nosey pup has really got anythin' on you or me?" Vic asked.

"Search me," the big fellow murmured wearily. "Why didn't you ask him?"

The question infuriated La Belle.

"Why didn't I, eh?" he flamed. "You're kiddin' yourself if yuh think he ain't poison. Yuh better get this straight, Jud; you're stickin' around here until snow flies. If you drift out durin' the winter and forget to come back, that'll be okay with me. But yuh ain't goin' to be too raw about it. Just remember that I got to go on livin' here."

"That's a warning, eh?"

"I'll say it is," Vic answered bluntly. He opened the door once more. "I'll be lookin' for you tomorrow," he called back, raising his voice against the whining of the wind.

He walked away.

"You won't be the only one looking for me tomorrow," Forsby murmured with deep satisfaction.

VI

"THROW UP YOUR HANDS!"

MINUTES passed without bringing any further sound from the other side of the partition. Corson felt that Forsby was still at his desk however, biding his time.

Finally he heard the big fellow get to his feet and walk to the rear. His step was deliberate.

Suddenly it was still again, save for the hissing of the sleet. Corson put his ear to the partition and listened intently, his nerves on edge. A few seconds later he heard Forsby open his back door cautiously. Apparently satisfied that he was not being watched, he stepped out into the storm and hurried away.

Corson caught a glimpse of him, striding briskly across the vacant lot that lay between his office and the livery-stable,

where he conveniently kept his horse. He had not bothered to turn down the office lights nor lock the door. Anyone dropping in might well have thought that he had only stepped down the street for a few minutes.

"He's shovin' off," Corson told himself. "Two or three minutes to saddle up and he'll be on his way to the river!"

It was exactly what he had expected him to do, and he had believed himself prepared for it, but now that Forsby was actually about to flee, Corson had to fight off the impulse to rush after him and stop him before he really got started. Only the realization that very little of his evidence against Forsby and La Belle would stand up in a court of law held him back.

"It would be my word against theirs," he was forced to admit, "and I'd be lucky to prove a thing against 'em. There's a way to stop 'em, though, and I'm sure going to take it."

He was well aware that what he had in mind meant stepping outside the law; that if it went wrong he would surely find himself in jail, with public opinion all against him. He refused to be dissuaded.

"Nothin' is goin' to go wrong," he promised himself; "I'll see to that. I'll trip this gent between here and the river, and when I've got him on the shelf I'll go after Vic—and Forsby will help me to get him."

That was his main purpose. Against Forsby he had no great personal feeling. The man was a clever swindler, and Corson could even appreciate his cunning and nerve; but La Belle was just a lying, double-crossing rat, preying on his friends, doing his best to impoverish the man who trusted him most.

But it was not on old Pliny's account that Corson found his score against Vic so heavy. There was Jean, and he had but to think of her to welcome the opportunity that he believed was now his, and he flung the door back and quickly made his way to one of the broken-down wagons that stood on the vacant lot. From there he could

command a view of the entrance to the barns.

THE wind had become a driving gale. The sleet bit into his face. He was unmindful of it as the minutes dragged on. It seemed to be taking Forsby a long time. He began to wonder if he could be wrong after all, when he saw him ride into view. The man did not bother to glance up the street, but turning the corner of the barn, struck off boldly in the direction of the Transcontinental tracks. In that direction lay the shortest route to the Kootenai River.

Corson waited only until he was sure of the course Forsby was taking and then quickly made for his own horse, tethered among the alders in the creek bottom.

"I'm spottin' him a good start," he thought as he swung into his saddle, "but I know the country, and he don't. I'll over-



haul him before he hits Coulée Le Chien."

A trail ran through the big coulée. To reach the river Forsby would be forced to take it.

Corson touched his big sorrel with the spurs and began to move away. Half-turning in his saddle he flashed a glance up and down the street. To his surprise, he saw Vic La Belle running toward Forsby's office. It won a sour chuckle from Corson.

"Vic's about due to discover that he's holdin' the well-known empty bag," he thought.

Once he had left Yellow Horse behind, Corson swung off to the north slightly. The sorrel was sure-footed, and although the night was black, he let the animal out in earnest, intent on circling ahead of his quarry and reaching the coulée before the other entered it.

He didn't have over six miles of riding ahead of him and he raced along recklessly. He did not catch a glimpse of Forsby, nor did he expect to. But his confidence in his own judgment was such that he knew their trails must cross before the night was much older.

He was in open country now, a rolling, sage-brush covered plain, dotted with clumps of prickly pear. By instinct the sorrel seemed to avoid them.

At last a fringe of scrub pine showed to the west. Corson swung south presently. Coulée Le Chien was just ahead. With uncanny accuracy he headed for the trail that ran through it.

On reaching it he did not pull up to look for any sign that would tell him he was either too late or in time. Instead, he sent the sorrel down the long slope into the coulée without hesitating for a moment, convinced that he had arrived there first if only by a matter of seconds.

The place was choked with a jungle-like growth of scrub timber and mahogany bush. Not knowing how much time he had to spare, he proceeded less than a hundred yards when he slipped out of the saddle and hid his horse in a thicket of willows.

Returning to the trail he took up a position which permitted him to see the rolling plain to the east over which Forsby must come. Although the night was dark, it was so much blacker by comparison in the coulée that he believed he would be able to distinguish a moving object out in the open.

He had not been waiting more than several minutes when he caught the unmistakable sound of shod hoofs coming from the direction of Yellow Horse. He strained his eyes but could see nothing. A few seconds later, however, a moving smudge against the blackness resolved itself into a man on horseback.

"I want to be sure this is Forsby before I make my play," he cautioned himself.

Every sense keenly alert he continued to watch the oncoming horseman. The man was near now, but even as he came

down the slope into the coulé Corson could not recognize him. Fortunately the horse slipped on the treacherous footing.

"Take it easy there!" the rider commanded anxiously.

Corson recognized Forsby's voice.

The knowledge did not snarl his nerves. Calm, deliberate as ever, he waited, his gun drawn.

"I'll let him get right on top of me before I jump him," he decided.

With his head drawn well into the upturned collar of his sheepskin coat, Forsby rode into the trail. The threshing of the trees and the hissing of the sleet filled the coulée with eerie sounds. If they were without effect on him they at least made his horse nervous and the animal had to be urged ahead every few yards.

Forsby cursed the gelding to no avail. Caught without spurs or a quirt, he reached out to get a branch for a whip. He was just breaking one off when he was abruptly ordered to throw up his hands.

"Don't move. I got you covered!" Corson warned, masking his voice effectively.

Forsby was taken so completely by surprise that he couldn't speak for a moment.

"Say, what is this—a holdup?" he sputtered at last. "You're wasting your time if you're after money."

"Keep your hands up and slide out of that saddle!" Corson ordered.

Forsby's wits were beginning to function again. He could not see anyone and he doubted that the man hidden in the brush could see him any better. He was armed and he felt well able to take care of himself. Under no circumstances did he propose to hand over the money he carried as long as he could work a trigger.

SUDDENLY his hand flashed inside his coat. Whipping out his gun, he fired blindly in the direction from which Corson's voice had come.

In broad daylight his aim could not have been better. Corson groaned as the revolver spurted flame. With the kick of a

mule the slug struck his collarbone and glancing off, tore a ragged hole through his right shoulder.

Forsby fired a second time, but his bullet went wide by inches. He was using a big nickel-plated pistol. Even in the blackness it seemed to draw a sheen unto itself.

Corson thought he could distinguish it. He knew he had no alternative but to shoot the gun out of the man's fist. Hurriedly transferring his .44 to his left hand, he steadied himself and fired. To his dismay, Forsby's horse reared just as he pulled the trigger. The big fellow groaned and came crashing down out of his saddle to lay still in the trail.

Corson drew in his breath sharply and stared at him for seconds.

"My God, I've killed him!" he gasped, his blood running cold.

The thought seemed to put a spell on him. He threw it off finally, and finding a handful of dry grass, twisted it into a knot and lit it.

Forsby's horse had backed away. It stood rolling its eyes nervously as Corson dropped to his knees beside the big fellow.

A hasty examination of the wound proved that it was not serious.

"Just creased him," Corson murmured with evident relief. "He'll be okay in a few minutes."

It stirred him to action. Running his hand over Forsby's pockets, he quickly located a bulging wallet. He saw that it was filled with bills of high denomination.

Staring at the snug fortune, a little stunned by the sight of so much money, he heard Forsby stir. It warned him that he was tarrying too long.

Leading his horse into the trail he mounted without difficulty, although there were a thousand torturing devils in his shattered shoulder.

He began to move away at once and was about to leave the coulée when the wind breathed a warning in his ear. Someone was riding down the slope.

He surmised instantly that it was Vic,

riding like a madman to overtake Forsby. He explained it easily enough to himself.

"When he couldn't locate him he started lookin' for his horse," he thought. "When he found it was gone from the barn he had his answer."

HE DID not intend to have Vic find him there. But common sense told him he could not hope to escape by way of the trail without being seen. He considered turning back and attempting to ride through the coulée, only to dismiss it at once.

"Like as not I'd find Forsby sittin' up ready to throw lead at me," he said to himself. "The best thing I can do is to find an openin' and hope Vic will ride by without seein' me."

He found an opening in a few feet. He slid to the ground and started to lead the sorrel into the bush. The opening pinched out immediately however.

It was too late to do anything but stand his ground now, for with a wild tattoo of flying hoofs, La Belle bore down on him. Corson put his hand over the sorrel's nostrils and waited tensely.

A second later Vic thundered past him without even glancing in his direction.

Corson thought he heard him pull up at a distance.

"Found Forsby's horse," he surmised. "Reckon we'll go before he finds us," he said to the sorrel.

VII

"ARE YOU THE MAN?"

CAUTION prompted Corson to walk his horse until he was out of the coulée. Once he had left it behind, however, he did not hesitate to use the spurs. It was colder out in the open. The icy wind beating against his face served to clear his head. He had begun to feel the fever of his wounded shoulder. His sleeve was soaked with blood.

"It's goin' to complicate things for me,"

he told himself. "It'll have to be tended to directly, and that'll call for explanations which I ain't in no position to make just yet."

He could only wonder what was taking place back in the coulée. Certainly Vic had found Forsby. Certainly he knew that the big fellow had been running out on him. What a meeting! Anything could come of it. Had they shot it out or talked it out?

"If they get down to talk, Forsby will find a way out," thought Corson.

It had been his plan to return to town at once and turn the money over to Pliny as quickly as possible and let Forsby explain how he had been robbed of it. That course was no longer feasible. He knew his bleeding shoulder was leaving a trail that a child could follow; that anyone so



minded could track every step of his way from the coulée to town and easily establish his connection with the holdup.

Corson knew his life wouldn't be safe if that happened. Whether it did or not depended entirely on what Forsby and La Belle had done. If they had decided that the jig was up and were on their way to Canada, he had little to fear. If they had killed each other or had manufactured a plausible tale to save their faces and were hurrying back to Yellow Horse to arouse the town, the danger to himself could not be overestimated.

Given time enough, he felt they would mire themselves in their own stories. That had been his idea all along, but it depended

in a large degree on their not knowing who had taken the money.

Accordingly, as the best way of covering his trail, he headed for Yellow Horse Creek and began to make his way upstream. The creek was shallow, but the sorrel found the footing so treacherous that it felt out every step before taking it. It consumed so much time that when Corson at last found himself nearing the Transcontinental bridge it was after midnight.

The depot was just a few yards up the tracks. Clenching his teeth as a fresh twinge of pain shook him, he forced his horse through the alders and climbed out of the creek bottom. As he did so he saw three men ride up to the station and hurry inside. They were none other than Vic La Belle, Pliny and Ole Pederson, the town marshal.

There was an unmistakable air of excitement about them. He glanced up the street and saw men gathered in little groups. Lights that ordinarily were out at this time of night were burning brightly.

"Excitement has sure hit Yellow Horse," he murmured, his mouth hard.

Vic's very presence in town told him that the Frenchman and Forsby had settled their differences in some way and were prepared to prove their innocence.

"It'll be just too bad if they catch me with this banged up shoulder and the money in my possession," he thought, his face stony. "Some of these folks who figger they've been robbed won't give me a chance to explain."

HE CONSIDERED burying the money, only to change his mind. Obviously Vic and Forsby had told their story already. Whatever it was they couldn't go back on it now.

"I'm goin' to take a chance that they're over their heads," he decided. "I'll go to Pliny's house and wait for him to come home. We'll have a showdown tonight."

Keeping close to the tracks, he skirted the depot and headed for the sheriff's house.

It stood at the far end of town. Luck was with him and he reached it without being stopped.

A light burned within. Stabling his horse in the barn, he started to walk around to the front door. He was just about to turn the corner of the house when he chanced to look back in the direction he had come.

He drew in his breath sharply as he saw three men moving slowly toward him. He took it for granted that they were Pliny, Vic and Pederson. They were leading their horses and scanning the ground with the aid of a flashlight.

"They've picked up my trail," he jerked out. "My shoulder must be bleedin' again."

He knew he had no time to waste now. It took him only a moment to reach the door. His knock was a peremptory summons.

"Who is it? Who's there?" Jean demanded nervously.

"Jean—it's Jim Corson!" he answered sharply. "Let me in! You've got to be quick about it. Hurry!"

He heard her run to the door; but it seemed to take her forever to get the key turned in the lock. He knew his presence there at that time of night had startled her, coming on top of news of the robbery.

"Jim—what are you doing here?" she demanded breathlessly before she had the door half open. "Have they caught the ——" Her voice trailed off to a choked whisper as Corson stepped in and she caught sight of his blood-soaked shoulder. "Jim!" she gasped, the color draining away from her cheeks. "What is it? What's happened to you? You've been shot!"

Corson flicked a glance about the room to be sure they were alone.

"It's nothin' serious," he got out tonelessly. "I'm here to see your father."

"He went down town when Vic came with news of the robbery," Jean explained hurriedly. "I suppose you know somebody broke into the office and shot Mr. Forsby. Everything is gone——"

Corson gave no sign that he heard. He was listening to sounds from without.

"But you——" Jean ran on, "what happened to you, Jim? You're so weak you can hardly stand! Do sit down," she pleaded. "I'll get your shirt off. Something has to be done——"

"It'll have to wait a few minutes," he said. Then, "So somebody broke into Forsby's office, eh?"

"Yes. The whole twenty thousand that father and the others turned over to him this morning is gone—perhaps more along with it." Her chin quivered tremulously. "I guess it means the end of everything for us."

The tortured look in her eyes stabbed Corson.

"I wouldn't worry about the money," he said. She refused to be consoled.

"You always said the railroad would never be built, but I guess you never thought it would end this way—that the money would be stolen and Mr. Forsby shot down trying to protect it." She shook her head. Suddenly her eyes flashed fire. "I hope they catch the thief. Mr. Forsby is sure he wounded the man. He heard him groan and thought he saw him grab his—his—shoulder. If he was bleeding——"

She found herself unable to go on. White-lipped she stared at him, her eyes transfixed with horror.

Corson saw her sway slightly. She backed away as he reached out to catch her.

"Jim—was it you?" she gasped. "Are you the man?"

The silence deepened as they gazed at each other.

"Suppose you have a little faith in me for a few minutes and let me ask the questions," Corson suggested. "Someone is coming; I hear them out in the yard. Tell me, was it Vic who found Forsby?"

"Yes—found him lying on the floor beside the empty safe." Her eyes were accusing.

"And where is he now?"

"Why, in his rooms in back of the office. Doctor Moodie is taking care of him."

"Do they suspect anyone?" Corson rifled the question at her.

"Vic says he has an idea who did it; that he won't waste any time trying to take the man alive if he catches up with him."

"That would be smart—shootin' the man down before he could talk." A note of grim satisfaction crept into Corson's tone. He felt he couldn't have asked for things to work out better. "Maybe Vic is afraid of what the man might have to say."

"Vic?" Jean challenged coldly. "What is all this talk about Vic? Certainly he didn't have anything to do with the robbery. Jim, you're not trying to insinuate that he——"

Corson's hand closed over hers impulsively and he searched her eyes again.

"Jean—am I right in thinkin' that Vic doesn't mean anythin' to you—that you haven't got any intention of marryin' him, no matter what your father says?"

She shook her head reprovingly and her eyes softened until there was only concern for him in them.

"Do you find that question necessary?" she whispered. "Loving you, don't you know I will never marry Vic?"

IT WAS all Corson could do to hide his emotion. "I just wanted to be sure you hadn't changed your mind," he got out gruffly. "Vic is outside now. Your father and Pederson are with him."

"Jim—you can't let them find you here like this!" she exclaimed with deep anxiety. "They'll think exactly what I did. Vic hates you. He knows we've been riding together in these hills this fall. Let me hide you in the kitchen until they are gone." Her eyes began to mist. "I don't care what you've done, I don't want anything to happen to you——"

"No, I'm not goin' to hide," he told her. He drew his gun from the holster and handed it to her. "You take it, Jean."

Keep your eye on Vic when he comes in. If he tries to cut down on me without any reason, you stop him. Quick now. They're comin' in. If you could get me a glass of water——"

"Certainly," Jean murmured, her voice steady as her fingers closed over the gun.

She had barely left the room when Corson drew out the blood-stained wallet. He wiped it off on his sleeve. A sewing-basket stood on the table beside him. Lifting the lid, he dropped the money into it.

He was just settling down into a chair when the door was flung open with a bang.

"Say, there's blood all over the doorstep!" a startled voice exclaimed. It was the sheriff. "Hey, Jean!" he called out brusquely. "Jean——"

"Yes, father," she answered, hurrying in from the kitchen.

"Why, there's blood stains all over the steps," he repeated. "Has anyone been here since I——" He checked himself abruptly on catching sight of Corson. "Well," he grumbled, pulling down his bushy brows in a hostile stare, "you're a long ways from the Bar 8 for this time of night. I saw all this blood out here and thought for a moment that the man we're lookin' for was——er——"

"Waitin' inside for yuh," Corson finished for him.

"That's what I was about to say," Pliny acknowledged gruffly as Vic pushed in past him. Pederson remained at the door.

"Well, he's here," Corson said bluntly. "You're lookin' right at him, Sheriff."

It came as a bombshell. Corson heard Jean's sharp cry of concern. Vic stood rooted in his tracks.

"What!" Pliny grunted in his pop-eyed surprise, unconsciously recoiling a step as he beheld Corson's wounded shoulder.

Vic found his tongue then.

"Let me get this straight," he boomed. "Are you admittin' you broke into Forsby's office and committed the robbery?"

"I'm admittin' I got the money——nothin' else," said Corson.

VIII

"PRODUCE THE EVIDENCE!"

CORSON was watching Vic with undivided attention. He had expected him to show some sign of fear or give some hint that he had talked too much and now found himself tripped by his own story. Nothing of the sort happened. Indeed he seemed to take a great satisfaction out of the turn events had taken.

"Bluffin'," Corson thought. And yet he could not dismiss the fact that Vic's air of confidence sprang from something that was real enough. It puzzled him.

"I knew you were the bird we were looking for!" the Frenchman rasped. "I had that idea from the start." He hunched his shoulders as though about to spring at Corson's throat.

Jim met him eye to eye.

"You find yourself in a pretty bad spot, don't you, Vic?" he queried with cutting contempt. It broke through La Belle's complacency.

"Why, you rat!" he whipped out, reaching for his gun. "Throw up your hands or I'll drill you! Get 'em up!"

It happened quickly, but Jean was ready for it.

"Drop that gun!" she commanded, her voice shrill with excitement. Something in her tone stopped Vic. He flicked a glance at her and found himself looking into the muzzle of a .44.

"You better keep out of this!" he threatened.

"Drop that gun!" she repeated stonily, without shifting her eyes from him. "You're not going to shoot down a wounded man and make it appear that he was trying to get away!"

The dreadful insistence in her tone gave La Belle a flash of sense.

"All right," he growled, tossing his gun on the table, "have it your way. But it won't get this gent out of the jam he's in." He appealed to the sheriff. "Get her out of here, Pliny. No reason why she should get mixed up in this business."

"You're right," the old man exclaimed angrily. "You go to your room, Jean; we'll take care of Corson."

"I'm staying right here, Father," she answered flatly.

Pliny was used to her petty tyrannies. But this was different.

"You listen to me, Jean," he sputtered indignantly. "Corson has admitted his guilt. Don't let your sympathy for him run away with your judgment. You go as I said——"

"You better let her stay, Sheriff," Corson advised. "I've got somethin' to say that I want her to hear."

"Say, for a man in your shoes you're takin' a lot on yourself!" Pliny fumed. "I tell you, Corson, this business takes my breath away. We've had a good many differences of opinion, but I never thought to find you a thief. For weeks you've done



your damndest to throw mud at Forsby. When you saw the man goin' ahead, doin' just what he promised to do, it was more'n you could stand. I reckon you figgered you could slip in there tonight, loot the safe and make it appear that he got away with it. But he was lucky enough to wing yuh and yuh had to give yourself up." His frosty old eyes were boring holes into Corson. "Have yuh got that money on yuh?"

"No, I ain't," said Jim. "It's safe enough though——"

"Safe where you hid it, eh?" Vic sneered. "You won't help yourself none by holdin' out."

"I aim to turn it over to the sheriff when we've got to the bottom of this busi-

ness," Corson volunteered. "Not before." "I guess we've got to the bottom of it right now," Vic muttered. "We've got evidence enough to convict."

"There'll be a lot more before I'm through," Jim promised. He turned to Pliny. "Do yuh mind havin' Ole lock the door?"

"What's the idea of that?" the sheriff demanded.

"I just want to be sure that Vic is here when I finish."

"Say, what's your idea in tryin' to drag Vic into this?"

La Belle laughed. "You ought to know, Pliny," he said. "He's out to smear me in Jean's eyes if he can. That's his game."

"I'll do more than that," Corson promised. "Forsby is goin' to jail—and you're goin' along with him, Vic."

SOMETHING in his manner impressed the sheriff, although Pliny tried to put away the gnawing fear that he might be telling the truth.

"It won't be necessary to lock the door," he snapped. "If you've got somethin' to say, get it out. But I warn you to talk sense."

"That's what I've been talkin' for weeks," Corson told him. "You wouldn't listen to me, not even when I tried to tell yuh a man honestly buildin' a railroad would never have tried to drive that cut through the mountain at this time of the year——"

"You don't have to go into that," Pliny interrupted. "I heard what you thought about that. That's got nothin' to do with this robbery."

"Maybe it has," said Corson. He proceeded to tell him about what he had learned from the Mexican. La Belle was hard put to hide his chagrin.

"Of all the damned rot a man ever listened to!" he burst out viciously. "Slip a pair of handcuffs on him, Pliny, and we'll get him out of here."

"No, let him have his say," the sheriff declared.

Despite Vic's jeering interruptions it did not take Corson long to recount how he had let himself into the vacant store, and repeat some measure of what he had overheard.

A deep sigh of relief escaped Jean. His story rang true to her. Pliny bit savagely at his stubby mustache and had nothing to say. As for Pederson, his expression remained as wooden as ever.

Vic glanced from one to the other and expressed himself with a snort of disgust.

"What a pack of lies!" he cried. "That's an old game, tryin' to pull another man down to save yourself. You can't prove your story, Corson!"

"It ain't worth a thing if you can't," Pliny spoke up.

Corson recalled his conversation with Chris Evans about renting the store.

"That's well enough in its way," said Pliny, "but that don't prove anythin'. Chris couldn't swear you was in there."

"Of course he couldn't," Vic seconded. "You're pretty clever, Corson, but not quite clever enough to fasten this on me. Why don't you claim that I took the money and be done with it?"

"No, I stuck him up," Jim drawled, "but it wasn't done within six miles of that office."

"What?" Pliny ripped out incredulously.

"You heard me, Sheriff," Corson insisted. "I nailed him in the big coulée."

"Go on—" the old man ordered sternly.

Corson obliged with a detailed account of what had occurred from the moment he followed Forsby out of the office until Vic rode by him in the coulée.

"I could have reached out my hand and touched you, Vic," he continued. "You found Forsby and brought him back to town and planted him beside the safe. I don't know why yuh did it, unless you figgered you could squeeze some money out of him that way. It might have worked at that if the thief hadn't given himself up. I've got you dead to rights."

"Maybe you have," Vic laughed with

strange confidence. "Where's your proof? Produce the evidence!"

"That'll be easy," Corson retorted. "I advise you to speak to old Joe down to the stable. He knows that Forsby took his horse out tonight."

"I doubt it," Pliny ground out. "Joe's been drunk for two days. You could take the barn itself and he wouldn't know it."

"Forget about him then," Corson went on, undismayed. "There ain't a man in this country can read sign better than you, Sheriff. Go to the coulée; you'll find evidence enough there to convince you."

"Aye tank you not find not'ing dere," said Pederson. "She ban snowing outside."

"Snowin'?" Corson echoed dully. He could not pretend to hide his disappointment.

"Ban coming down pretty goot," Ole observed. "Ban couple inch on the ground by time we reach the coulée."

With an effort Corson got to his feet and walked to the window. The ground was white. He stared at it wordlessly.

IX.

TWO-SPOT OR ACE

A CHARGED silence descended on the room. The lamp on the table cast weird shadows against the wall.

Corson's face had become an inscrutable mask. He had believed the evidence he had built up against Vic and Forsby to be well-nigh indestructible. He realized now how flimsy it really was. He found it easy to understand from whence Vic's confidence had sprung. Surely he had known that Joe Malotte would be unable to testify to anything; that it had begun to snow.

Clearly he realized that as matters stood the evidence was all against himself. He had admitted taking the money. He had a slug in his shoulder for which he had no explanation but the truth, now something that he could back up only with his own word. Public opinion was against

him. His animosity to Forsby and his feud with Vic would be used as a motive.

As for Vic, he had begun to glow. He knew he was almost in the clear now.

"You ain't so talky, Corson," he said insolently, intent on making the most of the moment.

"Maybe that's because there ain't much left to say," Jim flung back, his voice toneless. He was not yet ready to admit defeat. Certainly some fact must present itself which would fix the guilt where it belonged, even yet.

Suddenly a spark flashed in his brain. He had not said anything about the thousand dollars Forsby had handed Vic. He asked himself what La Belle could have done with it. Did he still have it in his pocket? Things had been happening swiftly for the last hour or two. If he had not got rid of it at once he must have it on him.

It was a card in the hole, but it could turn out to be a two-spot as well as an ace. He realized he would never know until he played it.

"It's got to stand up for me," he told himself. "I'm goin' to play it, and I'm goin' to play it to win!"

He turned away from the window slowly to face Pliny.

"Sheriff, I'm goin' to ask you to take charge of the money I took from Forsby. You'll find it there on the table, in Jean's sewin'-basket. I hid it there just as you came in."

The silence deepened until it was smothering as Pliny walked over to the table and opened the basket.

"Yudas priest!" Pederson gasped at sight of the money.

The sheriff cleared his throat nervously. "There ought to be twenty thousand dollars here," he said. "I'm goin' to count it in front of you all."

He moistened his thumb. The money was in crisp thousand-dollar bills that gave off a crinkly sound as he counted them out on the table.

Jean's face was bloodless as she watched her father. Corson's eyes were fixed on Vic. The Frenchman's face had a pasty look.

"Say," Pliny announced, "if I didn't make a mistake there's only nineteen thousand here."

"You didn't make any mistake," Corson assured him coolly. "Vic will give you the other thousand. He's got it in his pocket. Forsby gave it to him when they were in the office this evenin'."

La Belle was ready with a laugh, but Corson thought he saw a hunted look in his eyes that had not been there a few seconds back.

"What a sucker I'd be to carry a thousand dollars around on me if there was a word of truth in what you say," Vic sneered. "You're at the end of your rope, Corson. The thing for us to do, Pliny, is to lock this gent up and have a talk with Jud. He wasn't sure just how much he had in the wallet."

The sheriff shook his head. He looked suddenly old and tired.

"No, Vic," he said, "there's more to this than I thought. If you ain't got the money on you you can't object to bein' searched."

Murder flared in Vic's eyes.

"What!" he jerked out viciously. "You mean you're goin' to search me? . . . Don't you put a hand on me!"

"Shut up!" Pliny barked at him. "You act as guilty as hell!"

AS HE took a step in his direction Vic leaped for the door.

Pederson, slow thinker that he was, was quite efficient after a fashion. He brought his fist up in a crashing blow that dropped Vic to his knees.

"Yust put up those hands!" he ordered, "or I bust you goot!"

Pliny located the missing bill in Vic's purse. La Belle's imagination was not equal to suggesting any way in which he could have come by it honestly.

"Handcuff him, Ole," Pliny muttered,

breathing heavily. "Get him out of here before I forget myself and shoot him down for the skunk he is!"

"Aye ban lock Forsby up too, eh?" the Swede asked.

"I'll meet you at his place in five minutes," the sheriff answered.

Pederson clamped a huge paw on Vic's shoulder and propelled him through the door without ceremony.

They had been gone a minute or more before Pliny turned to face his daughter. Corson could appreciate what the bitter truth meant to him.

"Jeannie, this is a pretty bad night for me," the old man got out brokenly. "I can't bear to think of tomorrow and the days to come. I've been an awful fool, honey."

"Father, it will be all right," Jean insisted, hugging him to her. "Everything isn't gone."

"It ain't only the money," he murmured

miserably. "The railroad—it never can be built now. I thought it would do something for this country. I was proud to be able to help. It wasn't just to make a profit that I went into it."

Carson felt he had never liked nor understood Pliny Graham so well as at that moment. No matter how much of his money he recovered, his dream was gone forever, and it was one that did him proud.

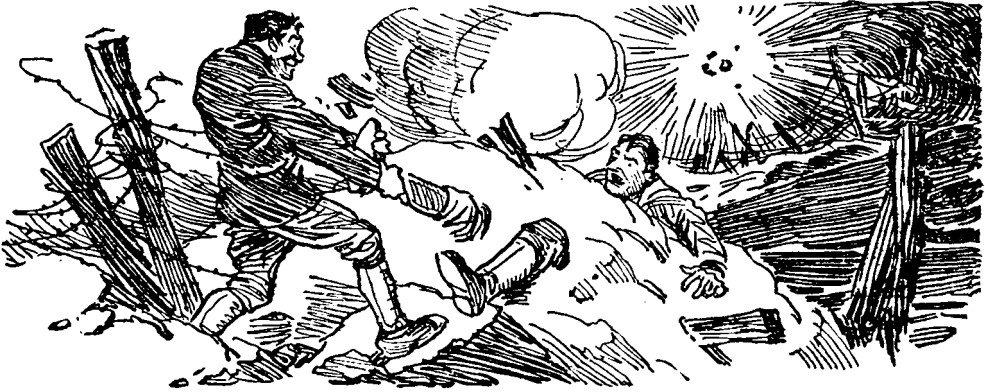
Then, however, as though to prove that his courage was not completely shattered, the old man pulled himself together.

"I'll send the doctor up here at once," he said. "In the meantime, let Jean get that shirt off you, Corson. You're in bad shape."

"I can wait until the doctor gets here," Jim insisted.

Pliny glared at him, bristling as of old.

"You do what I say," he snapped. "One pig-headed fool in this family is enough from now on!"



THE BUNK DETAIL or VETERANS' PARADISE

By DAN EDWARDS

SERVICE STRIPES! Why, we of the various Expeditionary Forces gave them to cooties, put them on our animals and mascots amid ceremony and laughter. We wore them ourselves with open pride. Though I sported four reenlistment hash

marks on my sleeve, I felt much prouder sewing on three gold stripes indicative of eighteen months with the A. E. F. I remember trying to keep those gold stripes clean, and feeling quite puffed up when passing an officer or man who wore only

a dirty silver stripe bespeaking six months service back home. My chest went out like a pouter pigeon's upon meeting someone not entitled to wear any stripe, though I knew they were responsive to the same orders and red tape as I was. I knew they couldn't dictate where, when, or the length of their service. We wore those stripes with pride regardless of what we might think about the war personally, or about our particular branch of service, underlings and commanders.

The Bunk Detail now rates two service stripes! Yes, we have been on the Line regularly twice each month for over one year. We Detailers who make up the Bunk Detail are scattered all over the world, so to speak. We come from every branch of service; of all ranks. As in war, some Detailers are more conspicuous than others. Several men have won three cash prizes, many have won two prizes, and as every Detailer knows—each man who had a story published had the pleasure of seeing his name atop his own story as well as the fun of spending the prize money he won the way he wanted to.

While it might seem impossible to the casual reader, this department is actually conducted by thousands of veterans who never saw each other, or don't remember each other, though they might have rubbed elbows in some dark muddy trench, or took pot shots at each other. As the mess officer, I am put to it at times to rewrite the offerings of some tough old soldier, leather-neck or Barnacle Bill. Their choice of words is too salty at times. I don't always get our late enemy's point of view! That is, they seem to take their experiences more seriously than does your M. O. However, we promised to accept former enemy stories under the same conditions as those set down for comrades of the Allied Services.

Truly, never before was there such a group recruited under the same banner, which has given and taken with as much good sportsmanship. Why, even all the peace conferences, with so-called statesmen

from all the countries, have invariably wound up in a near free-for-all fight. We who bore the brunt of the hardships of the war have again demonstrated our ability to go the big shots one better. Why, those treaty makers should follow our example and start spinning war experiences, or better still, read our Bunk Detail carefully. After they found out how amicable we get along together, they could sit down and dope out a real peace program. Probably they'd give us a round of medals, or drinks. (I have a medal tucked away somewhere and would rather have the drinks.)

But while we are patiently waiting for this deserved recognition from the statesmen who get us into the wars that we fight for them, we might don our service stripes as Bunk Detailers. Then, too, our favorite magazine, SHORT STORIES, is still offering cash prizes for the stories accepted for this department. SHORT STORIES gives \$10 for first prizers, \$5 for second bests and \$1 for third. A group of prize winners are published in SHORT STORIES twice each month. So, whether you've been on the line or not with this great fun making outfit, get your pen or pencil and send your favorite yarn to Dan Edwards, M. O., Bunk Detail, SHORT STORIES, Garden City, L. I. We want more recruits. D. E.

FIRST PRIZE—\$10.00

AN ADJUTANT'S WOUND STRIPE

By William I. Lynch

Brooklyn, N. Y.

AFTER another man by the name of Lynch joined our unit, the Old Man started calling me "Lynch the Adjutant." Naturally, as is the case with most adjutants, I had to walk the straight and narrow to keep the gang from doing just that! Came the time when we were taking over a sector. There were several officers and non-coms sent up to reconnoiter the positions. The adjutant had to go up and find a suitable, shell proof dugout for the regi-

mental P. C. and to learn where the other post commands were to be located.

As we neared the zone of fire, lighted cigarettes and pipes were taboo. A friend gave me a chew of tobacco which I chewed on nervously. It wasn't my first chew, but my very last. We were up in the ill-smelling, muddy-bottomed front line trench, worming our way slowly behind men standing at guard on the firing steps. We collided with all manner of human traffic in the trench itself. When I'd step on the arm or foot of a sleeping man his remarks would make my hair stand on end. It was out of the question to parade my rank—I had to take it. At such times I'd simply masticate the cud of tobacco more rapidly, being at all times careful to train my expectorating machine upward in the general direction of the lip of the trench.

One of those gas shells which land with a sort of *sputt* sound, exploded near me. The gas alarm was given. It seemed that every klaxon in the world started sounding off in that very trench. On went my mask. We used the English mask which had a clamper gadget for the nose and an air tube for the mouth. The mouthpiece was too big for any man other than Joe E. Brown. However, when the gas alarm sounded I noticed that all the men could stretch their mouths over the gadget. I soon learned to my great consternation that the darned thing wouldn't fit into my mouth along with my half plug of well chewed tobacco. What to do? Well, for one thing I wouldn't remove my mask to spit, because I feared the gas. Philosophically I tried to manage sneaking a bit of breath through the tube without removing the cud. What little air came through the tube gurgled ominously. The gas attack continued.

Now, I hadn't read any statistics about death due to drinking tobacco juice. Gas was known to be deadly! I swallowed the terrible mouthful bravely. The area around my midriff took command. I thought a shell had exploded within my very mask. The mask blew off and I swooned into an actual nauseating faint. I was brought

around behind a wet blanketed first aid station, sick unto death—nearly, and limp.

"Well, you got quite a dose of that gas, sir," remarked the sergeant in attendance. "We'll send you back on a stretcher," he added. I was too sick and weak to answer or object. I was in the hospital only one day when I insisted on rejoining my outfit. They handed me a copy of an order they had sent the old man saying I had been gassed. The old man made me wear a darn wound stripe, him not knowing how I really was (?) gassed. While I hated to go around under false colors, I feared more what would happen to me if I told the truth. "Lynch the Adjutant" would have become an order of action, and not a means of identification.

(Note: If any of you detailers have the tobacco chewing habit, try what Lynch tried. He guarantees the trick will break you of the habit. He named a fairly vicious and strong brand of tobacco, but we think nearly any brand would be equally effective.—M. O.)

SECOND PRIZE—\$5.00

THE LAST WISH OF AN HONEST MAN

By F. K. Jungle

Sonora, Texas

THOSE who saw service in the Philippines know what it is to have Dobhi itch. Iodine was all they would put on one for it no matter how it hurt. But iodine was the only known remedy that would stop the infernal itch for any length of time. We had been ordered from the Islands after three years of service. We were on our way to France in '17.

Two or three days out of Manila we got into a typhoon. It was about the worst on record. The typhoon lasted about five days and at its height we struck a coral reef. Hatches had all been battered down

with us below. Naturally, we all thought we were doomed. The ship's officers couldn't allow us on deck lest we be swept overboard by one of those mountainous waves. Our own officers didn't dare try to visit us from their quarters lest they meet the same fate.

The ship's chaplain did come to visit us. He had come to comfort us. Every man Jack of us thought the last hour had arrived, and that the chaplain had merely been sent to prepare us sinners for our watery grave. After we had calmed down somewhat the chaplain asked if there was anything he could do, though he admitted that there was little he could do save pray for any one who might desire him to. Was there anyone who would like the chaplain to pray for him? There was!

A man who had been suffering torments from Dobhi itch moaned his request from a far corner: "Yes—Chaplain, will-you-please pray-that-they-have-plenty-of-iodine-in-hell."

(Note: At least there was one soldier who either liked iodine or believed in preparedness.—M. O.)

WINNER OF A \$1.00 PRIZE

SPINACH a la NICOTINE

By Carl O. Behr

Los Angeles, California

COOKS have a habit of doing things that will attract attention to them. Nick, the cook for Squadron B at Wilbur Wright Field was a long, spare and greasy combination of several races churned into

one. Nick was a good cook, strange as that may seem in the army.

Nick smoked a pipe that could pick him up and bring him to camp when he was too drunk to make it without stimulant. It wasn't a briar, because a briar couldn't smell that badly. But it had some quality of material that would saturate with tobacco soup and hang onto the odor. In plain words, Nick's short stemmed pipe oozed and reeked. Its odiousness was the cause of Nick being isolated from the rest of the men in camp.

One day we massed into the mess hall and assumed our places at the tables. There before each man's place was a saucer of bright green spinach, garnished with a one-fourth portion of hard-boiled egg. We had to remain standing until the mess sergeant blew his whistle. On this day the C. O. was pacing up and down the center aisle. By the time he was ready to address us, every man around me was drooling at the mouth. That was the most luscious spinach and egg I had ever looked upon.

"Men," the C. O. spoke at last, "we have prepared an extra special dish for you today, but before you eat it, I feel it my duty to tell you of an incident that occurred today. Nick lost his pipe today and he didn't find it until he dished up the spinach." We were then permitted to take our seats. There wasn't the expected wild rush for the spinach. First one and then another tasted the dish cautiously. Finally I had eaten my entire dish in minute nibbles, and I still thought it good!

(Note: I wouldn't eat it without Nick's special flavor in it.—M. O.)



THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE



Delving Deep in the Orient

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER is one of the most energetic as well as prolific writers of adventure stories. He jumps about all over the place and it seemed as if we'd no sooner finished shaking hands with him in New York than we received a letter which said:

WE ARE taking a trip through the South Seas on the 'exploration cruise' of the Matson liner, *City of Los Angeles*. They put in at all of the principal South Sea Island ports, as well as many of the isolated primitive places which are off the beaten track. The cruise is particularly designed to give a complete picture of the South Seas, and they have aboard several experts on the island dialects and life.

"I have picked up some wonderfully interesting local color from some of these experts on native life and am putting a good deal of this directly on the dictating machines. We will take the records back to San Francisco and transcribe them at our leisure. I am also making some records of the various Polynesian dialects, so that I can keep the sound of the words in my ears when I need them.

"In *The Black Egg* there is some rather interesting stuff which is not known by the general student of life in China. The initiation ceremony described in the story is the more or less thinly disguised initiation of

one of the powerful secret Chinese organizations centering in Shanghai.

"The sign of *Yin and Yang* which appears in *The Black Egg* has a peculiar significance to the Chinese. It typifies the forces of day and night, of masculine and feminine, the principle of creation, the coming of order and life out of chaos. The symbol is the basis of all Chinese secret philosophy and has been correctly interpreted in the story. In fact, there is quite a bit of stuff in this yarn that will give the person who knows his China quite a thrill. It's stuff that isn't picked up by the ordinary tourist, or even by those who have lived the life of the ordinary white man in the treaty ports.

"In *The Black Egg* I have given an accurate summary of the significance of this sign, and in the initiatory ceremony described in the story I have outlined much that actually takes place in the initiatory ceremonies of one of the most powerful of the secret Chinese societies working in and about Shanghai.

"I have spent some time in China and before going there had fitted myself to participate in the Chinese life by studying the language as well as the customs of the people. From the moment I arrived in China I 'went native,' living with the Chinese in their homes, participating in their life.

"My Chinese friends told me I would be shown things that no other white man had ever seen. I do not know whether

this was so. I do know that I was admitted to some of the secret governmental departments where undercover men were stationed, their very lives dependent upon the preservation of the strictest secrecy, and the most detailed precautions were taken to see that no outsider ever entered the building. I participated in religious ceremonies of a rather weird nature, was admitted to temples from which white men were excluded. I was taken into the inner circle of the Cantonese Government and even went to a fort to participate in a conference of generals at which a plan of campaign was laid out. I was chased by pirates on the Pearl River and an attempt was made to kidnap me in Canton. I mixed in Chinese politics and was at one time informed that certain powerful enemies would see that I never left China alive.

"All in all, however, I was never as happy as during the time I spent in China



and for some reason can feel more at home with Chinese than with American friends. I can't explain this except upon the theory that when a Chinese once gives you his friendship he will stay with you through thick and thin, while American friendships are too often dependent upon position, wealth or expediency.

"One of these days I am going back to China, to a land that is teeming with adventure. The better class of Chinese have a philosophy of life that is very interesting. They are cultured, sincere and loyal, and there is springing up in China today a younger generation that is a source of pride to the nation. These young Chinese are energetic and intelligent, patriotic and far

too sensible to make a material goal their mission in life. I believe we are going to hear much of China in the future.

"Naturally I have some sources of information concerning the Orient which I must protect. I cannot tell how I discovered the secret ritual of one of the Shanghai cults, but I can say that it was an interesting adventure in itself and that a friend of mine unhesitatingly risked his life and perhaps endangered mine in order to see that I secured the local color that I was interested in. Incidentally, the secret societies of China are not comparable to our own secret societies. There are one or two of them that have some similarity and some standing. For the most part, however, the Chinese organizations are quite lawless in their operations. They occasion the authorities in Hongkong a great deal of trouble, and their secrets are usually closely guarded.

"And to the readers who are interested in China, let me say one thing: no matter how wild or improbable a story of China may seem do not consider that it is far fetched. There is only one thing of which we can be certain in regard to China—anything can happen there!

"Erle Stanley Gardner"

One needs only to read Mr. Gardner's exciting novel in this issue to be aware that it contains some of the most interesting and hard-to-get material ever to appear in Oriental fiction. China today is more than ever a "land of adventure"—the "tinder box," not only of Asia, but of the whole world.

Much as we admire the Chinese as the creators of one of the world's most civilized societies, and much as we admire their present dauntless and titanic struggle—which receives so little attention in the newspapers—to free themselves from the yoke of a ruthless dictatorship, we don't really like to accept unequivocally Mr. Gardner's statement that the Chinese as a race make better friends than Americans, for we believe that human beings emotion-

ally are fundamentally the same the world over, and that the quality of friendship is not a matter of race, but of individuals and their multifarious character-moulding backgrounds.

Crooks—Little, Big and In-Between

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY, who is very well known as a writer of stories of the underworld, delves into the thick of the things he writes about, wherever he may be.

"It had struck me before," says Mr. Chidsey, "but never so emphatically as this past season, what a big mistake people make when they suppose that Florida in the winter time is inhabited only by Floridians and millionaires and the people who wait on millionaires! Given two horse tracks,



three dog tracks, and the Lord only knows how many private gambling establishments, in the Miami district alone, and you're sure to have more than a sprinkling of crooks. More important, given the wives, estranged or otherwise, or else the widows or daughters, of half the nationally advertised products in the country—lovely ladies, well larded with cosmetics, and fairly clanking with jewelry, and nothing much to do—believe me, Mr. Editor, the cops down that way have a much tougher time of it, from December to April, than *Gorillas' Rest* would seem to indicate!

"Little crooks and big crooks, and in-between crooks. They don't wear caps,

either. Or turtle-neck sweaters. Not those boys!

"They've got a good force in Miami. They need it.

"Another problem the police down there face—similar to but worse than the problem facing the cops of southern California each winter—is that of the bums. From each of the other forty-seven states, as soon as the air gets nippy, the boys who have nothing else in the world to do, the poor fellows who either don't want to work or else can't find work to do, almost unanimously figure that they might as well do nothing where it's comfortable and warm. So they go to Florida. They go singly and in pairs, in groups, in droves. They sleep anywhere. The local residents don't like 'em, and the tourists don't like 'em—and naturally the cops don't like 'em either.

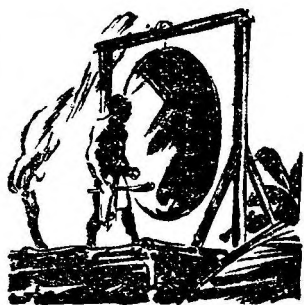
"To the cops they represent just that much more work. And the cops meet this problem in characteristic fashion. They simply kick the bums out of the state. At least twice a week all winter, and much more frequently in the middle of the season, the *Hobo Special* pulls out of Miami. Seven A. M. is the usual time of departure. The homeless ones are packed aboard a bus. The bus goes north, picking up other bums at other police stations on the way. When it strikes the Georgia state line it stops. It disgorges bums. It turns around and goes back.

"What happens to the bums? You can guess, can't you? Most of them, in all probability, turn around and go back too—after the bus, and the guards aboard the bus are out of sight.

"Some day some better writer than this one is going to write a story about that *Hobo Special*. An *Outcast of Poker Flats* sort of thing, but on a bigger scale, a little bitterer, a little more nasty.

"Meanwhile, it's swell to lie on the sand and feel the sun on your face and legs and torso, and to listen to the rattle of the coconut trees. . . .

"Donald Barr Chidsey"



*Captain Lucifer, that devil-
may-care adventurer beneath
the Southern Cross, learns of
the curse of——*

THE AGRA SKULL

A colorful, thrilling complete novel

by

William Chamberlain

All in the next issue
SHORT STORIES

for December 25th

**H. C.
WIRE**

*A Western novelette
"Any Man's Range"*

**HOMER KING
GORDON**

*A flying adventurer
in "Gold Sealed"*

**CHARLES
W. TYLER**

*A side-splitter,
"Baldy Sours and the
Tin Horse"*

**J. ALLAN
DUNN**

*A novelette of the Mounted,
"Broken Trail"*

and other good stuff

"Bob Wire"

THE period used for *The Cleanup*," says J. Allan Dunn, "is that one known in Texas as the Wire War era. Until barbed wire—'barbwire'—was invented, fencing was practically non-existent in Texas, save for the protection of crops. Farming was a minor industry. West of the Pecos River the Texas steer reigned supreme. It was a stock country, belonging to and especially suited for cattle. During the Civil War the longhorns were routed out of the bosque and driven north for sale to the commissary officers. A steer worth three dollars or less in the mesquite, sold for thirty. But the land was one wide-open, general range.

"The cowboys hated barbwire in the beginning. The first to handle it got pricked and torn by the barbs, and there was the question of postholes. A puncher hates posthole digging, always has, and always will. He is not over keen about riding wire with staples, hammer, stretcher and fresh wire. It looked as if the much heralded invention was a flop.

"But the enterprising introducer fenced a long line of property he owned beside a road. Owners of outfits soon saw the practical value of the new wire, in more ways than one. They went haywire over barbwire. They fenced in enormous areas, they fenced in water, they fenced in roads. Often they fenced in the settlers or nesters who, while disliked, had been tolerated.

"They got their cowboys to homestead on much of this pre-empted land. Title to hundreds of thousands of acres had always been in dispute over the legality of Spanish grants. The nesters, settlers, small farmers or stockmen, began to cut wire—and the war was on.

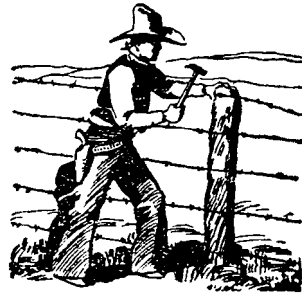
"The Texas Rangers got orders from Houston to stop the wire cutters. The Rangers had a hard time of it. Many wanted to disband Sam Houston's famous irregulars. Smugglers played politics, it was often a tough job to get the appropriation through the legislature for their scanty

pay. They got forty dollars a month, rations and ammunition. They provided their own mounts and weapons, their own clothing. The various companies of about thirty men always had a surgeon provided to patch them up, but the rations were sketchy, there were no pensions, no money for funerals.

"But they were a fine body of men. Their sympathies were often with the settlers who had cut the wire, and they believed in justice rather than the law. Their responsibilities were wide, as were their opportunities.

"Many of the big stockmen, paying the heavier taxes, were unscrupulous. They were called cattle barons, they owned stock by the tens of thousands, wired-in acres by the hundreds of thousands; and, like other barons, they were robbers, taking by might and holding by it.

"For a long time there was a law in Texas that there should be no fencing of



rangeland, either for sheep or horses or cattle. And the sheepmen and the cattlemen were always at odds as the woolly herds increased. But that is another story. The Texan old-timer, who tied one end of his rope to his horn instead of taking dailies, the Texan of the longhorn days, believed implicitly that western Texas was Godgiven for the production of cows and the fortunes of those who owned them.

"The Texas Ranger was a fine hombre. He was referee and regulator, feared by malefactors, respected by honest men.

"I had a Texas cowboy on my own ranch in Routt County, Colorado, back in '95. He was a straw boss, a grizzled old-

timer who rode with his hands almost as high as his chin, and forked them hairpin fashion. I got many yarns from Jackson; about Texas, down by the Rio Grande, in the early days.

"J. Allan Dunn"

"Old Up Your 'Ead!"

IL DYARD, 'Ildyard, 'old up your 'ead, 'Ildyard!"

So piped the riding master at C. Stanley Hildyard, of Canada's famous Royal Mounted constabulary, away back in the days of his youth, when, as a raw recruit, Hildyard, fresh from England, was being taught the fine points of riding a horse. The riding master's cockney twang couldn't possibly seem so laughable here in print, however, as it sounded in the telling by Hildyard himself.

"Hidyrad was a friend of mine. I use the past tense because I've lost track of him now.

"He was fifty-two when last I saw him, and fit as a fiddle; a white-haired soldier of fortune, who had served thirteen years in the Mounted. He had quit the Force only to seek gold in the Yukon. There was plenty of gold in that country at that time, for that was back in the Klondike's '98.

"Hildyard found what he was after;

came out with \$68,000—I believe the figure is correct—but, like many another, he couldn't hold on to it. He tried again, but the luck seemed to have run out. In spite of that fact, he married a fine Dawson girl. After a while he came outside to stay, settled in Seattle—and there, if I'm not mistaken, he still lives. When last I saw him he was with a wholesale house, calling on retail trade, over in the Wenatchee country, in Washington. Many's the yarn he spun for me as we'd



go jogging along, from one town to another, in his old Velie touring car. *The Rescuers*, in this issue, is not, in truth, one of his stories, for there were, of course, no airplanes when he wore the scarlet tunic and wide-brimmed Stetson; but it is based upon an experience of his somewhat similar.

"By nature happy-go-lucky, it was seldom that Hildyard got down in the dumps;

READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| 1 _____ | 3 _____ |
| 2 _____ | 4 _____ |
| 5 _____ | |

I do not like:

_____	Why? _____
NAME _____	ADDRESS _____

but one time he did and he said to me: 'Thirteen years in the Mounted, a good part of that time spent with the Indians; two years in the Yukon, swilling in gold; and here I am, trying, with tears in my eyes, to sell one storekeeper a five-case deal of succotash, another an eighty-cent box of nigger-babies. My gosh!'

"'Old up your 'ead, 'Ildyard,' I told him. 'Old up your 'ead.'

"Frank J. Leahy"

For a long time Frank J. Leahy's stories of diving and other aspects of life on, in, under or nearby the sea have been acclaimed by our readers as having that "different" touch and being in every way good reading with the authentic tang of adventure. We feel sure that you will share our delight in discovering that Mr. Leahy can turn his hand with an equally authentic and no less individual touch to stories of the North. Mr. Leahy's Northerns will be found also in our companion magazine, *WEST*.

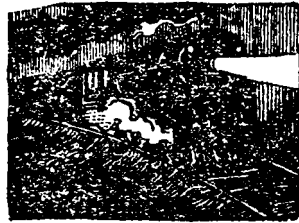
\$5,000 a Week—For What?

GRANDSTAND MCGINNIS, who plays the title rôle in my story is this issue, isn't entirely a fictitious character," writes Clifford Knight. "He is running today on the Santa Fé. But whether he will ever get into the movies as Grandstand did, I can't predict. Recently I was riding into Los Angeles from Barstow and this fellow was the brakeman. I don't mean to say that he was a grandstander. But he did have his eye out for every pretty girl. He also knew everybody along the right of way, and hollered at them all either in Spanish or plain railroad lingo. And when we got over Cajon Pass the conductor handed him a long list of mail stops and he didn't miss pulling the engineer down at a single one. That isn't remarkable in itself, but I thought it the height

of something or other that he could do it and not interrupt his conversation with the girls.

"Near Los Angeles at a small station, a motion picture company was shooting some scenes with an old-fashioned train, the engine of which had a diamond smoke stack. 'Oh yeah,' he said, when I called his attention to the layout, 'what do them birds know about railroadin'?"

"Which comes close to my own opinion. I've seen some cockeyed things done in motion pictures wherever the operation of trains is concerned; even such crazy things as giving back-up signals when the obvious intention was to high ball; conductors that took out runs all the way from Seattle to New York; hogheads that took complete charge of trains and ignored their conductors. Not long ago I asked a story editor



at a Hollywood studio why such things got by in pictures. He replied naively: 'If a five thousand dollar a week director don't know those little details it's too expensive to hold up the picture while he learns them.'

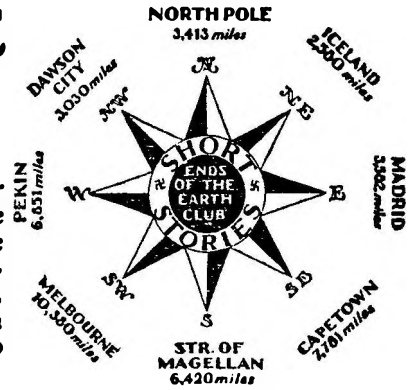
"That may explain why movies are what they sometimes are. But I can't get by with a railroad story if I ignore those 'little details.' The boys from all over the country would be writing in telling me it was time I pulled the pin on the job. And it would be.

"Clifford Knight"

Just another cockeyed inequality of our competitive system.

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, %Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.



Everyone in the Ends of the Earth Club seems to have traveled at some-time or other, so Comrade Smith should receive lots of mail.

Dear Secretary:

I hope this letter will be published so that I may find a few pen pals.

I have traveled a lot and have been in the most important sea ports of the world, and quite a number of out of the way places throughout the Seven Seas.

I expect to travel a lot more in the near future and I would like to hear from friends who have traveled and also friends who expect to travel and see the world.

Respectfully,

Frank E. Smith

107 North "D" Street,
Tulare, California

Fifty thousand miles to his credit and still anxious to see South America, Africa and Australia.

Dear Secretary:

I received my membership card to your famous club this morning and am writing right back. I should like to hear from fellows interested in auto racing and aviation and also fellows living in South America, Africa, and Australia. I have been interested in these places ever since I was able to turn the pages of an atlas. So won't someone please write me concerning the above places and state the chances

of obtaining work therein? I am a draftsman, commercial artist and also a display artist but would do anything. I like to travel and could not settle down very long on the above positions. I have traveled some 50,000 miles of England, France, Canada and the United States in the last ten years. Any letters received will be answered at once.

Best wishes,

John Cansley, Jr.

2725 Stephens Street,
Vancouver, B. C.,
Canada

And now for some information on South America.

Dear Secretary:

Thank you for admitting me into the Ends of the Earth Club. What are the affairs of the Club in which all the members take active part?

I've been a reader of SHORT STORIES for some time and enjoy them very much. I'm sorry because I couldn't join earlier but now I understand about the Club and should be very glad to hear from the members who can give me information on South America.

Very sincerely yours,

Johnny Soltis

111 Grand Street,
Garfield,
New Jersey

Here's a man who sure has been places and done things and such a variety that he should be a most interesting correspondent.

Dear Secretary:

I hope you will admit me to the Ends of the Earth Club. I have only been reading SHORT STORIES a short time but I find them very interesting.

At the age of fifteen I left my home in North Dakota and since then have been around a bit. Crossed the States eight times from coast to coast, was in Canada and Mexico, worked on a ranch in Montana, drove and rode the freight trains through the Rockies and all western states, worked in Washington in a lumber camp, and went from one end of each and every state to the other. Started with an automobile and then on a motorcycle, from that to beating my way on freight trains and later to hitch-hiking the highways. Have had some very exciting experiences, been shot at and held for suspicion of robbery and murder and several other things.

When I first left home in 1926 I went to Detroit and worked in the automobile factories. Then I went to Milwaukee and later to Chicago where I had an accident and was laid up in a hospital for several months and there I met my future friend and pal with whom I traveled until we both landed in New York City and were fortunate in getting work.

I can fly, motorboat race, do mechanical work, box, wrestle. I am much interested in body-building, like boat-sailing, hunting, fishing, trapping and hiking, and living in the woods in tents.

I would like to hear from people who did barnstorming and have flown over the Rockies, Arizona Desert, Mojave Desert, and the plains of the Dakotas, and from people who have been to the South Seas, West Indies, Java, Borneo, China and Japan, or any desolate place of the earth where natives and savages are.

Hoping to hear from some of the members, I remain

Cordially yours,

Victor Steven Fedora

75 Ocean Avenue,
Bay Shore,
Long Island

A lonesome rancher in need of friends.

Dear Secretary:

Thank you very much for the beautiful membership card, which I am proud to own. I live in America, my parents came from Europe, and I was born in Chile. I read and write three languages and spent seven years in foreign lands. I am a boy, eighteen, brown eyes, and medium height. I have been all over the U. S. A., and have been everything from a stamp dealer, fruit peddler, Christmas tree wholesaler, chauffeur, writer, cartoonist, and contest winner, to a movie extra. Right now I am living on a beautiful California desert, on a ranch, and I am lonesome. I want to correspond with everybody, everywhere, and promise to answer all.

Sincerely,

K. B. Spanski

c/o Lee Arenas Ranch
Palm Springs, California

A new stamp collector anxiously awaiting replies.

Dear Secretary:

I am a constant reader of SHORT STORIES and have always enjoyed reading the many thrilling stories contained therein. A short time ago I became a member of the Ends of the Earth Club and have heard from a few pen pals. Now that I am saving stamps, I would like to hear from a great many more.

Yours sincerely,

William Farley

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10x4-50-30	2	2.35	0.88	10x4-50-30	2	2.35	0.88
10x4-50-30	3	2.65	0.95	10x4-50-30	3	2.65	0.95
10x4-50-30	4	2.90	1.00	10x4-50-30	4	2.90	1.00
10x4-50-30	5	3.15	1.05	10x4-50-30	5	3.15	1.05
10x4-50-30	6	3.40	1.10	10x4-50-30	6	3.40	1.10
10x4-50-30	7	3.65	1.15	10x4-50-30	7	3.65	1.15
10x4-50-30	8	3.90	1.20	10x4-50-30	8	3.90	1.20
10x4-50-30	9	4.15	1.25	10x4-50-30	9	4.15	1.25
10x4-50-30	10	4.40	1.30	10x4-50-30	10	4.40	1.30
10x4-50-30	11	4.65	1.35	10x4-50-30	11	4.65	1.35
10x4-50-30	12	4.90	1.40	10x4-50-30	12	4.90	1.40
10x4-50-30	13	5.15	1.45	10x4-50-30	13	5.15	1.45
10x4-50-30	14	5.40	1.50	10x4-50-30	14	5.40	1.50
10x4-50-30	15	5.65	1.55	10x4-50-30	15	5.65	1.55
10x4-50-30	16	5.90	1.60	10x4-50-30	16	5.90	1.60
10x4-50-30	17	6.15	1.65	10x4-50-30	17	6.15	1.65
10x4-50-30	18	6.40	1.70	10x4-50-30	18	6.40	1.70
10x4-50-30	19	6.65	1.75	10x4-50-30	19	6.65	1.75
10x4-50-30	20	6.90	1.80	10x4-50-30	20	6.90	1.80
10x4-50-30	21	7.15	1.85	10x4-50-30	21	7.15	1.85
10x4-50-30	22	7.40	1.90	10x4-50-30	22	7.40	1.90
10x4-50-30	23	7.65	1.95	10x4-50-30	23	7.65	1.95
10x4-50-30	24	7.90	2.00	10x4-50-30	24	7.90	2.00
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10x4-50-30	26	8.40	2.10	10x4-50-30	26	8.40	2.10
10x4-50-30	27	8.65	2.15	10x4-50-30	27	8.65	2.15
10x4-50-30	28	8.90	2.20	10x4-50-30	28	8.90	2.20
10x4-50-30	29	9.15	2.25	10x4-50-30	29	9.15	2.25
10x4-50-30	30	9.40	2.30	10x4-50-30	30	9.40	2.30
10x4-50-30	31	9.65	2.35	10x4-50-30	31	9.65	2.35
10x4-50-30	32	9.90	2.40	10x4-50-30	32	9.90	2.40
10x4-50-30	33	10.15	2.45	10x4-50-30	33	10.15	2.45
10x4-50-30	34	10.40	2.50	10x4-50-30	34	10.40	2.50
10x4-50-30	35	10.65	2.55	10x4-50-30	35	10.65	2.55
10x4-50-30	36	10.90	2.60	10x4-50-30	36	10.90	2.60
10x4-50-30	37	11.15	2.65	10x4-50-30	37	11.15	2.65
10x4-50-30	38	11.40	2.70	10x4-50-30	38	11.40	2.70
10x4-50-30	39	11.65	2.75	10x4-50-30	39	11.65	2.75
10x4-50-30	40	11.90	2.80	10x4-50-30	40	11.90	2.80
10x4-50-30	41	12.15	2.85	10x4-50-30	41	12.15	2.85
10x4-50-30	42	12.40	2.90	10x4-50-30	42	12.40	2.9

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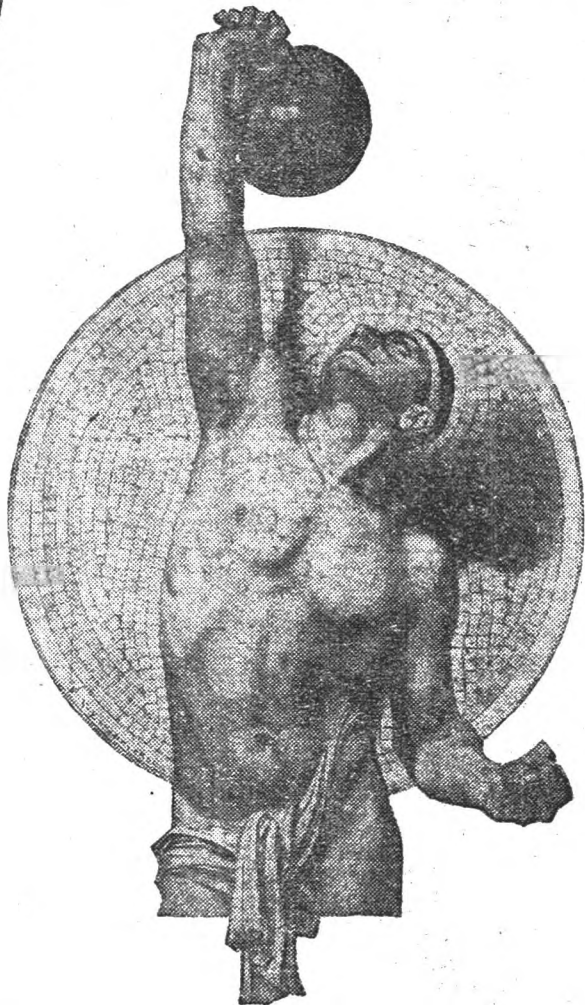
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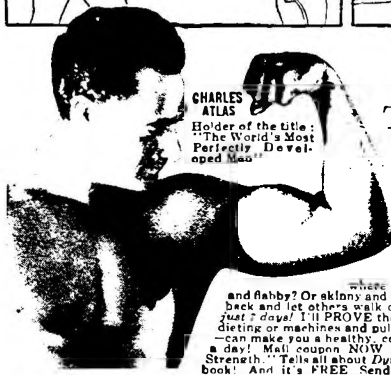
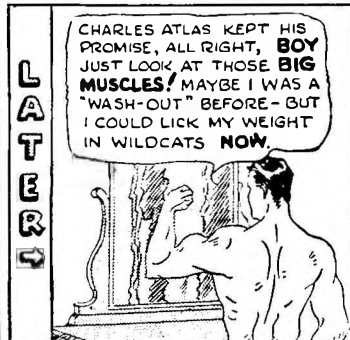
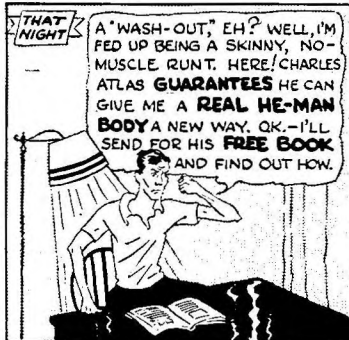
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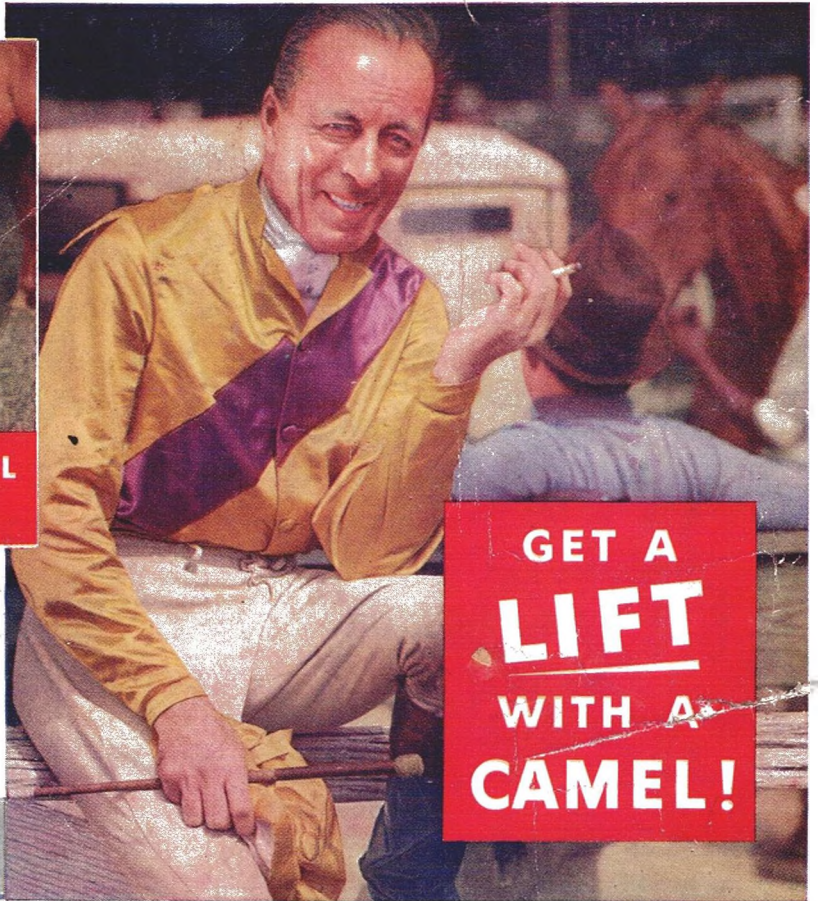
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